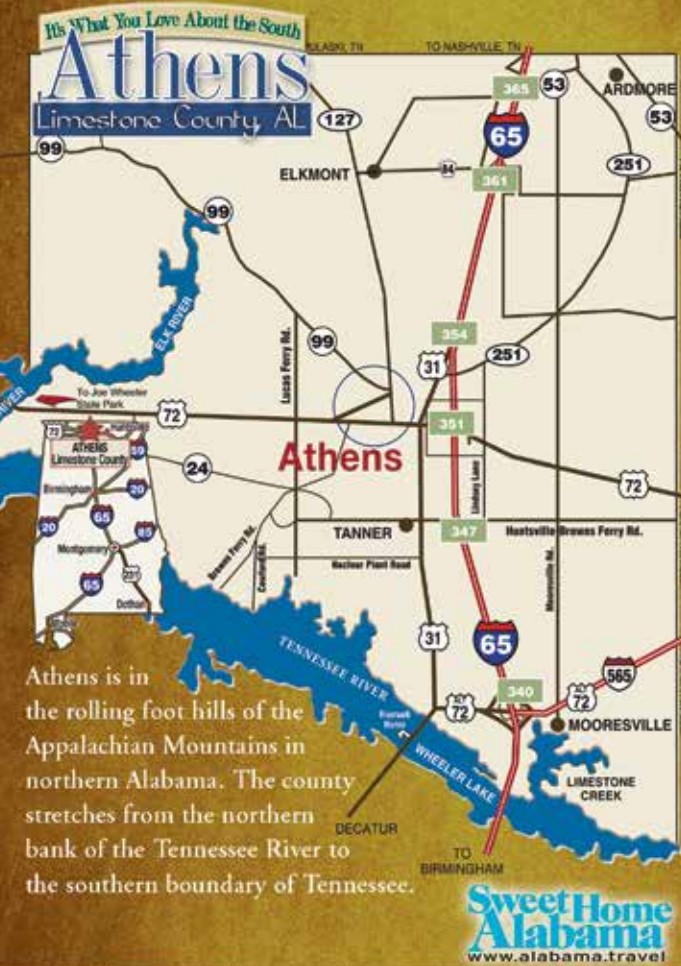


ATHENS-LIMESTONE COUNTY, AL

AFRICAN-AMERICAN HERITAGE TRAIL

Athens, AL is at coordinates 34.789602°N 86.969424°W



Athens is in the rolling foot hills of the Appalachian Mountains in northern Alabama. The county stretches from the northern bank of the Tennessee River to the southern boundary of Tennessee.

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ATHENS-LIMESTONE COUNTY, AL

-Those Who Served-

Civil War

The regiments of the **106th, 110th and 111th U.S. Colored Troops** served in Limestone County. The 106th and 110th U.S. Colored Troops (USCT) first saw combat on September 24, 1864 when they engaged raiders from Major General Nathan B. Forrest's cavalry at Fort Henderson in Athens. A historic marker is dedicated to the battle and located on Brownsferry Street west of Allyn Street in Athens.

(Historic Marker N 34° 47.841, W -086° 58.761)

The 111th USCT saw combat on September 25, 1864 at Sulfur Creek Trestle in northern Limestone County. The USCT regiment fought valiantly and some had to be physically restrained by their officers when the decisions to surrender the fort to Major General Forrest was made. There are 12 Civil War Veterans buried in honored glory at the Hine-Hobbs Cemetery on the corner of Hine and West Hobbs Street.

In 2001, a delegation of black officers from the U.S. Army, Air Force and Navy along with a group of distinguished citizens honored these veterans by placing markers and a flag pole at the cemetery.

World War I

George Bell was born in Limestone County and served in World War I in France.

Assigned to the all-Black 366th Infantry, he earned the Distinguished Service Cross, the nation's second highest award for bravery, on September 4, 1918, in Lesseau, France. His grave is located in the Oak Grove Church Cemetery in southwestern Limestone County.

(N64.94674, W-87.19136)



George Bell grave at Oak Grove Church Cemetery



Photo courtesy of U.S. Library of Congress

World War II

Leroy Murray was born in Limestone County and served in Tuskegee, Alabama and Ramatelli, Italy with the Tuskegee Airmen. He, along with all those who kept the planes flying, was designated as original Tuskegee Airmen. On March 29, 2007 Congress presented the Tuskegee Airmen with the Congressional Gold Medal, the highest civilian award in the United States.

