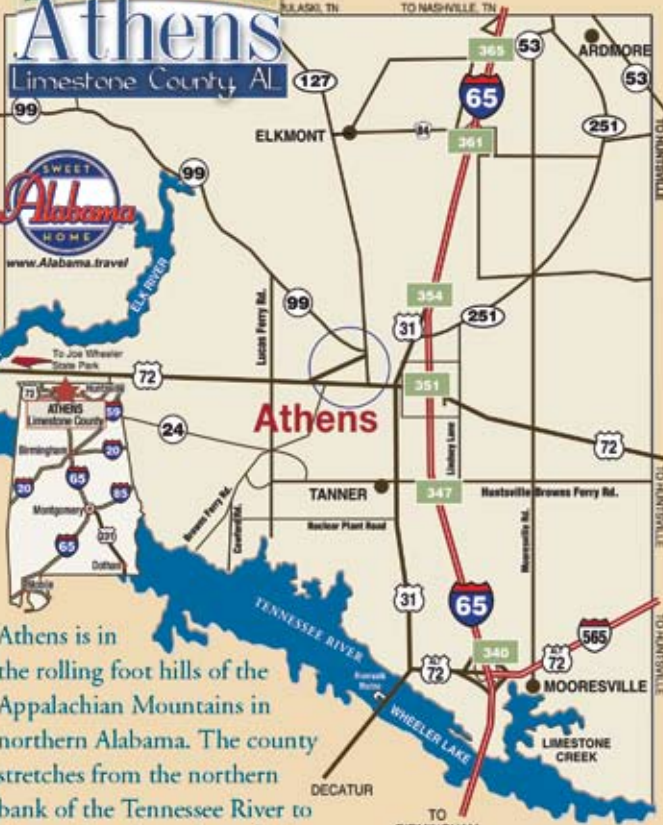


ATHENS-LIMESTONE COUNTY, AL CIVIL WAR TRAIL

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

A Great Place to Explore

Athens
Limestone County AL



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.



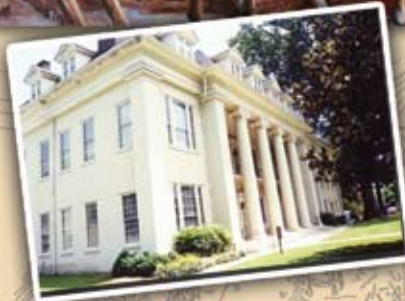
**GREATER LIMESTONE COUNTY
CHAMBER of COMMERCE**

Visitors Center
GPS: 34.803 -86.967

100 Beaty Street North, Athens, AL 35611
(866) 953-6565 / (256) 232-5411

www.TourAthens.com

ATHENS-LIMESTONE COUNTY, AL CIVIL WAR TRAIL



**Self Guided
Driving Tour
featuring the
Battles of Athens &
Sulphur Creek Trestle**



The Fort at Sulphur Creek Trestle (During Attack)

www.TourAthens.com

Numbered brass buttons indicate stops along the Trail.

The War for Southern Independence, commonly called the Civil War, was very real and devastating to Athens and Limestone County from 1861 to 1865. Limestone County had two railroads running through it and both would play a vital role in the war. The Decatur and Nashville Railroad ran North and South through the entire county. The Athens to Decatur portion is still operating today.

Located in the southern part of the county, the Memphis & Charleston was the longest line in the Confederacy and is also still operating today. This railroad linked the western Confederacy to the east and on its tracks moved supplies and soldiers. The strategic importance of these two railroads was the reason the war kept returning to Athens and Limestone County.

The Tennessee River forms a natural southern boundary of the county dividing Limestone from Morgan County. The river played an important role in the war. It was patrolled by Federal forces to keep the Confederate Army from crossing the river into Limestone County.

The War began on April 12, 1861 at Fort Sumter in the harbor of Charleston, South Carolina. One of the earliest Confederate groups to muster in Limestone County was the "Mollie Guards". They formed the 35th Alabama Infantry Regiment on the grounds of Cambridge Methodist Church in March 1861. The Church continues to have Sunday services at this site. In June 1861, Captain Thomas H. Hobbs formed the 9th Alabama Infantry and they left Athens for Virginia. More units would form and leave as the war progressed.

