

TRAVELING THE

# SIMPSON COUNTY

HERITAGE TRAIL



Braxton ♦ D'Lo ♦ Harrisville ♦ Pinola/Old Westville ♦ Mendenhall ♦ Weathersby ♦ Sanatorium ♦ Magee

[www.DiscoverSimpsonCounty.com](http://www.DiscoverSimpsonCounty.com)

# Traveling the Simpson County Heritage Trail

The Simpson County Heritage Trail was established through the Simpson County Development Foundation in 2011. Each stop along the trail is of historic significance to Simpson County, showcasing points of interest and facts about the origins of the county.

## TRAVELING FROM JACKSON SOUTH ON U.S. HIGHWAY 49



- |           |               |              |              |
|-----------|---------------|--------------|--------------|
| 1 Braxton | 3 Harrisville | 5 Mendenhall | 7 Sanatorium |
| 2 D'Lo    | 4 Pinola      | 6 Weathersby | 8 Magee      |

### ATTRACTIONS KEY

- Heritage Trail Marker
- Directional Landmark
- Historic or Other Site
- Driving Directions
- Right Turn
- Left Turn
- Lodging
- Dining
- Campsite or Water Park

### 1 Braxton

Traveling South on U. S. Highway 49 South from Jackson, continue South through Richland and Florence to **Piney Woods School**.

- While there be sure to visit historic **Piney Woods School**, which is a **Mississippi Blues Trail Site**.

- **Richland** offers lodging and restaurants.

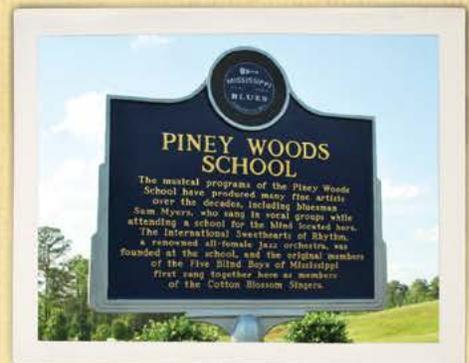
- **Florence** offers restaurants.

At 2.4 Miles South of Piney Woods School, **turn RIGHT** at the **“Welcome to Braxton”** sign onto M. A. Neely Road. In .4 mile M. A. Neely Road meets Simpson Highway 149. At that intersection is the **Braxton “Pocket Park.”**

- The **Braxton Heritage Trail Sign** is located in the park.

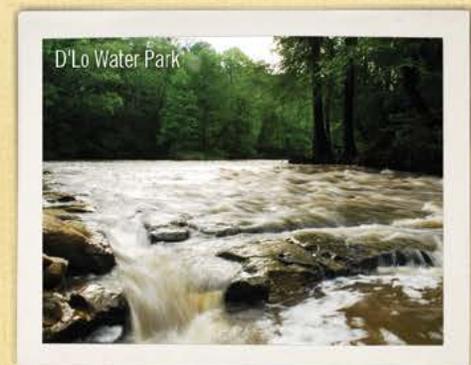
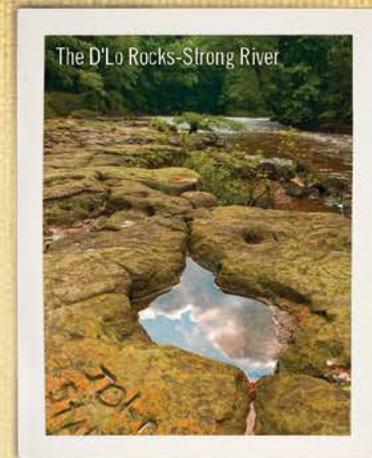
- Cross Highway 149 into Braxton to see the **Braxton Museum** housed in the Community Center. Stop at the Braxton Town Hall to ask about visiting the museum.

- The **Braxton Town Park** is across the street from the Community Center.