His gravesite is located in the Colored Legg Cemetery in northwestern Limestone County community of Leggtown. (N34.9375, W-87.0619)

Private Leroy Murray, ground support for the Tuskegee Airmen. Photo courtesy of: U.S. Air Force Archive



Shield of the United States Army Air Forces 332d Fighter Group (the Tuskegee Airmen).

Alabama Veterans Museum

Alabama Veterans Museum and Archives Located at 100

West Pryor Street (N 34.80660, W -86.96978) in Athens has in its collection books of Limestone County African-American Veterans compiled by local historian, Colonel James Walker. The museum also houses personal as well as war artifacts from veterans and their families.



Athens-Limestone County Tourism

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- Trinity Area -



Photo of the original Trinity High School, date unknown but believed to have been taken in the early 1900s. Pictured at right is Mary Wells, Founder of Trinity School and Trinity Congregation Church.



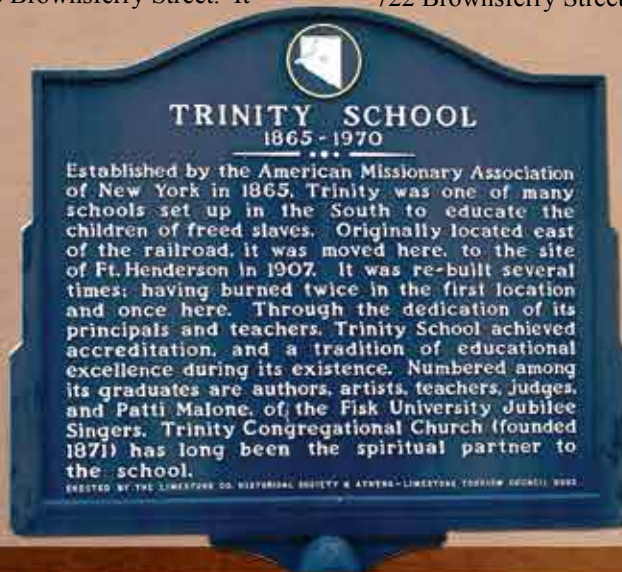
Trinity High School

808 Brownsferry Street, Athens

At the end of the Civil War, the first educational institution for Negroes in the Tennessee Valley opened in Athens on May 28, 1865, by Mary Wells and Chaplain Charles Anderson. That school, Trinity High School, was located on Market Street until 1907 when it was moved to 808 Brownsferry Street. It educated Blacks for 105 years until it was closed due to desegregation in 1970. Trinity was responsible for many firsts in the Tennessee Valley including employment of the first integrated faculty and first Negro school to gain accreditation. Historic Marker on Brownsferry Street, west of Allyn Street in Athens.

(N34.79735, W -86.97935)

Photo courtesy Limestone County Historical Society.



Artist rendering of the proposed Trinity School Heritage Center.

Trinity School Heritage Center

The Trinity Project reinvisions the now abandoned Trinity High School and Fort Henderson - reviving crucial historical structures and tales. Goals are to partially restore the earthen-work fort that stood during the Civil War. While a state-of-the-art facility will be built to house the cultural artifacts from Trinity and her students and continue to educate generations to come.

For additional information about the Trinity Project or to make a contribution, please contact the Athens-Limestone County Historical Society, Box 1476, Athens, AL 35612 or email TrinityAthens@charter.net.

Trinity Congregational Church

Trinity Congregational Church is located at 722 Brownsferry Street and has served the



community for more than 140 years. Trinity Congregational Church is recognized as one of the oldest African-American churches in the Tennessee Valley. Founded in 1871 by Mary Fletcher Wells, also the founder of Trinity School, the church was relocated to its present location in 1930. Trinity Congregational Church has been the home church for parishioners, teachers, alumni and former teachers of Trinity School.

(N 34.79801, W -86.97824)

"It is safe to say that no woman of her race ever sang in so many different countries of the world as Miss Patti J. Malone."

-- Cleveland Gazette newspaper headline on display at the Alabama Music Hall of Fame in Tusculmbia, AL.