According to Athens Mayor William P. Tanner, he

thought Athens was a strong Union town. It is believed to be the last town in Alabama to take down the Stars and Stripes.

Things changed in North Alabama in April 1862 with the arrival of the Federal Army in Huntsville. By May they had invaded and captured all of Lauderdale, Limestone, Madison, Morgan and Jackson counties. All of these counties were north of the Tennessee River except Morgan, which had a very important railroad bridge crossing the river at Decatur and was a vital rail center. The 18th Ohio arrived in Athens on Saturday, April 26, 1862 and encamped in and around the town.

On May 1st, Confederate Cavalry made up of the 1st and 2nd Louisiana Cavalry led by Colonel J.S. Scott drove



Cambridge Methodist Church where the 35th Alabama Infantry Regiment was formed in 1861.



Parapet of Fort Sumter, Charleston, S. C., with stacks of ammunition.



Pvt. Edmund Ruffin, Confederate soldier who fired the first shot against Fort Sumter



1 *The Civil War Trail begins at the Athens Depot which now houses the Limestone County Archives. In this painting, we see Captain Thomas Hobbs and his men of Company F, 9th Alabama Infantry leaving Athens on June 6, 1861 to go fight with Joseph E. Johnston and the Army of the Shenandoah. One hundred and sixty three Limestone County men were leaving for war. More Limestone County men had already left and even more were to leave before the conflict was over. (Signed and numbered print available for purchase at the Athens Visitors Center.)*

the 18th Ohio from Athens. They were pushed within 6 miles of Huntsville. The next day Colonel John B. Turchin, a former Russian Cossack came from Huntsville with the 19th and 24th Illinois Infantry and the 37th Indiana Infantry. Turchin's men ransacked Athens causing extensive damage.

2 After the “sacking” of Athens, the strong Unionist feelings diminished drastically among the citizenry. This action by the Federals influenced more Limestone County men and boys to join the Confederate

Army. The “sacking” of Athens caused extensive damage financially and emotionally to the citizens of Athens. Union General James A. Garfield, future President of the United

States, was in Mooresville (*Point of Interest B*) and Athens during the war. General Garfield stayed in the home of Dr. Maclin, just north of the courthouse, for several weeks during the court-martial of Colonel Turchin for his part in the “sacking” of Athens. Colonel Turchin was found guilty and convicted of charges brought forward in his court-martial. General Garfield presided over the trial in Athens and also after it was moved to Huntsville. The Federal Army remained in Limestone County for the duration of the war and until the end of Reconstruction in 1874.

3 Founders Hall on the grounds of the Athens Female Institute was saved from the Federal Army during the ransacking. It is said that College President Jane Hamilton Childs had “written to President Lincoln” for protection for her school and her girls. President Lincoln sent Mrs. Childs a letter of protection. The girls sang “Dixie” all night from the balcony of Founders Hall as the Federal guards stood watch. Founders Hall

General Garfield preached at the Mooresville Christian Church (now Mooresville Church of Christ).



John Basil Turchin (1822-1901) was a Union officer during the Civil War. In May 1862, he authorized his men to sack the city of Athens.



Painting of Founders Hall on the campus of Athens State University as it appeared in 1844 and at the time of the War for Southern Independence. It was the main building on the campus of the Athens Female Institute at the time of the sacking of Athens.

still stands today as part of the oldest Institution of Higher Learning in the State of Alabama.

In 1863 a push was made by Federal forces to drive out any remaining Confederates in Limestone County. They were ordered to destroy the saltpeter works, gristmills and to take all horses and mules to prevent the farmers from raising crops.

After this big push, in the fall of 1863, the Federal Army started searching all over North Alabama and recruiting black males to serve in one of the first black regiments in the fall of 1863. These regiments were designated as the 106th, 110th and 111th United States Colored Troops Infantry Regiments. The majority were freed or runaway slaves from North Alabama and South Central Tennessee.

One of the major Federal Quartermaster supply depots in the western theater was in Nashville, TN. The railroad loop from Nashville to Athens, Decatur and Huntsville brought supplies to the Federal troops and the return trip through Chattanooga back to Nashville returned damaged ordnance and wounded soldiers.