## 2 D'Lo

- From there, continue 5.3 miles on Simpson Highway 149 to the **D'Lo Park**, **on the LEFT**. Parking is available on the lane that forms the southern boundary of the park.
  - The **D'Lo Heritage Trail Sign** is located at the Gazebo in the center of the park.
- On leaving the park, **turn LEFT (South)** onto Simpson Highway 149. Continue straight on Simpson Hwy 149 to go to **D'Lo Water Park**, which is just ahead **on the LEFT**.
  - D'Lo Water Park** has campsites and a cabin (make arrangements in advance). This Park—the “D'Lo Rocks”—was used as a location for the movie *O Brother, Where Art Thou*.
- Situated between D'Lo Park and D'Lo Water Park is a **Citgo Service Station**.
  - Turn RIGHT** onto Highway 540 W next to the Citgo to proceed to the next stop on the Heritage Trail.



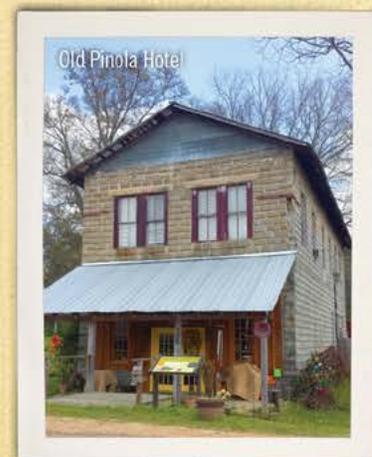
## 3 Harrisville

- Travel 10.5 miles to Harrisville. Continue on Highway 540 W, and 1.2 miles further, the **Harrisville Community Park** is **on the LEFT**. **Turn LEFT** at the **Library**.
  - The **Harrisville Heritage Trail Sign** is just beyond the library at the edge of the park.
- On leaving the park, **turn LEFT**, and immediately ahead is the **Fish House** and **Jennings Service Station**. **Turn LEFT** between the Fish House and the Station onto Hopewell Road.

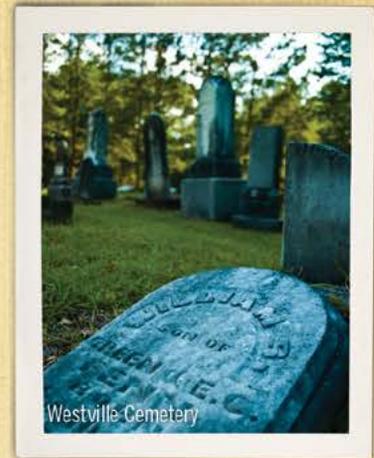


## 4 Pinola / Old Westville

- After 5.6 miles, Hopewell Road ends at Old River Road.
  - Keep LEFT** onto Old River Road. Between .1 and .2 miles is the historic **Palestine Cemetery and Church**, dating back to the late 1700s.
- After 7.2 miles, Old River Road ends at Highway 28.
  - Turn RIGHT** here and travel approximately 1 mile to see the historic **Steel Frame Bridge** that spans Pearl River between Simpson and Copiah Counties. This cantilever through truss bridge is on the National Register of Historic Places.



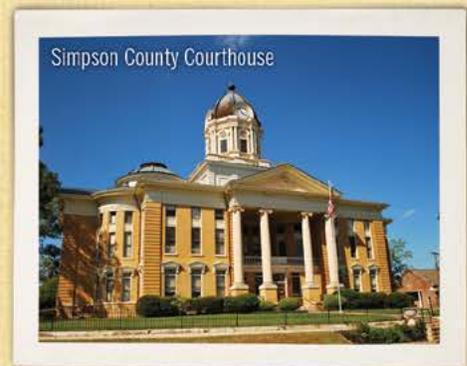
- Turn LEFT onto Highway 28 East and travel 9.5 miles to Pinola/Old Westville. On the LEFT, the two story stone building is the Old Pinola Hotel. The historic old Pinola Hotel houses a pottery and gift shop.
- The Pinola/Westville Heritage Trail Sign is in front of the building.
- Turn LEFT onto Highway 28 and proceed to the four-way stop. Turn LEFT onto Highway 43 North.
- Turn RIGHT at this intersection to see the historic Pinola School House.
- Just beyond the intersection on Highway 43 N on the RIGHT is the road to the historic Westville Cemetery.