Noteworthy Trinity Alumni

Patti Malone was born into slavery at The Cedars in Athens, Alabama. She attended at Trinity School and Fisk University in Nashville, TN. During her time at Fisk University, Patti Malone was selected to fill-in for an original member of the Fisk Jubilee Singers who had fallen ill while the group was on tour in Europe. She departed Nashville and joined the group in Germany in 1877.



Fisk Jubilee Singers, c. 1880 (Patti Malone at far right)

She and the Fisk Jubilee Singers performed throughout Europe, Australia and New Zealand, including for prime ministers and heads of state like the Queen of England and German Emperor Wilhelm I. Her grave is located in the Hines-Hobbs Cemetery at the corner of Hines and Market Streets.

(N34.80478, W -86.98406)



Patti Malone headstone in the Hobbs-Hine Cemetery.

The Mary Perkins Monument (1948) is located on the campus of Trinity High School. Miss Perkins was a northern missionary who came south in 1900 and taught at Trinity for almost 50 years. She was so beloved by the community that a log cabin was built on the campus for her. After her death, Mary was cremated and her ashes scattered on the campus according to her wishes. A monument was dedicated in her honor.



Mary Perkins Monument. Photo courtesy Charlotte Fulton.

- **Dr. C. Eric Lincoln**, author of 22 books including "Black Muslims in America" (see Trinity-Brownsferry Community section for more information.)
- **Dr. Noah Franklin Turner**, physician and surgeon and Meharry Medical College Graduate
- **Dr. Bernice Allen Reeves**, professor, Florida A&M University
- **Dr. Milton French**, dentist
- **Dr. Patricia Hargrove**, clinical Psychologist and business woman
- **Dr. Floyd Farrar**, professor, Fisk University
- **Dr. Alexander Collier**, physician and Meharry Medical College Graduate
- **Dr. Dean Scruggs Yarbrough**, college president, Miles College

These are among the hundreds of educators, artists, ministers, and military personnel to have passed through the halls of Trinity High School.

Woodbury Bridge (1930) is located on Allyn Street on the campus of Trinity High School. Designed by Trinity High School senior Will Alyce Mason in 1929, the bridge was built in 1930 to facilitate the crossing of a moat by the teachers who lived on the campus. Photo courtesy of Charlotte Fulton.

Perimeter Ditch, circa 1947, courtesy Athens-Limestone Historical Society.



The Class of '57 Monument, gifted to the school by the Class of 1957, is located on Allyn Street on the campus of Trinity High School.





- Limestone County Map Legend**
- 1 Alabama State Welcome Center (I-1)
 - 2 Ardmore Aviation (J-1)
 - 3 Ardmore Veterans Walk (K-1)
 - 4 Rails to Trails (G-2)
 - 5 Elkmont Depot (G-3)
 - 6 Limestone County Sheriff's Rodeo Arena (E-4)
 - 7 Southern Gayles Golf Course (J-4)
 - 8 Limestone County Courthouse Square (H-7)
 - 9 Bayhill Marina Waterfront Rentals (A-8)
 - 10 Lucy's Branch Park (B-8)
 - 11 Athens Golf Course (H-8)
 - 12 Canebroke Golf Community (I-8)
 - 13 Orchards (J-8)
 - 14 Cowford Landing (E-10)
 - 15 Calhoun Community College/Pryor Regional Airport (H-12)
 - 16 Huntsville International Airport (L-11)
 - 17 North Alabama Birding Trail (I-13)
 - 18 Historic Mooresville (L-13)
- Featured Detailed Areas**
- A Lucy's Branch / Little Elk
 - B Tanner & Beuhland
 - C Athens Downtown
 - D Elkmont
- Cemeteries**
- E • Payne Cemetery (N34.99203°, W -86.97612°)
 - F • Berea Cemetery (African-American Section) (34.85431, W -87.05644)
 - G • Legg Cemetery (African-American Section) (N34.9375, W -87.0619)
 - H • Polly Malone Cemetery (N34.7832°, W -86.921°)
 - I • Hine-Hobbs Cemetery (N34.80457, W -86.98417)
 - J • Hatchett Cemetery (N34.9192534, W -86.7997232)



ATHENS-LIMESTONE COUNTY, AL

- Lucy's Branch / Little Elk -

Lucy's Branch and the Little Elk Community
 Area A of County Map
 (N 34.77971666 W -87.21908333)

Area sits near the confluence of the Elk River and Tennessee River on Snake Road in southwestern Limestone County Alabama. The land of both communities formerly belonged to the Chickasaw Indians before being ceded to the United States in 1816. It is believed to be the home of one of the last known Indian chiefs in the area.