4 To protect the railroad Fort Henderson was constructed in Athens on “Coleman Hill” (located on Browns Ferry Street) and was completed in early 1863. The fort was described as “An earthwork 180 by 450 feet, bounded by



Gen. William T. Sherman in Atlanta in late 1864.



Portrait of Brig. Gen. James A. Garfield, officer of the Federal Army (Maj. Gen. from Sept. 19, 1863.)



abatis and palisade 4 feet high and a ditch 12 feet wide 8 feet from the bottom of the ditch to the top of the parapets”. This facility was, in the words of a Federal inspector of such defenses, “One of the best works of the kind I ever saw”.

On March 23, 1864 General William T. Sherman passed through Athens by rail on an inspection tour of the defense of his supply lines. These lines were vital as he prepared for his infamous “March to the Sea”.

Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest had made several requests to disrupt supply lines in North Alabama and Middle Tennessee. In 1864 General Richard Taylor issued a directive to Forrest “to worry Sherman’s communications north of the Tennessee River”.

Forrest was to disrupt supply lines and the railroad as much as possible to weaken Sherman’s advance.

Forrest’s force grew to about 4,500 men as part of General Phillip D. Roddy’s cavalry joined him at Masonville (Killen, AL). Forrest detached the 20th and 14th Tennessee Cavalry and ordered them to strike the Federal forces at McDonalds Station, (Tanner, AL) south of Athens. At dawn Forrest moved the remainder of his men across the Elk River and into Athens after sunset on September 23, 1864. Forrest surveyed the town and Fort Henderson. Some 600 men under the command of Colonel Wallace Campbell defended the fort. The men were from the 106th, 110th and the 111th United States Colored Troops. Under the cover of darkness another 500 men of the 3rd Tennessee (U.S.) moved into the fort. Other Federal soldiers were in blockhouses up and down



Gen. Nathan
Bedford Forrest

the railroad guarding the trestles and bridges in and around Limestone County.

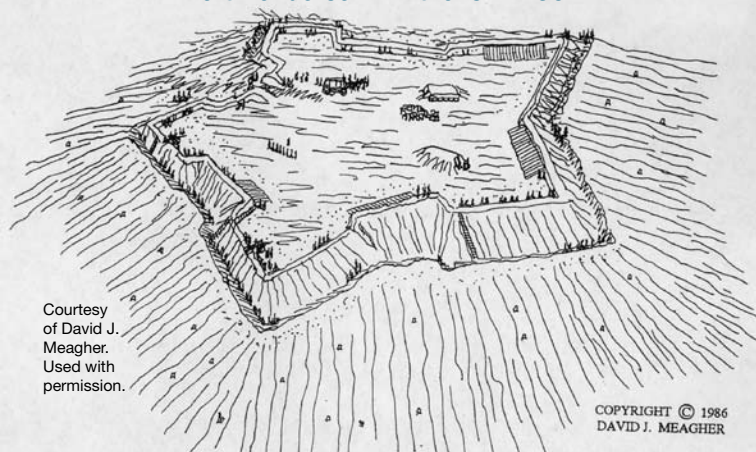
On the morning of September 24th, 1864 at daybreak, Captain John Morton, Forrest’s artillery officer, opened fire with his eight guns, casting almost every shell inside the works according to the garrison commander. Forrest halted the shelling to send a white flag and a note demanding the surrender of the fort. The Federals declined, so Forrest repeated a maneuver that had worked for him before. He displayed the same troops and artillery repeatedly as he moved them down the line, which convinced the Federals they were facing a much larger force than they actually were. Colonel Campbell convinced his officers they needed to surrender rather than face such a large force of men.

5 This surrender allowed the Confederates to give their undivided attention to the 18th Michigan and 102nd Ohio Infantry relief force sent from Decatur into Limestone County. (Corner of Hwy. 72 and Jefferson St.) A brief skirmish resulted in another victory for Forrest and his men.

6 As a result, Forrest’s men had captured 1,300 prisoners, 300 horses, 2 pieces of artillery and a large cache of supplies. Forrest turned his attention to the north and sent his men up the railroad, camping at Hays Mill,

The morning of Sept. 24, 1864, found the small North Alabama town of Athens completely surrounded by 4,500 Confederates under the command of Major General Nathan Bedford Forrest. Using his famous chicanery of troop movements, Forrest convinced the Union commander to surrender just before a relief force from Decatur arrived and attacked. (Signed and numbered print available for purchase at the Athens Visitors Center.)

