

2019 marks bicentennial of newspapers in Athens

By Betty L. Taylor

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Newspapers: A Brief History

In the year 1819 during the administration of James Monroe, Alabama was admitted to the Union. That same year, A.A. McCartney established *The Athenian*, the first paper published in Athens. It was succeeded by *The Alabama Republican* in 1825 with Charles B. Mathews as editor and publisher. It was in print until 1828. For a short time there existed *The Athens Register*, a violent anti-Whig newspaper that lasted less than a year. In 1836 William J. McLin established *The Alabama Watchman* and published it for four years. Thomas Wilson of Nashville established *The Athens Weekly Chronicle* in the 1840s. He shortened the name to *The Weekly Chronicle* and sold the paper in 1842 to A. A. and J. A. Johnson. After a few years they sold the press to J. D. Beauchamp and J. D. Danforth who had started a paper in favor of the “Whig Party” called *The Southern Patriot* with Col. L. R. Davis as associate editor. In November 1844 *The Dollar Whig* was published by Dr. John S. Blair during the presidential campaign between Polk and Clay. The paper expired with Clay’s hopes for a place in the White House.

The Athens Herald had its beginning in 1846 with owners A. A. Johnson, J. A. Johnson and Egbert Jones. It was later bought by Thomas H. Hobbs and George P. Keyes. Hobbs and Keyes sold it to N. J. Floyd of Virginia, who then sold it to D. H. Bingham and J. A. Johnson. It was still in publication in 1861. In 1858 J.A. Johnson founded *The Limestone News* and sold it to A. B. Hendon just before the outbreak of the Civil War. Hendon changed the name of the paper to *The Banner*. When the Yankee soldiers occupied Athens in 1862 they closed down the paper. In 1871, after the war, John A. Johnson and L. R. Davis began the publication of *The Limestone News*. Others working with the paper between 1872 and 1876 included R. W. Johnson, T. H. Field, James A. Danforth, S. M. Ainsworth, and James A. Gibson. With so many changes in leadership, *The Limestone News* stopped publication after six years.

In 1889-1890 *The Athens Herald* was again in publication with W. E. Vassar as manager. Matt G. Johnson worked as a devil’s printer, but after five months, Vassar ceased publication. In 1888 *The Alliance Banner* was being published by H. D. Lane. Critz Pettey was also with the *Banner*. *The Alabama Courier* began publication in 1880 with Charles M. Hayes and in 1933 celebrated fifty years in publication with Robert Rawls. *The Athens Democrat* was established about 1886 by W. R. Francis and sold in 1888 to H. D. Lane. In 1866 Thomas B. Reynolds began the publication of *The Athens Weekly Post*. William S. Nelson and Thomas J. Tanner bought the paper in 1871 and shortened the name to *The Athens Post*. In 1881 Col. L. R. Davis and Thomas H. Fields purchased the paper and retained ownership until 1884 at which time it was sold to Robert Maurice Rawls.

In 1889 Capt. S.M. Clay bought and published *The Limestone Democrat* in Elkmont, Alabama. He sold it in 1892 to George L. Towns who moved the press to Athens where he managed it for one year then sold the press to 17-year-old R. H. (Harry) Walker in January 1893. Walker continued as editor and publisher for more than fifty years. He sold *The Limestone Democrat* in 1950 to Steele McGrew who was publisher of *The Alabama Courier*. McGrew continued to publish *The Alabama Courier* on Thursday and *The Limestone Democrat* on Tuesday until 1968 when he sold the two papers to Robert Bryan. Bryan also published *The Athens News Leader*, a paper Beasley Thompson had started in 1966. Robert Bryan combined all the papers and published only one under the name of *The Athens Limestone News Courier*.

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