

Facts come to light about historic Trade Days photo

By Rebekah Davis

Limestone County Archivist

One of the most popular features of the local side of “The Way We Worked – Athens,” the Smithsonian exhibit that was presented by the Limestone County Archives in the Limestone County Event Center this fall, was this 1922 picture of Trade Days on the Square.

Printed eight feet wide and set atop a fence panel, this photo was clear enough for visitors to pick out their dads in the crowd, or to wonder, “Why were those people all there? And why were they all in hats?”

Fortunately, some visitors helped us learn more about the rest of the story of this well-known historic Athens photo, the original of which hangs in Dobbs Shoe Shop behind the Limestone County Archives on Market Street. Here’s what we learned:

1. This was not the only Trade Days photo like this. This one was taken on Dec. 27, 1922, and the event went so well that they did it again, on Dec. 23, 1924. The original 1924 photo is in the Limestone County Archives, and both are available for copies.
2. You can easily see so many folks because no trees blocked the view from the courthouse steps. That’s because the Limestone County Courthouse was only three years old, and the mammoth trees gracing the courthouse lawn today were mere saplings at the time.
3. There’s a reason so many people crowded on the square that day: They were hoping to win a car, and you had to be present to win.
4. You didn’t have to buy a raffle ticket, you got one for free... IF you spent money in a participating merchant’s store. And obviously, everyone spent their money on...
5. ... hats. A status symbol of the time, a new hat showed that you had made your crop and had made your money for the year. So every fall, Herman Swanner’s store nearly sold out of the thousands of hats he had stocked.
6. Winners of the cash drawings that day were LeRoy Howard; \$5; J. S. Owen and J. M. Cannon, \$10 each; Hinson Grigsby, \$15; and W. J. Hudson, \$25. The new car went to Mrs. Lakin Lambert, who lived in the Shoalford district in today’s East Limestone.
7. Identified businesses in this photo are, from left: Hendricks Corner, Gilbert Drug Co., Jaffe Bros., C.O. Johnston’s Hardware Store, L. L. Rogers’ store; The Leader, Joe Steinberg, Martin-Richardson-Malone, Farmers & Merchants Bank, W.T. McDaniel building, Johnson-Rawls-Cain, and Edmundson’s Grocery.
8. A Nashville photographer took the panorama photograph of the crowd that day.
9. Now that the Smithsonian exhibit is closed, the eight-foot print of Trade Days photo will hang in the Limestone County Archives.
10. Athens and Limestone County will celebrate their bicentennials in 2018, and some people think it would be a great idea to re-create this photo on our 200th birthday – perhaps without the hats, but certainly with a car to give away. What do you think? Would you crowd on the Square with 10,000 of your closest friends in hopes of winning the big birthday present?

To learn more about this and other items of Limestone County history, we welcome you to visit the Limestone County Archives.

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

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