Fort Henderson in Athens in 1864



Courtesy
of David J.
Meagher.
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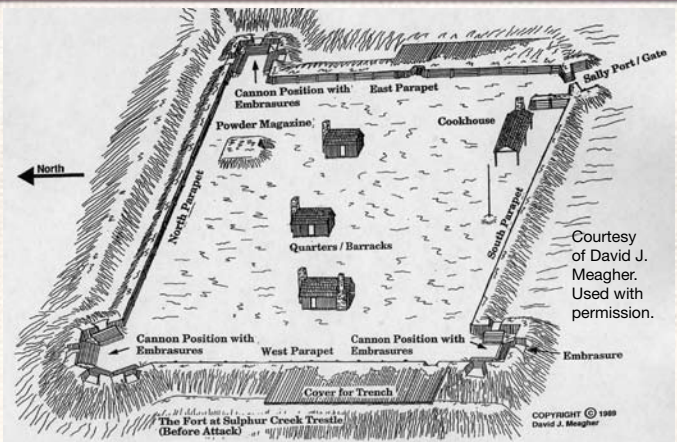


two miles south of Sulphur Creek railroad trestle and fort, which Forrest intended to capture the next day. That evening General Forrest stayed in Athens at the Maclin Home, the same home where General James A. Garfield stayed during the court-martial trial of Colonel John B. Turchin.

7 The next day, September 25th, Forrest fought, and won, the Battle of Sulphur Creek Trestle, the bloodiest land battle fought in a single day in Alabama during the War Between the States. Some 30 Confederate soldiers and at least 200 Federal officers and men were killed. The captured soldiers were from units of the 110th U.S. Colored Troops Infantry Regiment, the 9th and 10th Indiana Cavalry, the 3rd Tennessee (U.S.) Cavalry and the 12th Tennessee (U.S.) Cavalry.

8 After the surrender of the fort at Sulfur Creek Trestle, Forrest continued up the railroad to a small town called Elkmont. About a half-mile north of Elkmont, Forrest's men ran into a small group of Federal soldiers who fired some shots at the Confederates but quickly retreated back towards Pulaski, Tennessee.

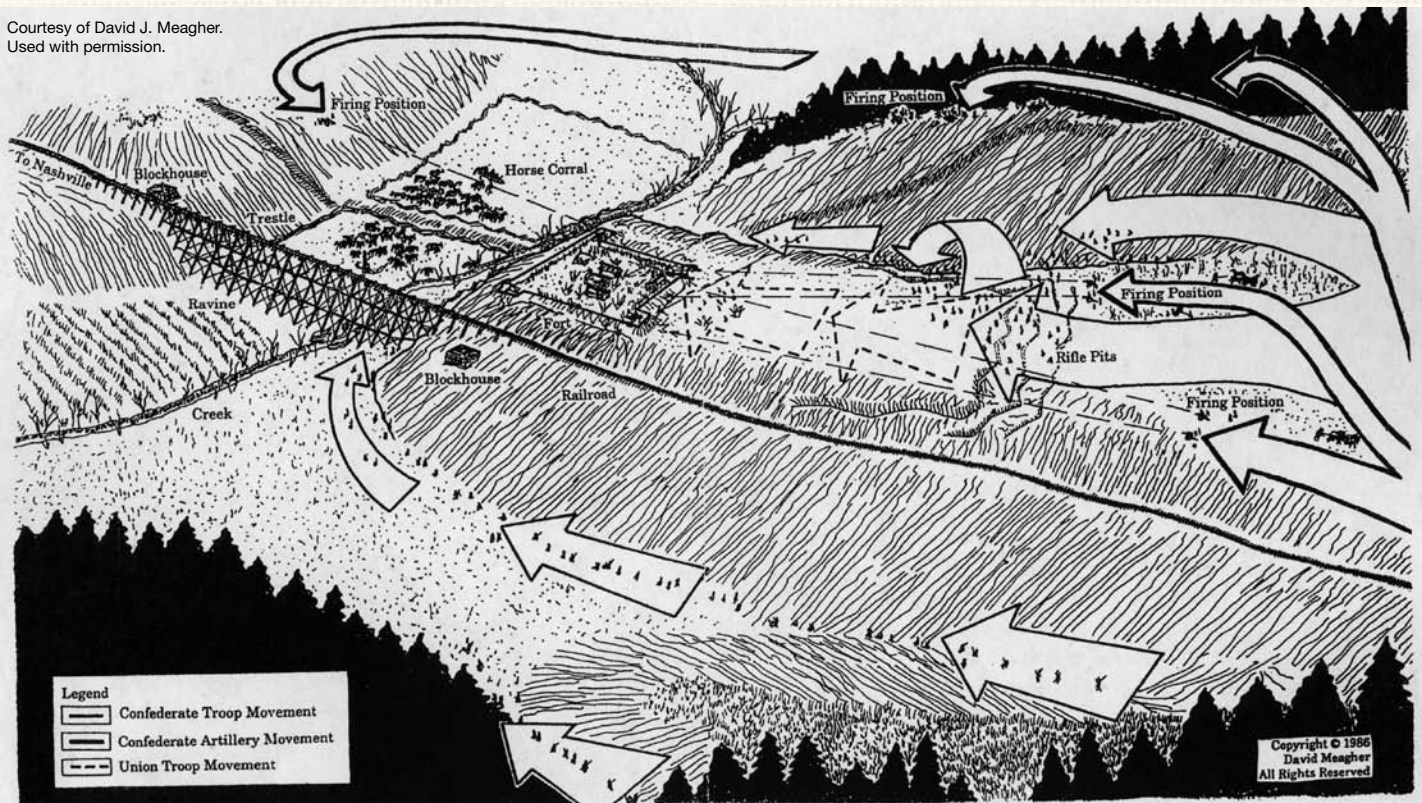
9 Forrest and his men next came to a blockhouse guarding Holt's trestle (Two and one-half miles south of the end



