



**(Above)** Trinity High School Building, 2018 (Photograph by Jenna Tran)

education and African American history. Col. Walker can often be found at the archives delving into boxes of Trinity High School documents, books, and records or the numerous other small community schools, like Living Water School or Little Zion School – two schools where his mother, Mrs. Lizzie Mae Walker, taught. He shares the photographs and information he finds on social media and with his own students. After years in the military, Col. Walker devotes his time and knowledge to his hometown community.

One of the first things that becomes apparent when getting acquainted with Limestone County history, is that education has played a key role here, particularly for African Americans. There were at least 35 schools for African American children in Limestone County between 1865 and 1970. Athens was home to one of the earliest schools for African American children, Trinity School. Opened in 1865 by the American Missionary Association for the education of former slaves, Trinity continued to operate, despite numerous struggles, for 105 years until integration caused it to close its doors. However, there are still many alumni of Trinity that continue to hold the memory of the school, its mission, and the light of its students and faculty in their hearts and minds – like alum Col. James L. Walker.

Over the past century and a half, people of color educated in Limestone County have given back to their communities. One of Trinity School's greatest accomplishments is its legacy of education. By having such a strong, community-driven institution like Trinity School in a small town like Athens, those educated at Trinity were able to go back to their communities as teachers and supporters of small community schools. Today, Col. Walker supports the education of Limestone County children like his fellow alumnus, George Ruffin Bridgeforth, did 100 years ago.

Of the 35 schools known to have been in Limestone County – mostly from the 1890s through the 1950s – only four of them were Rosenwald schools. The majority of the small, one- or two-room schoolhouses throughout the county were funded, built, and run by local African American communities. The Rosenwald Fund played no small part in some of the largest and successful community schools in the county. The communities of Belle Mina, Beulah Land, Veto, and Tanner were all fortunate enough to have a Rosenwald school built in the early 20th century.

The schools of Limestone County are fairly well-documented considering that many of them barely had the supplies and resources necessary to run a full classroom or buildings dedicated solely to the school. Most African American communities in the early 20th century were not able to provide schooling for children more than a few months of the year and many of them held classes in the local church. Col. Walker remembers attending Little Zion School where his mother was his teacher. Mrs. Lizzie Mae Walker taught six grades in a single room and took efforts to dress well as a model to the children she was helping to raise.



**(Above)** Col. James L. Walker as a Child at the Little Zion School (Photograph Courtesy Col. Walker)

Education and educators are held in high esteem within the African American community. Teaching is a noble profession with particular importance to those who were denied an education during slavery and systematically discriminated against for the next century. While teaching at a small community school did not pay especially well, teaching did provide some financial security when the economy in the South or the entire nation were unsound. Teachers were often afforded financial loans when others were denied because their profession was thought of as providing an assured income. Mrs. Walker's profession as a teacher in part helped her to secure a life home for her children and provide them with eye-opening experiences that allowed them to become the people they are today.