

Smithsonian Exhibition Exploring the American Workforce Coming to Athens

By Rebekah Davis

Limestone County Archivist

In just a few short months, a Smithsonian Institution traveling exhibition will make its temporary home in downtown Athens, giving people in this community an opportunity to not only explore the history of working in America, but also to share our own stories of our communities' contributions as hard-working Americans.

The Limestone County Archives, in cooperation with Alabama Humanities Foundation (AHF), will explore the professions and the people that sustain American society when it hosts "The Way We Worked," September 20 to November 8, 2014, in the former W.E. Estes & Son storefront right across Washington Street from the Archives.

In addition to the Smithsonian exhibit, we plan to share our own Limestone County about the way we worked, from elk-hunting Native Americans to commuting rocket scientists. The local exhibit will include a timeline of artifacts, photos, stories and interactive exhibits from such diverse groups as the Tennessee Valley Authority, homemakers clubs, federal employees, small businesses, farmers and more. Right now I am in the process of contacting groups and planning exhibits and events, and I encourage anyone who wants to be a part of this event to please let me know.

Athens and the surrounding community have been expressly chosen by AHF to host "The Way We Worked" as part of the Museum on Main Street project—a national/state/local partnership to bring exhibitions and programs to rural cultural organizations. The exhibition will tour six communities in Alabama from July 2014 through June 2015: Pell City, Athens, Valley, Cullman, Demopolis, and Dothan.

"The Way We Worked," adapted from an original exhibition developed by the National Archives and Records Administration, explores how work has become a central element in American culture. It traces the many changes that have affected the workforce and work environments over the past 150 years, including the growth of manufacturing and increasing use of technology. The exhibition draws from the Archives' rich collections, including historical photographs, archival accounts of workers, film, audio and interactives, to tell the compelling story of how work impacts our individual lives and the historical and cultural fabric of our communities.

Since 1997, AHF has partnered with the Smithsonian to bring the Museum on Main Street program to small cities and rural communities across Alabama. "Allowing all of our state's residents to have access to the cultural resources of our nation's premiere museum is a priority of the Alabama Humanities Foundation," says Executive Director Armand DeKeyser. "With this special tour, we are pleased to be working with the Archives and area organizations to help develop local exhibitions and public programs to compliment the Smithsonian exhibition."

The Alabama tour of "The Way We Worked" has been made possible by the Alabama Humanities Foundation, the Alabama Power Company, and Norfolk Southern Railroad. Museum on Main Street is a collaboration between the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service (SITES), state humanities councils across the nation, and local host institutions. To learn more about "The Way We Worked," visit www.museumonmainstreet.org. To find out more about how you can contribute to "The Way We Worked" in Limestone County, please call me at the Archives, 256-233-6404, or e-mail me at lcarchives@knology.net.

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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