The section of Tennessee River Valley land was settled by a society of blacks, whites and Indians and became known as the Little Elk Community. Soil was enriched by the annual flooding of the Tennessee River, lending to its success as farmland. African-American children from area families were educated at Little Elk Missionary Baptist Church (established 1874) until Little Elk Elementary School was built on Snake Road in 1930 on three acres

set aside for the purpose of the school by Mary Cunningham, mother to Joe Weaver Jr., great grandson of Lucy Bedingfield.

Lucy Bedingfield, daughter of a slave and a Cherokee Indian, was born in 1832 during the period of Indian Removal Act. Many believe her status as a slave of Henry A.B. Yarbrough, allowed her to escape the forced relocation that many of her own Cherokee family members underwent. Lucy married a former slave named Meridith Bedingfield and they raised a family of nine children on 170 acres of farmland near the Little Elk Community.

Lucy's love of storytelling centralized her role within the community. She came to be a source of advice and news to this burgeoning community and its name sake, Lucy's Branch. Many of the early residents are interred at Lucy's Branch cemetery. (N 34.7828658 W -87.2219618)



Lucy Bedingfield grave marker located in the family plot in Oklahoma.

Beulah Land / Orrville / Oakland Area (South Limestone County)



ATHENS-LIMESTONE COUNTY, AL

- Tanner & Beulahland -

Tanner, Beulahland, Orrville, Harris, Oakland and Southern Limestone County (Area B of county map) **Blue Ridge Academy** is the only remaining Rosenwald school in Limestone County. Julius Rosenwald, the President of Sears-Roebuck, in the early 1900's established several schools for blacks in

the south including six in Limestone County at the behest of Booker T. Washington.

Orrville Community (N 34.667 W -86.977) is located in southern Limestone County on Harris Station Road, just west of US 31. The community is named for Pleas Orr, who sold farm products to the Barnum and Bailey Circus. Pleas Orr owned several hundreds of acres of farmland in the community.

Beulah Land (also known as Beulahland) (N34.68870° W87.00140)

is located west of the Orrville Community on Harris Station Road where it intersects with Lucas Ferry Road and Bridgeforth Road. The Lakeview United Methodist Church is central to the Beulah Land community with its history dating back to the Civil War when slaves would meet under the arbor. The church continues to serve the community today after direct hits of the 1974 and 2011 tornadoes. Buried in the Church's cemetery is **William "Sou" Bridgeforth**, original owner of Nashville's New Era jazz and R&B club and owner of two Negro Baseball League teams - Baltimore Elite Giants (later moved to Nashville and dissolved) and Birmingham Black Barons. The Birmingham Barons had several recognizable players -- Satchel Paige, Willie Mays. Jim Zapp and country music star Charley Pride.



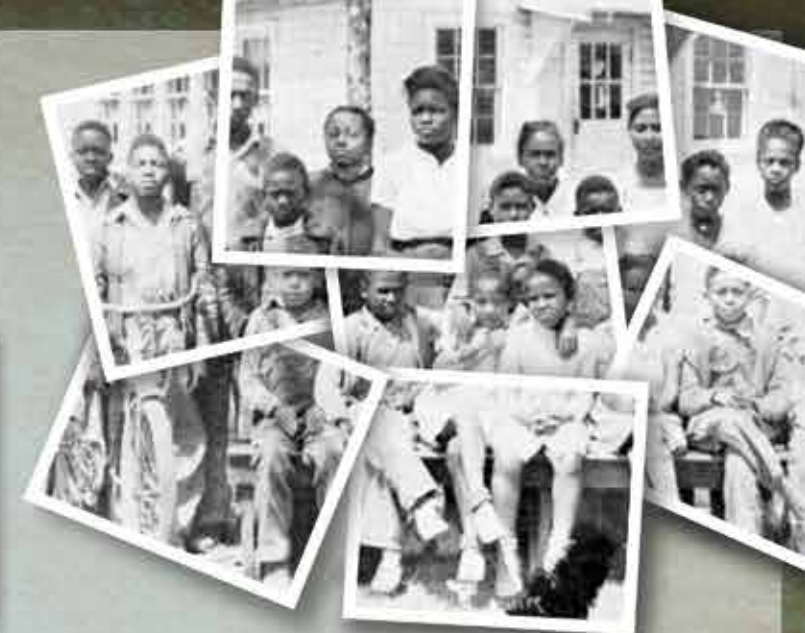
William Sousa "Sou" Bridgeforth, Trinity graduate and star pitcher, turned his passion of baseball into reality when he purchased the Baltimore Elite and their bus for \$11,000. He later purchased the Birmingham Black Barons.

