

Trinity School history and future rises from the dirt

By Rebekah Davis
Limestone County Archivist

If only the dirt that bulldozers have pushed around during the past few months could talk, what stories it could tell.

Every now and then it gives up a tangible reminder of one of those stories, in the form of a Union soldier's button or bullet, or a muddy purple-and-gold basketball jersey, or an engraved brick once used as a cornerstone.

A century and a half ago, slaves packed this dirt into an earthen fortress as they fought for their freedom. Their children and grandchildren returned to this patch of dirt to build a school as they engaged in another kind of fight for freedom – the daily labor of earning the education that would be their key to a better life. And today, after years of sitting virtually untouched, the dirt is moving again.

The building on that dirt, being renovated and readied for re-opening, is Trinity School, on the southwest side of Athens. For more than 100 years, from the close of the Civil War until desegregation, Trinity school offered the African American students of Athens and Limestone County an education. Closed as a county school in 1970, the main building is on schedule to re-open in summer 2015 as a community center, with a museum to follow in the former band room. So much of Limestone County's history, and particularly the history of its African American families, is connected to Trinity School. For years, learning about that history was difficult as many of the documents were in storage, and the stories remained only in the memories of those who lived them. However, thanks to the work and research of Athens author Charlotte Fulton and the many Trinity alumni and others who shared that history with her, those stories are coming to light.

"Holding the Fort: A History of Trinity School in Athens, Alabama 1865-1970," was published in the fall of 2014 by the Athens-Limestone Community Association, the group that is working to re-open Trinity School and share its history. Not only is the book available for purchase and research at the Limestone County Archives, but many of the ALCA's photos and documents of Trinity School and the people connected to it have been shared with the Limestone County Archives to make available for our patrons to research and learn about that history.

The Archives' partnership with ALCA is exciting, but there is still more to discover and learn, and that's where our readers and patrons come in. The ALCA plans to publish a pictorial history of the school next, and to ultimately open a museum and archives of Trinity School. If you have photos or other memorabilia related to Trinity School, the ALCA wants to include those in the book, the museum, or both. You can bring photos to the Limestone County Archives for scanning, and pick up a copy of "Holding the Fort" while you're at it.

If you have questions about this project, my contact information is below. Thank you in advance for helping to dig even more fascinating stories out of the dirt of our community history.

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: Rebekah.Davis@limestonecounty-al.gov or April.Davis@limestonecounty-al.gov

Web: www.limestonearchives.com

Facebook: www.facebook.com/limestonecountyarchives