

Story behind the photo: Limestone's first courthouses served new community

By Rebekah Davis
Limestone County Archivist

Did you know that the current Limestone County Courthouse, the focal point of the downtown Square for the past century, is actually the fifth courthouse built by the county?

With its 100th birthday coming up in 2019, the Courthouse has stood longer than any of its predecessors, too. But then, it hasn't seen quite as much action, either.

Plans for the first Limestone County Courthouse are barely visible on a torn page of the original county record book, housed at the Limestone County Archives. Limestone County had just been established at the end of 1818, a settlement carved out of Chickasaw territory, and the new county government needed a home.

The artist's sketch in the record book showed the log building, and bids opened in 1819 for a two-story courthouse, 40-by-60 feet, and a two-story jail, 20-by-40 feet, including a debtor's dungeon.

Trees were cleared from the heart of Limestone County to create the little town's new square, and those logs are most likely what were used to build the courthouse, too. By 1820, some of Limestone's first officials – like first sheriff James Slaughter and first circuit court clerk William T. Gamble – were conducting county business out of the new courthouse and jail.

By 1825, however, residents of the growing community had decided a log courthouse would no longer do. That year, the county's first brick courthouse was erected on the Square. It didn't last long, however. Blame construction or blame location, but either way, by 1831, the walls of the second courthouse were cracking and giving way. Before it could completely fall down, the county sold it for \$505 and had it dismantled and moved away. Photos or structural references regarding this courthouse have never surfaced.

In the next Valley Star, I'll share a photo of the antebellum, Federal-style Limestone County Courthouse, as well as its tumultuous history. In the meantime, you can always come by the Limestone County Archives to get your Limestone history fix!

Cutline: This artist's depiction shows the exterior of the first Limestone County Courthouse, likely built of the logs that were cut down to create the town square.

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: lcarchives@knology.net or lcarchives2@knology.net

Web: www.limestonearchives.com

Facebook: www.facebook.com/limestonecountyarchives

What's new at the Archives:

It's time to wrap up that Christmas shopping! The Limestone County Archives has wonderful gifts available for the history buff on your list, or for anyone who lives in or loves Limestone County.

Make sure to pick up a 2012 Friends of the Archives Calendar, "Downtown Athens, Alabama: Then and Now." It's a great keepsake filled with history and photos, plus more than \$110 worth of coupons for local Athens merchants, all for just \$12.

Or browse our collection of thousands of historical photos to create your own keepsake, starting at just \$3 for a print or digital file.

The Archives also has dozens of local history books available for purchase. For more information, visit www.limestonearchives.com or call 256-233-6404.