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## AN EDUCATION IN LIMESTONE COUNTY'S HISTORY

Limestone County and its seat, the City of Athens, are central to North Alabama. Of all the early established towns, Athens is directly connected to the others. Immediately east lies Huntsville, whose greater metro area is slowly encompassing more and more of Limestone County, while to the west is Florence and the Shoals, and south, across the river, is Decatur. Once connected by railroads, the cities are now linked by easy to navigate county highways and interstates. Taking U.S. Highway 72 West from Huntsville leads directly to the southern edge of downtown Athens, which is a place made for history buffs. The downtown area has changed little in the past century.

Located along the railroad tracks a block east of the courthouse is the 1928 Louisville & Nashville Railroad depot, now the Limestone County Archives. The recently restored depot perfectly fits the feeling of a county full of small towns and few structures over three stories tall. At the archives a researcher can find the county land maps in their original bindings with hand written pages, a small library of Limestone County genealogy and history, filing cabinets full of school censuses, and a large collection of Trinity School documents. Here, you can also find the incredibly knowledgeable county archivist, Rebekah Davis and, if you're lucky, local resident and teacher Colonel James L. Walker.



(Left) Restored Window inside the Athens Depot-Limestone County Archives, Athens, Alabama (Photograph by Jenna Tran) (Below) Athens Depot-Limestone County Archives, Athens, Alabama (Photograph by Jenna Tran)



Col. Walker was born and raised in Limestone County. His mother was a teacher, his father was a farmer – together the Walkers embody what is significant about Limestone County and North Alabama: agriculture and education. Col. Walker is a tall man with a friendly face and the demeanor of a patient teacher. He is eager to share his knowledge, to educate all around him, and often leaves pauses between his statements to allow things to sink in.

The Colonel's family on both sides is deeply rooted in Limestone County. His family history is the story of Limestone in a nutshell. It includes a slave that ran away to join the Union Army, an early landowner who grew cotton and corn and rented his land out to other African American tenants, a teacher and independent mother, and someone who went North to hedge his bets. In researching his own family, Col. Walker has come across other remarkable people of color of Limestone County and can regale you with encyclopedic knowledge of the largest African American landowners, the most influential families, and the community's schools and their significant alumni. Ms. Rebekah Davis recommends Col. Walker to anyone visiting the archives, particularly those interested in local