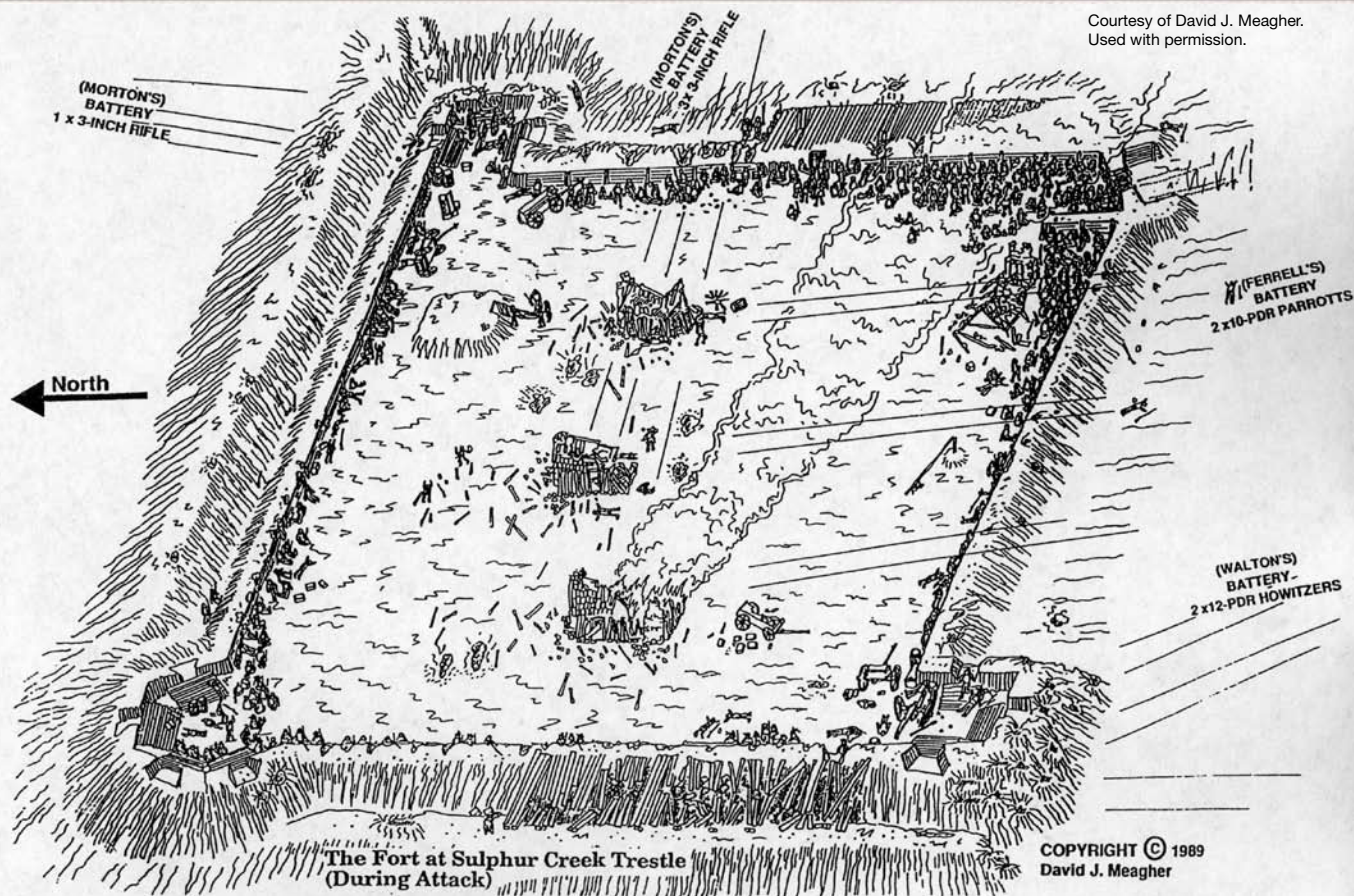
of the Rails to Trails path at the Veto Methodist Church); they captured the blockhouse and continued driving north. Arriving at the blockhouse guarding the Elk River Bridge they were able to capture it as well. At this point Forrest and his cavalry left Limestone County, Alabama and moved into Middle Tennessee where he continued with great success in disrupting the supply lines of Sherman's army.

