

What's in a Name? Coffeepot once famous for rowdy rendezvous

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

By Rebekah Davis
Limestone County Archivist

Today it's the name of a landmark convenience store and surrounding community, often used in giving directions such as, "turn right after you pass the Coffeepot Grocery." But once upon a time, **Coffeepot** was known as the Chicago of Limestone County.

It might not be noted on county maps, but most people who have lived in Limestone County long enough can clearly point to Coffeepot on a county map, halfway between Athens and Ardmore on Alabama Highway 251. And more than a few of them have stopped in to the convenience store for a biscuit and, of course, a cup of coffee.

That store has been the center of the community since 1927, when Dempsy Carroll opened it as a grocery store serving northeast Limestone County. In 1932, his son Charley moved back to Limestone County from Chicago, and he was ready to bring a bit of the Windy City back with him.

He opened a café – The Coffeepot – next to the store, and then added a dance hall, which also doubled as a boxing and wrestling ring. Saturday night dances would attract a hall full of couples from all over the county, where little country bands would play while people danced the night away – and drank the night away, too, sneaking in liquor and passing it around.

"Sometimes people would get rowdy and they had to call the police," Calvin Powers, one of the later owners of the store, recalled in 1978. But Carroll usually nipped the fights in the bud, throwing people out at the first sign of trouble.

"He was one of the toughest guys around," Powers said. "I guess he was afraid of nobody."

So many couples came to the dances that Carroll built several cabins behind the dance hall. They became a way stop for travelers on Old Highway 31, which was once the most traveled north-south route through the county. They also became a notorious rendezvous spot for couples sneaking out of Athens who wished to remain anonymous.

After a few summers, Carroll opened another location in Ardmore, and the Coffeepot dance hall closed. He eventually moved back to Chicago himself.

The Coffeepot entertainment complex had a succession of owners after Carroll, but the dance hall never re-opened, and eventually the café closed, too. The cabins stayed available to rent for several years until the owners got out of the rendezvous business as well.

However, the store stayed open through it all. For 35 years, Calvin Powers owned the store under the name of Powers Grocery. After he sold the store, it was renamed Coffee Pot Grocery, a reminder of its heyday as a community store, café, dance hall, boxing ring, waystop, and rendezvous point – a slice of Chicago in Limestone County.

Note: Information for this article came from "Coffeepot: Little Chicago for Limestone Countians," by Julian Godwin, Athens News Courier, Feb. 12, 1978, and from Limestone County census records.

Request of Readers: Where did Scarce Grease get its name? Share your knowledge and theories with me so we can share it in a future article. Call me at 256-233-6404 or e-mail archives@limestonecounty-al.gov. Thanks!

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