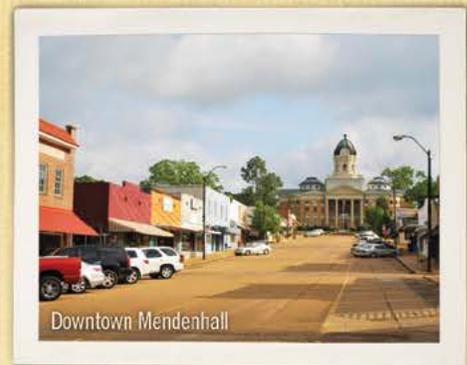
Westville Cemetery

## 5 Mendenhall

- Proceed on Highway 43 until it ends at Highway 13 (7.6 miles) at Mendenhall.
- Between Pinola and Mendenhall is the Merit Water Park.
- Turn LEFT onto Highway 13, and then RIGHT onto Highway 149 South. The first four-way stop is at the intersection of Highway 149 and Main Street.
- Turn LEFT onto Main Street and the historic Simpson County Courthouse is at the head of the street.
- The Mendenhall Heritage Trail Sign is in front (south face) of the Courthouse.
- The Simpson County Courthouse is on the National Register of Historic Places, and it is always listed among the most beautiful courthouses in Mississippi.
- The Simpson County Museum is on the Courthouse Square in the Miller Building at 150 West Court Avenue.
- The Mendenhall Ministries is located at 309 Center Street. TMM was founded in 1962 in response to the dire needs of the poor black community in this rural Mississippi area. Today, TMM is nationally known and is considered a model for the foundation for the Christian community development movement.
- Mendenhall offers restaurants, and downtown Mendenhall is lined with retail establishments, including antique stores, gift shops, and specialty shops. The Chamber of Commerce is located on Main Street.



Simpson County Courthouse



Downtown Mendenhall

## 6 Weathersby

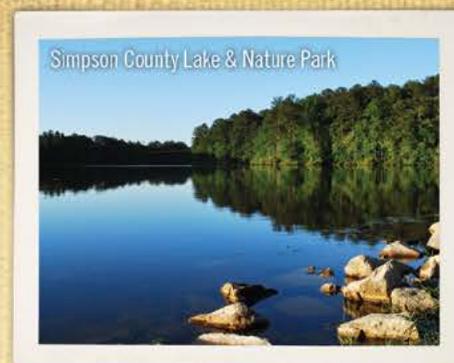
- Turn LEFT onto Highway 149 at the four-way stop at the intersection of Main Street and Highway 149. Continue South on Highway 149 to the intersection with U. S. Highway 49 South. Turn RIGHT onto U. S. Highway 149 and move to the LEFT lane.



- Travel 1.4 miles and  **turn LEFT** onto Steel Mill Road at  **Weathersby Baptist Church**.
- The  **Weathersby Heritage Trail Sign** is at the near front corner of the parking lot.

## 7 Sanatorium

-   **Turn LEFT** onto U. S. Highway 49 South. At 3.1 miles  **turn RIGHT** to take the Boswell Regional Center exit onto Simpson Highway 149 South.
- OPPOSITE this turn** is the entrance into  **Simpson County Lake & Nature Park**.
-  At 1.3 miles,  **turn RIGHT** onto the grounds of  **Boswell Regional Center**.  **Bear LEFT** to  **Building 14**, the first building **on the LEFT**.
- Be sure to tour the  **Mississippi State Sanatorium Museum**, which is housed in Building 14.
-  Tour the beautiful grounds, as well. The grounds are a Mississippi Department of Archives and History Landmark, and many of the buildings date from the early days of the Sanatorium.
- The  **Sanatorium Heritage Trail Sign** is in front of the Museum/Building 14.



## 8 Magee

-  Upon leaving Boswell Regional Center,  **turn RIGHT** onto Simpson Highway 149 South. Between Boswell and Magee, **pass under the overpass at the intersection with U. S. Highway 49**. At 2.9 miles, you will be in downtown Magee, at the all-way stop.
-  Magee has an historic downtown with a variety of shops.
-   Along U.S. Highway 149 are restaurants and hotels.
-   **Turn LEFT** onto 1st Street NW. In one block  **turn RIGHT** onto 1st Avenue NW.
- The Magee Chamber of Commerce** is on the corner. The  **Magee Community Center** is next door to The Chamber and houses the  **Magee Museum**.
- The  **Magee Heritage Trail Sign** is located in front of the Community Center.
-  Upon leaving Magee,  **drive NORTH** on Simpson Highway 149 to access U. S. Highway 49.