During two days of battle, Forrest had captured almost

Courtesy of David J. Meagher. Used with permission.



Courtesy of David J. Meagher.
Used with permission.



2,300 Federal soldiers. Many of these soldiers would perish in the sinking of the U.S.S. Sultana after the war ended, the greatest maritime disaster in United States history. The news of Forrest's victories reached Confederate President Jefferson Davis and General Robert E. Lee and the news also received the attention of the entire U.S. Army command. General U.S. Grant telegraphed General William T. Sherman stating that driving General Forrest out of Middle Tennessee was to be the top priority before contemplating any other operations, including dealing with Hood's army.

The success of General Forrest's "Railroad War" was having the desired result- albeit too late to sway the

eventual outcome of the war. The surrender of General Lee at Appomattox in April 1865 effectively brought the war to an end. The surrender of the remaining Confederate forces

The "Battle of Sulphur Creek Trestle," by Lyn Stone, commemorates a major victory by Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest during his 1864 Tennessee Valley Campaign. It depicts the very moment when General Forrest, in consultation with his artillery commander Captain John Morton, decides to demand the surrender of the Federal garrison. (Signed and numbered print available for purchase at the Athens Visitors Center.)



Tragedy on the Mississippi

The U.S.S. Sultana was built in Cincinnati, Ohio in 1863. The steamer's run was from Saint Louis to New Orleans. In the year 1865 on April 27, the U.S.S. Sultana left Memphis on the Mississippi river headed for the United States' worse river disaster. Days earlier on April 23, Captain Mason had brought the Sultana into Vicksburg with a boiler leak for repairs. There, captured Union soldiers held at Georgia's Andersonville prison and Alabama's Cahaba (also known as Castle Morgan) prison, had been released to return home as the war ended. General Dana, the Union Commander for the Department of the Mississippi, had ordered that the soon-to-be paroled prisoners at Camp Fisk be sent

northward from Vicksburg on private steamers. The Captain, who was part owner of the Sultana, was paid \$5 a head for enlisted men and \$10 for Officers,

so he did not complain when the steamer was overloaded with passengers. On April 27th, the 260' sidewheel steamer sank near Memphis after a boiler exploded. It was certified to carry 376 passengers but was loaded with over 2000 sick, hungry, and war torn soldiers anxious to return home.

