

Historic Trade Days recreated at Athens Bicentennial Bash Nov. 17

By Rebekah Davis
Limestone County Archivist

On Nov. 17, the City of Athens will celebrate its 200th birthday a couple of days early with the Athens Bicentennial Bash, a great big party on the Square.

Events will include:

- Beard and Bonnet Contest – sponsored by the Friends of the Archives, who will award a crisp \$100 bill each to the male with the best beard and the female with the best bonnet or hat. Start growing and sewing!
- Art as Our Narrative – bicentennial-themed art exhibit at High Cotton Arts.
- Christmas Open House – shops open and decorated with a historical flair this year.
- Live music
- Commemorative shopping totes and cupcakes

But the perhaps biggest event of them all during the Bicentennial Bash will be the re-creation of an event nearly a century ago and of one of the most iconic historic Limestone County photos: The Trade Days car giveaway.

If you've been in the Limestone County Archives – or in Dobbs Shoe Shop – then you have probably seen the photo of the throng of people massed on the east side of the Square and wondered, why were all those people piled into Athens? Well, here's what we know:

1. The first special Trade Day event was Dec. 27, 1922, and the event went so well that they did it again, on Dec. 23, 1924.
2. There's a reason so many people crowded on the square that day: They were hoping to win a car, and you had to be present to win.
3. You didn't have to buy a raffle ticket, you got one for free... IF you spent money in a participating merchant's store. And obviously, everyone spent their money on...
4. ... hats. A status symbol of the time, a new hat showed that you had made your crop and had made your money for the year. So every fall, Herman Swanner's store nearly sold out of the thousands of hats he had stocked.
5. Winners of the cash drawings that day were LeRoy Howard; \$5; J. S. Owen and J. M. Cannon, \$10 each; Hinson Grigsby, \$15; and W. J. Hudson, \$25. The new car went to Mrs. Lakin Lambert, who lived in the Shoalford district in today's East Limestone. Ironically, Mrs. Lambert didn't buy a hat or anything else to get her ticket. Her sons and nephew had pooled their money to buy her husband a new suit of clothes for when he boarded a train, bound for a new job, so they all got a ticket. One son gave his ticket to his mama.
6. Identified businesses in this photo are, from left: Hendricks Corner, Gilbert Drug Co., Jaffe Bros., C.O. Johnston's Hardware Store, L. L. Rogers' store; The Leader, Joe Steinberg, Martin-Richardson-Malone, Farmers & Merchants Bank, W.T. McDaniel building, Johnson-Rawls-Cain, and Edmundson's Grocery.
7. A Nashville photographer took the panorama photograph of the crowd that day.

This year, you can donate \$5 a ticket or \$10 for three to Athens Main Street to be eligible for a drawing to compete in an Athens Trivia Contest. And like nearly a century ago, the contest winner gets the keys to a car – this time a Kia Rio donated by Dealers Auto Auction – and a photographer will be on hand to once again snap an iconic photo of the celebrating crowd in downtown Athens.

About the Archives:

Limestone County Department of History and Archives

Established: 1980

Staff: Archivist Rebekah Davis and Assistant Archivist April Davis

Location: 102 W. Washington St., in the 1905 L&N Passenger Depot

Hours: 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday

Phone: 256-233-6404

E-mail: archives@limestonecounty-al.gov

Web: www.limestonearchives.com

Facebook: www.facebook.com/limestonecountyarchives