Oakland United Methodist Church (N34.6585 W -86.94990) has served generations of African American in the Tanner area with services held under a brush arbor prior to the Civil War. In August of 1879, the land for the Oakland Methodist Church was deeded to parishioners. In a wood-clad, one-room building, the community worshiped and operated their own private school open to surrounding communities. The Limestone County Board of Education took charge of the Oakland UMC school in 1929 until it closed in 1952.

ATHENS-LIMESTONE COUNTY, AL

- Cemeteries -

- **Payne Cemetery** (N34.99203°, W -86.97612°) Payne Cemetery is located off of Spence Cave Road just before the Tennessee State Line. This historic African-American cemetery has graves dating back to the late 1800's.
- **Berea Cemetery** (African-American Section) (34.85431, W -87.05644) Berea Cemetery contains African-American graves dating back to the mid-1800's.
- **Legg Cemetery** (African-American Section) (N34.9375, W -87.0619) This historic cemetery is in northern Limestone County on Leggtown Road, north of Easter Ferry.



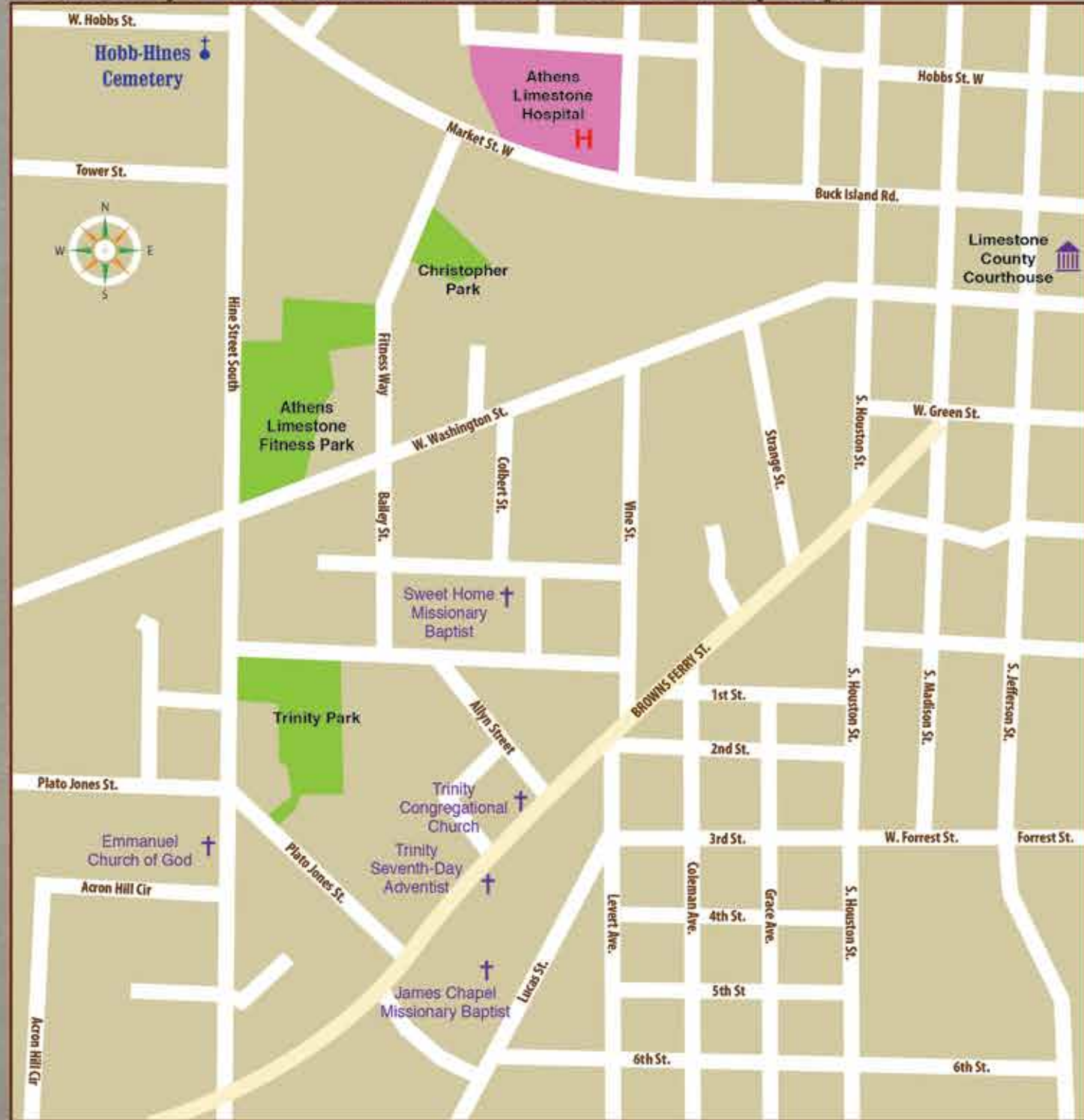
Alabama Fork School class photo. The school was formerly located on North Jefferson St./Highway 127, just north of Athens at Cross Key Road. Photo courtesy Athens-Limestone County Archives.