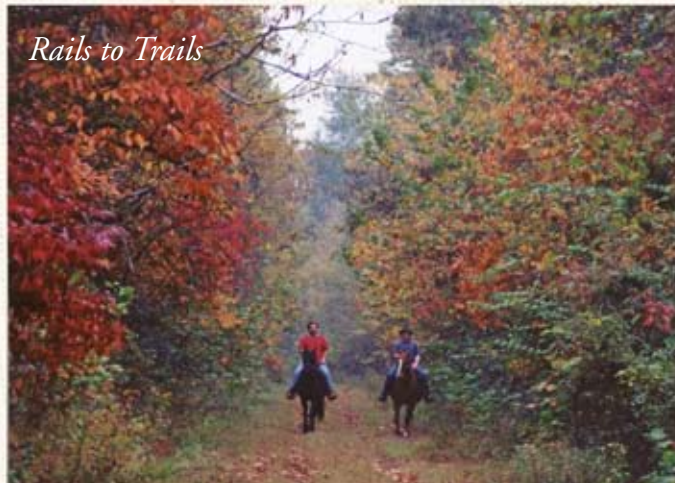


Congressional Library

would come over the next few months.

As the Confederate soldiers walked home from all parts of the country into the Tennessee Valley and Limestone County, all they saw was devastation – chimneys standing where homes once stood, as well as churches, courthouses, schools and mills burned to the ground. Entire towns had been destroyed. Livestock was scarce and there were no seeds for planting. It took many years for Athens / Limestone County and the rest of the South to recover from the war and “Reconstruction”.

10 Today, just north of Athens, a 10.5-mile stretch of the old railroad bed has been converted into a walking, biking and horse back riding trail. The Richard Martin Trail, a part of the Rails to Trails Program, is a beautiful area for outdoor users. As you stroll the trail, remember those on



Rails to Trails

both sides that gave the ultimate sacrifice when you see the historical marker for the Battle of Sulphur Creek Trestle.

11 As you arrive back in Athens you will drive to the Athens City Cemetery. Entering the cemetery parking area you will see a memorial marker to the Unknown Confederate Soldiers buried in Limestone County. Around it are the markers for eighteen Confederate soldiers who are buried in unmarked family plots in the cemetery. As you walk up the road into the cemetery you will come to the Confederate Circle. A monument to the Confederate soldiers buried in the circle stands in the middle. In Limestone County there are almost 500 known Confederate graves (*Point of Interest C.*) including 180 in the Athens City Cemetery. The Captain Thomas H. Hobbs Camp of the Sons of Confederate Veterans has placed a marker on every known Confederate grave in Limestone County.

Those that enjoyed the Athens/Limestone County Civil War Trail will also enjoy the self-guided Antebellum Trail. The driving trail will enhance your historical experience in Athens and Limestone County. A free brochure and a CD (\$5.00) are available at the Athens Visitors Center. The brochure provides site names, addresses and a map. The CD provides a history of each stop and driving directions.

Acknowledgements:

