

Looking back at Moving Forward

By Rebekah Davis
Limestone County Archivist

The mid-century summer was hot, but in Athens and Limestone County, folks had a cool reason to celebrate: The entire Tennessee Valley was coming to town to celebrate 15 years of electricity with the Tennessee Valley Authority.

As Athens was the first city in Alabama to contract with TVA for electric power (just 30 days behind the first city in the country, Tupelo, MS), and it was smack dab in the middle of TVA service area, Athens was tapped to host the big parade and celebration, June 1, 1949.

In recent weeks, a special item has made its way into the Limestone County Archives: The original, 25-cent, 24-page booklet that was published for the celebration. Titled “Moving Forward with Athens and Limestone County,” the booklet provides a snapshot of life in Limestone County 15 years into this relationship with TVA. It includes literal snapshots of government buildings, houses, churches, and schools, as well as facts about Athens and Limestone County. Here are some of the things that were deemed worth recording about the community in 1949:

- TVA power began flowing in Athens on June 1, 1934. At that time, the electric plant was valued at \$72,608 and served about 1,000 customers on less than 100 miles of line.
- By 1949, the Athens electric distribution system was worth \$1.2 million and served more than 6,000 customers on 750 miles of line. It paid \$25,000 a year in tax equivalent to the city.
- On March 22, 1819, the people of Limestone County made Athens the county seat by a one-vote margin. On March 22, 1934, the county made TVA the electric power provider... with only one dissenting vote. That vote came from man who got confused and thought he was voting against the other company.
- The cost of electric power had dropped from 7 cents per kilowatt hour before TVA to 1.3 cents.
- Athens population was about 6,000; Limestone County, 40,000.
- There were about 4,400 farms in Limestone County, encompassing about 220,000 of the county's 348,800 total acreage. There were about 1,750 landowners.
- Transportation options included Highways 31 and 72, the Tennessee River, L&N Railroad, and the Greyhound and Capital Bus Lines. Pryor Airport was soon to be equipped to handle commercial flights.
- Athens had 25 miles of paved streets. Limestone County had 1,000 miles of roads, of which 150 miles were paved, and state roads added another 65 paved miles.
- Athens had “two good weekly newspapers” and North Alabama's newest radio station.
- The two stockyards in Athens both did “a large amount of business.” The county had 6,671 hogs and 4,775 cows.
- Limestone County had produced \$10 million in cotton that year. The county had 54 Grade “A” dairies and 1,100 Grade “B” dairies, producing \$1 million in milk annually, and 83 commercial broiler hen growers and 23 commercial egg producers.

The entire “Moving Forward” booklet has now been digitized, so to take a look or to order copies of the entire book or particular photos, come by 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

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