

What's in a Name? Early settlers took on task of naming Limestone's places

Note: This article is the first in a series highlighting the history of Limestone County place names.

By Rebekah Davis

Limestone County Archivist

By the time Limestone County was established in 1818, it had already had an identity crisis.

Originally a battle zone between the Cherokee and Chickasaw tribes, this area would be claimed by France, England, Georgia, and Mississippi before finally becoming an Alabama county. And for each group of people that called this place “home,” there was a new name identified for the creeks, rivers, hills, and hollows that make up this county today.

Let's take a look at some of the earliest names given to the county and its geographical features and towns:

- **Chu-Wa-Lee River:** The original name of today's Elk River, so given by the Cherokees who named the river for their chief, Chu-Wa-Lee, and his village on a branch of the Tennessee River.
- **Elk River:** By the time Chickasaws ceded their land to the U.S. government in 1805, the “Chewallee” River was also known as the Elk River because of large herds of elk along the river banks.
- **Elk County:** After the Territory of Alabama was established on March 3, 1817, the territorial legislature designated much of today's Lauderdale and Limestone counties as one county, and on May 9, 1817, established it with the name Elk County, after the river.
- **Limestone County:** The Alabama Territorial Legislature, on Feb. 6, 1818, divided Elk County into two counties, Lauderdale and Limestone. Limestone County was so named because of Limestone Creek flowing through it.
- **Limestone Creek:** Early residents Levi Cummings, Thomas Mayfield, Benjamin Peete and Fletcher Lane named the creek for its limestone bed and the large number of limestone bluffs on its banks. Before that, it was known as...
- **Black Creek:** The Cherokees and Chickasaws named the creek for its deep swimming holes that looked black compared to the shallow water beside them.
- **Mooreville:** The oldest incorporated town in Limestone County, Mooreville was established Nov. 16, 1818. Alexander Moore and his sons, Robert and John, were the first settlers, and they named the town for their family. One of the Moores ran a shoe-making shop there, and another one ran a tavern that was an important stagecoach stop.
- **Athens:** Established three days after Mooreville, on Nov. 19, 1818, the town was founded by Robert Beaty and John Carriel (or Carroll), and first populated by many well-to-do Virginians who established a school soon after settling there. In that time, it was popular to name towns after important hubs of Western civilization such as Rome and Athens, and Athens was chosen as a reference to a place of learning and culture. While some say the town was originally named Athenson, the Limestone County Archives has no record of this. However, the very first deed in Deed Book 1 of the Limestone County government documents is the record of Beaty's and Carriel's purchase in February 1818 of the land to lay out the new town.

Note: Information for this article came from A Tentative Survey of Limestone County Place Names by Deborah Ashford.

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