Other Limestone County African-American Schools

Trinity High School is the most recognizable African-American school in Limestone County. However, it was not alone in its efforts to offer educational opportunities for African-Americans following the Civil War. Alabama Forks School was founded in 1915 on land donated by Miss Maggie Barbee north of Athens. Other African-American schools included Belle Mina, Beulah circa 1910, Big Creek School on Buck Island Road circa 1904, Blue Ridge circa 1917, Cotton Hill, Dogwood Flat, Elkmont, Greenbriar, Green Hill, Payne and numerous others.

- **Polly Malone Cemetery** (N34.7832°, W -86.921°) The Polly Malone Cemetery lies north of Huntsville-Brownsferry on Polly Malone Cemetery Road. This historic cemetery inters several African-American Veterans.
- **Hine-Hobbs Cemetery** (N34.80457, W -86.98417) This historic African-American cemetery sits on the corner of West Hobbs and Hine Street. Interred within are Patti Malone, several veterans and community members.
- **Hatchett Cemetery** (N34.9192534, W -86.7997232) This cemetery located on Goode Road in southwestern Limestone County inters several local veterans.

Brownsferry Street (downtown Athens, area C of county map)



ATHENS-LIMESTONE COUNTY, AL

- Brownsferry Street -



Mason Funeral Home and the Bridgeforth Home are located on Brownsferry Street in Athens.

Brownsferry Street known to many as the Strivers Row of Limestone County, Brownsferry Street and its surrounding community resembled the famous Harlem, New York, community in its reflection of upward mobility of blacks. During the 1930's and continuing through the 1960's, several successful and prominent businesses were located along Brownsferry Street. These included: Dot's Cafe, Nelson's Barbershop, Mason's Funeral Home, Simmons Coal Company, Brown's Service Station, Mrs. Lottie's Cafe, Oak Funeral Home, Malone's Barbershop, Horton's Hair Salon, Kirby's Billiard Parlor and Kirby's Record Shop. Dr. C. Eric Lincoln, a native of Athens, based his award winning novel *The Avenue*, Clayton City upon Brownsferry Street and its denizens.

Mason Funeral Home was established in the early 1900's by John Mason and located at 718 Brownsferry Street. (N 34.79803, W -86.97821) Mason is the oldest African-American business in Limestone County. Mr. Mason established the business in order to ensure that colored people had decent and dignified burials. An outgrowth of this business was a radio show called "The Mason Funeral Home Program" on station WJMW during the 1950's and 1960's.

