

1867 Athens laws forbade singing in the street, selling on the Sabbath

By Rebekah Davis
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It had only been a couple of years since downtown Athens was under martial law by Union troops, and the leaders of this little Southern town were still trying to regain some civility after what had been, for them, a decidedly un-civil Civil War.

So with that in mind, on Feb. 21, 1867, the *Athens Weekly Post* published a pretty comprehensive list of “Ordinances Governing the Town of Athens,” covering everything from yelling in the street to exposing the “lower part” of a privy to public view.

Some of our favorites:

- **Dead Animals Downtown:** If any person shall hereafter carry or place any dead animal upon the premises of another within the limits of the corporation, or upon the Public Square, or upon any of the public streets or about either of the public springs, he, she or they so offending shall forfeit and pay for each and every offence not less than one or more than five dollars, at the discretion of the Mayor.
- **Singing in the Street:** Any person or persons who may hallow, yell, sing or make any other noise in or about the streets of the town of Athens calculated to disturb the peace and quiet of any of the citizens of said town, shall on conviction thereof be fined, at the discretion of the Mayor, not less than one nor more than forty dollars.
- **Cows on the Sidewalk:** Any person or persons who shall ride, lead, or cause to follow them, any horse, mare, mule, jackass, oxen, bull, cow or calf, on or across the pavements or side-walks in the corporation of Athens, shall be fined not less than one nor more than five dollars.
- **Shooting in the City:** Any person or persons who shall shoot a gun, pistol or any other description of fire-arms, or in any way explode gun powder, within the corporate limits, except on the 25th December, 4th of July and 22nd of February (*George Washington’s birthday –RD*), shall be fined not less than one nor more than five dollars, at the discretion of the Mayor. Provided, that nothing in the act contained, shall prevent any person from shooting pork hogs, beef and cattle in said corporation; and provided further, that the shooting in proviso above, shall not be within one block of the Public Square.
- **Selling on the Sabbath:** Any person or persons who shall keep open his, her or their door or windows for the purpose of vending any goods, wares, or merchandise in the town of Athens on the Sabbath day shall forfeit and pay not less than five nor more than forty dollars, at the discretion of the Mayor.
- **Pitching Dollars:** Any person or persons, who shall pitch dollars, or quaits, or horseshoes, or rings, or any substitute whatever, on the sidewalks in the corporation of Athens, shall, on conviction, be fined for each and every offense not less than one nor more than five dollars.
- **Procreating inside City Limits:** Any person or persons who shall let or put any stallion or jackass to any mare within the limits of the corporation shall forfeit and pay not less than five nor more than forty dollars, at the discretion of the Mayor.

- **Trees on the Square:** Person or persons who shall cut down or injure in any manner any tree in the public streets or on the Public Square of the town of Athens, shall be fined not less one nor more than forty dollars, at the discretion of the Mayor.
- **Exposing the Privy:** It shall be unlawful for any privy, necessary or garden-house to be placed or suffered to remain on any street in Athens the lower part of which is exposed to view, and any necessary, privy or garden-house so situated, shall be deemed a nuisance, and its owner or occupants shall be subjected to a fine of five dollars for each and every week it may so remain after having received due notice from the Mayor or Town Marshall.

For the complete ordinances, you can take a look at one of the Limestone County Archives' newest additions to our library, "*The Athens Post*" and "*The Athens Weekly Post*" January 1867-June 1867 by Danny Black. Black has transcribed these newspapers verbatim, and this book provides a fascinating insight into Athens during the Reconstruction era. You can also pick up a copy for yourself for \$35 at the Limestone County Archives' office.

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