

## Last historical marker stops: Trinity School Cistern and Pleasant Hill/Donnell House

By Rebekah Davis

Limestone County Archivist

This article marks the last two stops on the historical marker tour of Limestone County.

I hope you have enjoyed this virtual tour of Limestone County's historical spots over the past several months. To see the list of most of the markers and more information, you can get maps and GPS coordinates to each one by searching for Limestone County's historical markers on [www.lat34north.com](http://www.lat34north.com), or to view additional markers and directions, visit [www.limestonecountyhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.limestonecountyhistoricalsociety.org).

Today's markers:

- **Trinity School Cistern:** This cistern is the last remnant of Trinity School located here 1865-1907. The cistern was used to store rainwater collected from the roof. No physical evidence remains of the Ross Hotel, the Chapman Quarters, and other buildings on this block, which played an important role in Athens history. Trinity, a school for the children of former slaves, was established here, on the old Richardson property, in 1865, primarily through the efforts of Miss Mary Frances Wells, the school's principal and chief proponent. Trinity Hall was built here 1881-82, as a joint effort by the American Missionary Association and local African Americans who hand-made and laid the bricks for the building. It burned in 1907 and was rebuilt the following year on the old Civil War fort site west of town. This marker is located in the parking lot near the northwest end of the new Limestone Courthouse Annex on Market Street near the railroad track.
- **Pleasant Hill:** Home of Rev. Robert Donnell (1784-1855). Built abt. 1849 by Rev. Robert Donnell, a native of North Carolina, and his second wife Clara Lindley Donnell. He was greatly inspired by the Presbyterian circuit rider, one of the "flaming fires," so called because of their spiritual intensity. Donnell held the first camp meeting in the settlement that became Huntsville, started new churches in North Alabama and Tennessee, and retired as minister of the Athens Cumberland Presbyterian Church. For his service and dedication, the North Alabama Presbytery was named in his honor. After the death of the Rev. Donnell in the 1855, this house and surrounding acreage passed to his son James Webb Smith Donnell. J.W.S. Donnell and his family lived here during the Civil War, even though he was wanted by the Union Army for aiding the Confederacy. In 1862, during the sacking of Athens, Federal troops camped on the house grounds, looted and damaged the house. The Donnells lost the house through bankruptcy after the war. It served as a boarding school for boys for a time and later as the home of Athens School Superintendent, Julian Newman and his family. In the 1970s, a campaign to save and restore the house was initiated by local historians and authors Christine W. Edwards and Faye A. Axford. Local citizens, businesses and Donnell descendants contributed to the restoration of this historical landmark. This marker is located in front of the house on the Middle School property situated southeast of the intersection of Forrest and Clinton streets.

**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:** [lcarchives@knology.net](mailto:lcarchives@knology.net) or [lcarchives2@knology.net](mailto:lcarchives2@knology.net)

**Web:** [www.limestonearchives.com](http://www.limestonearchives.com)

**Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/limestonecountyarchives](https://www.facebook.com/limestonecountyarchives)