Bridgeforth Home is located next door to the Mason Funeral Home and was the residence of George Ruffin Bridgeforth, Trinity graduate. Bridgeforth served as the Director of Agriculture for Booker T. Washington at Tuskegee after attending Amherst College. Bridgeforth also served as President of Kansas Technical College. In 1935, he proposed to TVA a model community of school, church and housing in Beulahland. His wife, Datie Mae, taught at Trinity High School.

The Bridgeforth Home is also the ancestral home of Elna Bridgeforth, a Durham, North Carolina City Councilwoman.

Dr. B.F. Hill Home is located at 722 Brownsferry Street (N 34.798012, W -86.978243) and was the home of Athens only colored veterinarian and his educator wife, Beulah. Dr. Hill was a fixture in the community and taught Trinity's night school after returning from World War II.

Bob Caldwell Home is located on Brownsferry Street across from Trinity High School. The home was the dwelling of longtime Chemstrand chauffeur Bob Caldwell and his educator wife, Mary. They raised a son Robert, who became a pharmacist and daughter Ann who worked in the medical field.

Nelson's Barbershop was located on the corner of Brownsferry and Lucas Streets. (N 34.79699, W -86.97876) Nelson's was where denizens of the colored community gathered to discuss politics, race relations, civil rights and a gamut of other subjects. It was where men gathered to observe the comings and goings of the community. Owned by World War II veteran Nelson Howell, the shop was where young colored boys received their first haircut which was a rite of passage for both father and son. It was also where one could receive a lesson in life from local veterinarian Dr. B.F. Hill, Trinity teacher Thomas House, or any of the wise men who occupied the benches inside the shop. Nelson's closed in the 1980's but a barbershop is still located in the original building.

Mrs. Lottie's Cafe owned by Mrs. Lottie Robinson, had two separate locations on Brownsferry Street. Both were the focal point of black social life from the 1950's through 1970's. The cafe was a gathering place for Trinity High School students after football and basketball games. There a DJ spun records and the students danced to music from Sun Studio in Memphis and Motown in Detroit.



Trinity Congregational Church, located at 722 Brownsferry Street in Athens, is one of the Tennessee Valley's oldest African-American churches.

- Trinity-Brownsferry - COMMUNITY

Famed author and sociologist **C. Eric Lincoln** grew up on Westview Street. After graduating from Trinity High School, Lincoln served in the US Navy during World War II from 1943 to 1945. Lincoln, upon returning from the war, pursued a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology at LeMoyné-Owen College in Memphis, Tennessee, a Master of Arts from Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, a Bachelor of Divinity from the University of Chicago, a Master's in Education, and in 1960, a PhD in Social Ethics from Boston University.



C. Eric Lincoln, courtesy of Charlotte Fulton.

Lincoln authored, co-authored, and edited over 22 books including "Coming Through Fire: Surviving Race and Place in America", "The Black Muslims in America", "The Avenue, Clayton City" and "This Road Since Freedom: Collected Poems."



The home of world renowned ceramicists **James Watkins** sits at 819 Brownsferry Street. (N 34.79689, W -86.97976) Watkins attended Trinity High School. His art is among the items in the White House Collection and the Shigaraki Institute of Ceramic Studies in Shigaraki, Japan. Watkins went on to teach and received the Texas Tech University President's Excellence in Teaching. He was also a Fulbright Scholar.



Ceramic pot designed by James Watkins.



C. Eric Lincoln Monument (2004) is located at Lincoln Bridgeforth Park on Westview Street. The monument was dedicated to honor the prolific author and Athens native, Dr. C. Eric Lincoln, who was a Professor Emeritus at Duke University as well as winner of the Lillian Smith Award for Best Southern Fiction in 1988. (N 34.79881, W -86.98294)

Charles Tisdale, Trinity alumnus, lived at 1101 Brownsferry Street (N 34.79368, W -86.98532). He was born on November 7, 1926, one of a family of seventeen children. His father worked the land until the farm was lost in the Great Depression of the 1930s; thereafter he supported his family through day jobs and yard work. From the time he was 15, Tisdale worked the migrant circuit of tobacco farms, especially in Connecticut. However, at 18 he was able to enter college in Memphis, Tennessee, and began working at the Memphis World newspaper.



