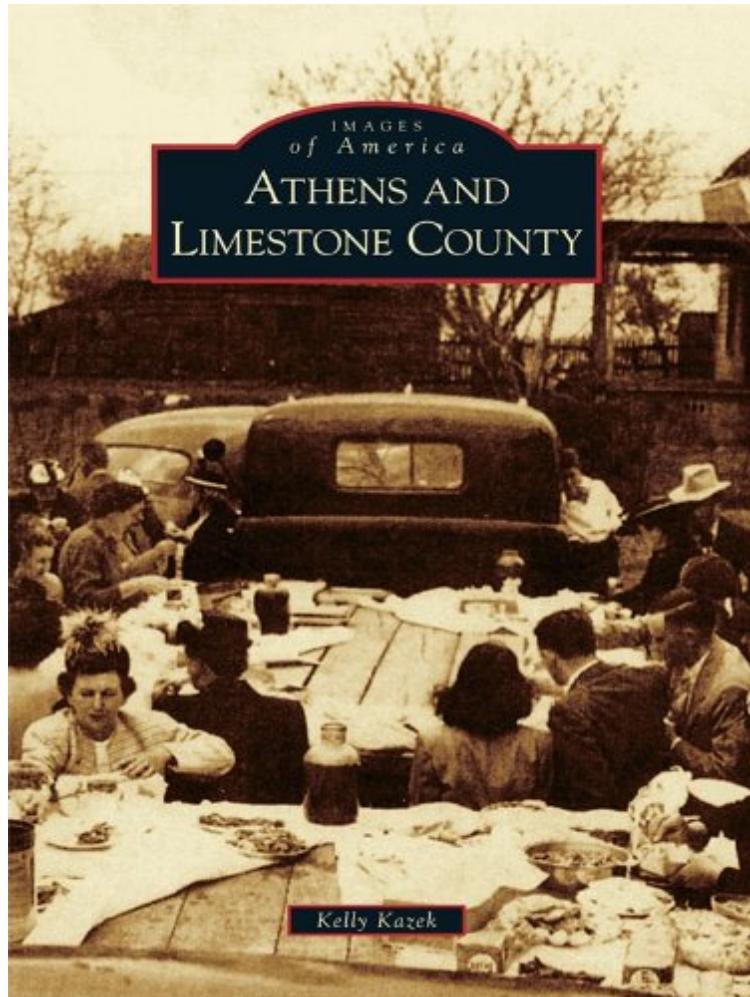


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Athens and Limestone County were founded in 1818, the year before Alabama became a state, making Athens one of its oldest cities. The quaint, picturesque downtown square in Athens, the county seat, is the heart of the community. Athens and Limestone County are studies in the ongoing tug-of-war between tradition and progress. Athens is traditionally a railroad and cotton town--once ranking among the state's largest cotton producers--but since the

aerospace boom of the 1960s, it has increasingly entered the orbit of the technology center of nearby Huntsville, home of the U.S. Space and Rocket Center and Redstone Arsenal. These days, Athens is home to many manufacturing firms, and local civic groups are focused on revitalizing downtown and bringing tourists to Limestone County.