## PINEY WOODS REGION



**THE PINEY WOODS:** Bounded roughly by Interstate 20 in the north and Interstate 10 in the south, the Piney Woods is part of a larger geographical region in the southeast that stretches from southern Georgia to a portion of eastern Texas. The region's sandy clay soil discouraged the initial settlers from farming; therefore the population in the Piney Woods remained small until large-scale timber cutting operations began in the late 1800s. Many of the region's towns and cities grew up around sawmills and the timber industry remains a vital part of the economy. Because of the abundance of wood, the region is known for its craftsmen, including basket-makers, woodcarvers, and others. Music also flourishes in the Piney Woods, with active blues musicians in its larger towns and a vigorous bluegrass community that hosts numerous festivals and "picking parties".



**SIMPSON COUNTY** is in the "Gateway to the Piney Woods." Although the "Delta" and the "Gulf Coast" may be better known sections of our state, the "Piney Woods" is a significant region of Mississippi with its own distinct history and heritage. Anyone traveling south from Jackson on U. S. Highway 49 should be sure to take advantage of the many recreational and educational opportunities available along the way as Highway 49 passes through the Heart of the Piney Woods.

## *A Brief History of Simpson County*

**CHOCTAW LAND:** The Five Civilized Tribes were the five Native American nations: the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek, and Seminole, which were considered civilized by white settlers during that time period because they adopted many of the colonists' customs and had generally good relations with their neighbors. The process of cultural transformation was proposed by George Washington and Henry Knox; the Cherokee and Choctaw were successful at integrating European-American culture. The Five Civilized Tribes lived in the Southeastern United States before their relocation to other parts of the country, especially the future state of Oklahoma.

The Choctaw nation was divided into northern, central and southern divisions. The area that is now Simpson County was in the extreme SW portion of the southern division, part of the Six Towns district. The famous Pushmataha was a chief of the Six Towns district. While there are some mounds in the county and Choctaw artifacts have been found, there is no definite evidence of Choctaw towns. The well-known Three-Chopped-Way may have crossed the SW corner of the county. An 1824 map of Mississippi shows an "old Indian path" crossing Simpson County.

Through a series of treaties between 1786 and 1830, the Choctaw Nations progressively ceded its lands to the United States. The area that is now Simpson County was in the extreme southeast corner of the territory ceded in 1820 by the Treaty of Doak's Stand. The Choctaws were the first of the Southeastern Native American nations to walk "The Trail of Tears." President Andrew Jackson used their removal as a model for future removals of the SE Native American nations.

**UNDER FIVE FLAGS:** The flags of four nations—five, including the Confederate States of America—have flown over the territory that is now Simpson County. While the Spanish explorer DeSoto passed through Mississippi in the mid-1500s, the French explorer LaSalle claimed the territory for France in the early 1600's. By 1732, both France and England claimed the territory, England considering the colony of Georgia to reach to the Mississippi River. France conceded the territory to England in 1763 as part of the First Treaty of Paris that ended the French and Indian War.

Toward the end of the Revolutionary War, Spain claimed territory up to the 32nd parallel as part of West Florida.

While still claimed by Spain, the territory including what is now Simpson County was ceded by England to the United States by the Second Treaty of Paris ending the Revolutionary

War in 1783. By the Treaty of San Lorenzo in 1795, Spain conceded any claim to territory above the 31st parallel, ending any Spanish claim to the territory that includes what is now Simpson County. Georgia continued to claim the territory until 1798, when Congress created the Territory of Mississippi, from which the states of Mississippi and Alabama would be formed.

On December 10, 1817, Mississippi was admitted to the Union.

On January 9, 1861, Mississippi seceded from the Union and was one of the founding states of the Confederacy.

