

Historical markers tell Athens history, Civil War events

By Rebekah Davis

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It's time for more stops on the historical marker tour of Limestone County, hitting 25 markers in all.

I'm spending a few weeks sharing the information about these markers. If you want to go ahead and check them all out, you can get maps and GPS coordinates to each one by searching for Limestone County's historical markers on www.lat34north.com.

Today's markers are:

- **Athens Sacked and Plundered:** On May 2, 1862, Union troops of the 19th and 24th Illinois and the 37th Indian Regiments commanded by Col. John Basil Turchin went on a rampage through the town. They looted and plundered stores and homes, stealing clothing, jewelry and anything of value, destroying what they didn't want. For months afterward, the soldiers stabled their horses in some of the town's churches, burned the pews for firewood and destroyed the interiors. Col Turchin, born Ivan Vasillevich Turchinoff in Russia, was court martialed in Huntsville for encouraging these actions, but his wife appealed to Abraham Lincoln for clemency on his behalf. Turchin was promoted to Brig Gen. one day before the court martial. Marker at the intersection of South Jefferson Street and West Washington Street, Athens.

- **Athens, Alabama:**

Side 1:

Athens was incorporated in 1818, one year prior to the admission of Alabama as the 22nd state. It is the seat of Limestone County, created by an act of the Alabama Territorial Legislature. Athens has a legacy of providing quality education for residents. In 1822, citizens purchased land for the establishment of the Athens Female Academy. Now Athens State University, the campus continues to serve the community. The fertile lands around the town were cleared by early settlers and slaves making possible large-scale cotton production during the flush times of the 1830s-40s. Local residents brought the railroad through Athens in 1858, connecting the area to markets and establishing the town as a hub of commerce for the surrounding area. Prospering, the town hoped to avoid secession of the state, voting for the Northern Democrat Stephen Douglas in 1860.

Side 2:

As the Civil War approached, many of the town's young men left for distant locales to defend their homes. Athens was seized by the Union Army in May 1862. The resultant destruction of home and businesses by these forces is known as the "Sack of Athens." The town was occupied by the Union Army for most of the war. Athens was home to Gov. George S. Houston, the state's first post- Reconstruction Democratic governor from 1874-1878. The town was also home to Trinity School, founded after the Civil War by the American Missionary Society to educate former slaves. Notable student and former slave Patti Malone became a celebrated mezzo soprano with the Fisk Jubilee Singers. In 1934, Athens was the first town to receive electricity from T.V.A. Although Athens has grown, its citizens continue to celebrate its small-town atmosphere. Marker at the intersection of Beaty Street North and Market Street/Buck Island Road, Athens.

- **Battle of Sulphur Creek Trestle:** On Sept. 25, 1864 Gen. N.B. Forrest's Confederate cavalry, with Morton's battery of 4 guns, attacked and captured the Union fort near here. The fort consisted of a square redoubt, rifle pits, two blockhouses, and some frame buildings. It protected a large railroad trestle about a mile E. of here. After a demand for surrender was refused by Col. Lathrop, the Union commander, the Confederates attacked, supported by 800 rounds of artillery fire. Over 200 Union officers and men, including Col. Lathrop, were killed in the onslaught. After the garrison of approx. 900 survivors surrendered, the trestle and blockhouses were destroyed. Marker on Elkmont Road/North Jefferson Street (State Highway 127) south of Upper Fort Hampton Road (County Road 49), Elkmont.

About the Archives:

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