Charles Tisdale.

Tisdale later moved to Jackson, MS and on July 1, 1978 he became the owner and publisher of the largest black newspaper in Mississippi, *The Jackson Advocate*. The Jackson Advocate covered many national events including the death of Emmett Till and the integration of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas.

The home of **Justice R. Eugene Pincham**, Trinity graduate, sits at 903 Brownsferry Street. (N 34.79430, W -86.98560) He was a renowned Civil Rights lawyer, has served judgeships in the Circuit Court of Cook County, Illinois and Appellate Court of Illinois. He ran as a mayoral candidate in 1991 for Chicago, receiving 175,000 votes. Pincham enjoyed nearly iconic status within the African American community in Chicago as the embodiment of justice.



Honorable R. Eugene Pincham.

- Athens -

Easy Street

Easy Street was a Colored business section located in downtown Athens, Alabama. It ran along the Louisville Southern Railroad between Hobbs Street and Market Street. Businesses located on the street were Bell Cafe, Simmons and Grigsby Barbershop, Coble Barbershop, Higgins Cafe, and Dr. B.F. Hill's veterinary office.



Trinity High Cistern

Trinity High School Cistern Located in downtown Athens, Alabama, on the present day Courthouse Annex Property between Market and Washington Streets. (N 34.80312, W -86.96892) The school cistern was used to collect rainwater at Trinity High School after its relocation into newly built building, 1879-1880.



Free Canady

Free Canady (also known as Free Canada) An area north of Elm Street between Jefferson (Highway 127) and the railroad tracks in Athens was formerly known as Free Canady or Free Canada Community. It is thought the name came from the English declaration in 1772, known as The Somerset case, that any slave reaching Canadian soil was automatically free. The Somerset case helped launch the movements to abolish slavery in England and the United States, and became a significant part of the common law of slavery in the English-speaking world.

Thank You

Athens-Limestone County Tourism Association (ALCTA) wishes to thank Charlotte Fulton, Colonel James Walker, Richard Martin, Limestone County Archives, Limestone County Sports Hall of Fame, United States Air Force Archives, Limestone County Historical Society, Limestone County Commission, Athens Limestone Community Association (ALCA), City of Athens, our featured communities, Alabama Veterans Museum and Archives, Athens State University and our volunteers for their support, contribution of images and research, and allowing us to highlight this amazing history and culture.

James Somerset was born in Africa, sold into the slave trade, and then taken to Virginia where Charles Stewart purchased him. Stewart took Somerset to England in 1769. In October 1771, Somerset escaped, and when Stewart recaptured him, he immediately imprisoned Somerset on a boat headed to Jamaica where he planned to sell him. Three abolitionists, Thomas Watkins, Elizabeth Cade, and John Marlow, came to Somerset's aid and submitted affidavits to the court for a writ of habeas corpus. Mansfield agreed to hear the plea and summoned Thomas Knowles, the owner of the ship, to bring himself and Somerset to court on December 9, 1771.

St. Luke Missionary Baptist Church

St. Luke Missionary Baptist Church (N34.83391, W-86.97300) is located in the historic area of Free Canady. Saint Luke's is one of the oldest African-American churches in Limestone County. It was founded in 1872, just seven years after the end of the Civil War. The original church bell is located on a memorial pedestal in the front of the church.



Original bell memorial at St. Luke's MB Church.

ASU Sports Alumni & Museum

Athens State University (ASU) Sports Museum collection features items of Gary Redus of Tanner, AL who played for major league baseball for the Cincinnati Reds, Chicago White Sox, Philadelphia Phillies and Pittsburgh Pirates.

Also featured in the ASU Sports Museum is umpire Chuck Meriweather. He was the fifth African American umpire in major league history, and the first in the American League since Emmett Ashford retired in 1970. He umpired All-Star Games as well as several World Series.

The ASU Sports Museum is open Monday through Friday in the Carter Gymnasium on the grounds of Athens State University. Please contact the ASU Archives for more information or to tour. 256-216-6671.



ASU Sports Museum in the Carter Gymnasium on Pryor Street (Photo Courtesy of Athens State University Archives)