On February 23, 1870, Mississippi was readmitted to the Union under the terms of Reconstruction.

In summary, the flags of France, England, Spain, the Confederate States of America, and the United States have flown over Simpson County.

**THE COUNTY IS FOUNDED AND GROWS:** On its way to becoming a county, Simpson County has been part of three earlier counties:

1. The territorial county of Washington
2. Hinds County
3. Copiah County, which with Yazoo was formed from part of Hinds

On January 13, 1824, Simpson County was formed from “all that portion of Copiah County east of Pearl River.” The county was named for Josiah Simpson, a native of Pennsylvania who served as a territorial judge from 1812 to 1817. Westville, named for Col. Cato West, was the first county seat, and flourished until the railroad bypassed the town at the turn of the century. In 1850, Westville Academy, considered one of the finest schools in the state, was established. One of the principals was Henry L. Whitfield, who later was elected governor of the State. When the community began to fade, the school was absorbed into the Pinola school in 1900.

After its founding, the county continued to grow. The Federal Census in 1850 listed 9 Baptist churches, 5 Methodist, and 1 Presbyterian. In 1853, the Strong River Baptist Association was founded with 8 charter churches in Simpson County: Bethlehem, Mt. Zion, Mountain Hill, Macedonia, New Zion, Palestine, Pleasant Hill, and Strong River. In 1859, six post-offices were listed in Simpson County: Harrisville, Mt. Zion, New Dublin, Old Hickory, Sander’s Creek, and Westville. By the 1890s, huge lumber companies owned much of Simpson County.

**Finkbine Lumber Company:** In 1914, Finkbine Lumber Company located a huge, modern lumber mill at D’lo at a cost of over \$1,000,000. During the 13 years of its operation,

Finkbine employed an average daily labor force of about 800, including the mill and the ancillary operations, and produced over 600,000,000 feet of long-leaf pine timber.

**Sanatorium:** In 1917, the Mississippi State Tuberculosis Sanatorium was opened in Simpson County, under the directorship of Dr. Henry Boswell.

**CHANGES WITH THE COMING OF THE RAILROAD:** As the twentieth century opened, the Gulf and Ship Island Railroad announced plans to continue plans to link Jackson and the Gulf Coast, with a 27-mile line through Simpson County, beginning at Braxton, and passing through D’Lo, Edna, Weathersby, Magee, and Saratoga. Although Westville was a thriving town and had served some 70 years as the county seat, the railroad bypassed the town in favor of a direct route through the county. As a result, a political battle began and lasted for several years as to whether Edna or Westville should be the county seat. Those in favor of Edna, that is, Mendenhall, were led by developer Philip Didlake and newspaper editor Hugh A. Geiger. Finally, in 1905, the State Supreme Court decided finally in favor of Edna (Mendenhall). It may be noted that as part of the final decision the geographical center of the county had to be determined. It lies approximately one mile south of Merit on Hwy 43 near Joe Magee’s poultry farm.

The original Edna was a small, largely African-American settlement, located south of the railroad and north of Sellers Creek, in an area now intersected by South Main Street and Bell Avenue. The town development undertaken by Mr. Didlake and his wife Edna was north of the railroad. When a post office was applied for in 1900, it was discovered that an older town named Edna already existed in Marion County. The name was changed to Mendenhall in honor of Thomas L. Mendenhall, a prominent citizen and lawyer in Westville. The first postmaster was R. H. Coke, and the Coke Building, built in 1928, still stands on Main Street.

**THE COURTHOUSE:** After receiving a final decision from the Mississippi Supreme Court that Mendenhall would be the county seat, the Board of Supervisors advertised for bids on December 4, 1906. Following the design of the United States Capitol, the adopted plans were submitted by New Orleans architect Andrew J. Bryon. The contractor selected was M. W. Land of Jackson, MS, who bid \$59,000. The courthouse was completed on December 21, 1907, one year after the contract was awarded at a cost of \$59,000.

The Simpson County Courthouse was listed on the National Register of Historic Places on August 29, 1985 and was restored in 1987 to conform to its historic detail at a cost of \$1,750,000.



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