Athens-Limestone County Tourism Council

Limestone County Historical Society

Sons of Confederate Veterans, Hobbs Camp #768

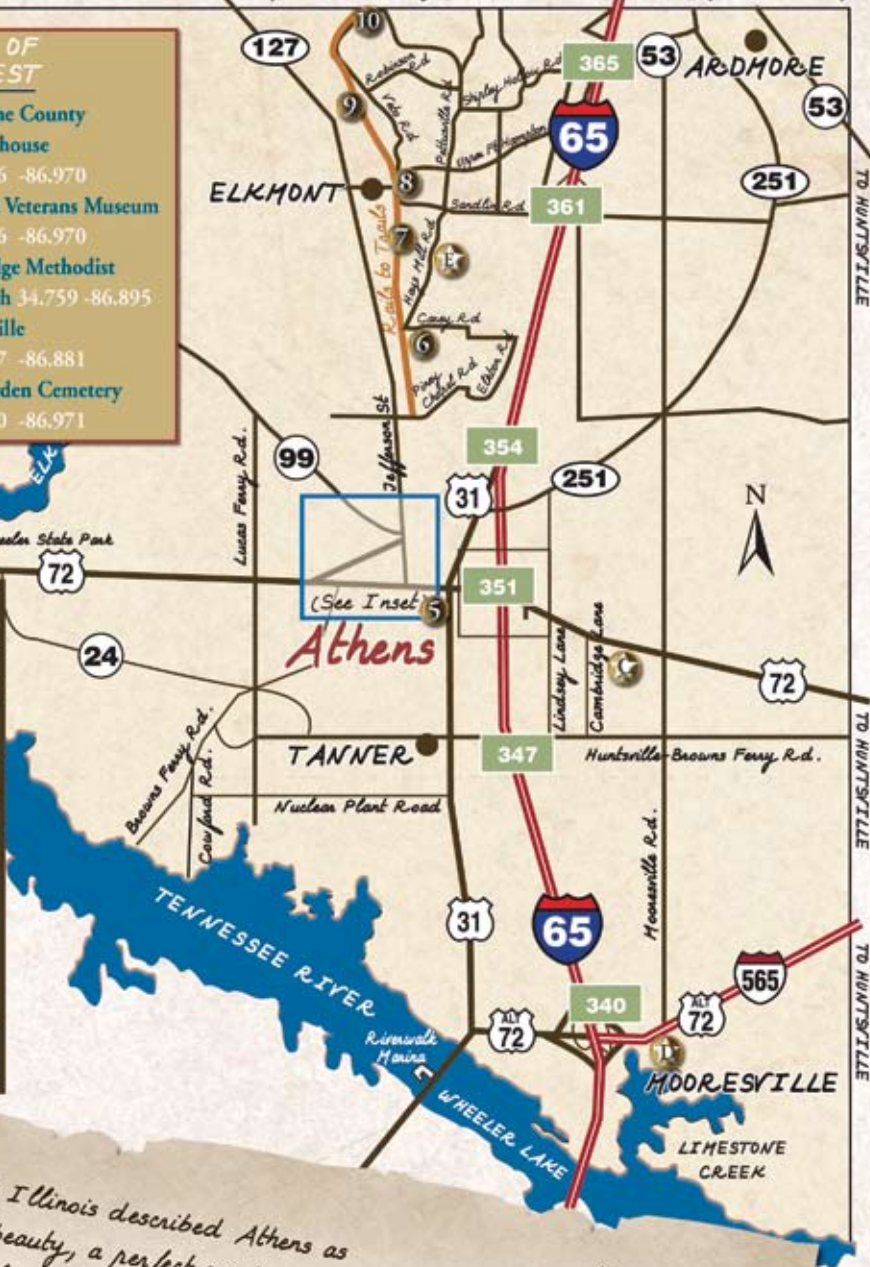
MAP LEGEND & GPS

The Athens-Limestone County Civil War Trail is a project of the Athens-Limestone County Historical Society.

- 1 Limestone County Archive
34.802 -86.970
- 2 Sacking of Athens Historic Marker
34.802 -86.971
- 3 Founders Hall 34.805 -86.966
- 4 Ft. Henderson 34.797 -86.979
- 5 Engagement with Decatur Relief Force 34.790 -86.971
- 6 Hays Mills 34.939 -86.991
- 7 Battle of Sulphur Creek Trestle
34.928 -86.973
- 8 Elkhmont Historic Marker
34.928 -86.973
- 9 Holt's Trestle/Mill Creek Block House 34.967 -86.992
- 10 Rails to Trails 34.994 -86.988
- 11 Athens City Cemetery
34.803 -86.963

POINTS OF INTEREST

- Limestone County Courthouse**
34.806 -86.970
- Alabama Veterans Museum**
34.806 -86.970
- Cambridge Methodist Church** 34.759 -86.895
- Mooreville**
34.627 -86.881
- New Garden Cemetery**
34.970 -86.971



May 1862

Joseph Johnston of the Nineteenth Illinois described Athens as
 "a place of home-like contented beauty, a perfect garden of roses and flowers whose delicate perfume fills every corner of the place. You walk the street and every garden sends out its peculiar scent according to the kind & quantity of flowers. Here are Planter's houses from all direction and the houses are large, roomy and comfortable, many of them elegant and all of them with garden and grass plots on every side. The houses are all surrounded with large trees for shade, which in many cases hide them almost entirely view."

"Athens is the prettiest and best looking town I have yet seen."