

Mrs. George H. Hart, Jr., President

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VERAN O. BLACKBURN: "Photographs Are Forever"

by

Albert S. Pendleton

One of our greatest Open House parties was held at the Museum on Sunday, November 23, 1986. It was the Blackburn Display, pictures made by photographer Veran O. Blackburn, 1907-1945. The people of all Lowndes County brought their pictures, well over 200, and visited on Open House Sunday, enjoying refreshments and decorations provided by our Lowndes County 4-H Club.

Mrs. Blackburn, son Veran, architect, and his wife Joella and sons were in attendance. They brought an interesting array of Blackburn family photos and local Valdosta scenes. There were pictures of Annette, Veran, Eula Mae, Robert and Mrs. Blackburn, the former Lennie Strickland. Annette, who lives in Alabama, was unable to be with us. Robert and Eula Mae, were deceased this year. For that afternoon, Mrs. Blackburn's brother Dan Strickland came from Fitzgerald.

The idea for the Blackburn display came from a modest young man, Burt Tillman of Atlanta, formerly of Valdosta. He is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Burton Lamar Tillman, Sr. (Skeet and Sis (Stump) Tillman). In Atlanta, Burt is with the legal firm of Boris, Kyle and Burch. He was with us on Sunday and brought pictures.

Burt said he hoped people were not just looking at the pictures to see people or scenes, but to see and enjoy the artistry of Mr. Blackburn. The display was a catalogue of history, a display of the past, lovely photographs of Valdosta people captured forever in a moment, people we all knew and know. Before many visitors left the Museum that Open House Sunday, they knew more about Mr. Blackburn and appreciated anew his marvelous artistry which was his life's work.

That day was nearly a year in the planning for Lilla Kate Hart, president, and Susie Thomas, in charge of the Open House, and Natalie Williams, Museum Chairman. First a photograph arrived by mail. Mary Sue Wilson Southgate of Portland, Oregon sent a Blackburn photograph of two little girls, Mary Sue and her sister Vera Wilson Drynan, also of Portland. Another photograph, from Echols County, was possibly the oldest, taken in 1907 of Elizabeth Virginia Carter Fletcher.

The first morning of receiving photographs netted a total of ninety-seven. A second time, an afternoon full of rain and bad weather, brought the total to more than 200.

The late Mr. Veran O. Blackburn was a long-time Valdosta resident and award-winning photographer, as his work spanned 1907-1945 in Valdosta. Born in 1883 in Fayetteville, North Carolina, Mr. Blackburn moved to Valdosta in 1907, opened Blackburn Studios and began photographing just about everyone in Lowndes County until his death in 1945. An older sister, Eula, worked with Mr. Blackburn until her death. Another sister, Sannie Elizabeth Blackburn Turner also worked with him and was responsible for the tinting of the photographs. Mrs. Turner was the mother of Ann Turner (Mrs. John) Sineath. For the display Mary Young Oliver brought a picture of Mrs. W. M. Oliver, Maxwell's mother. It was not taken by Mr. Blackburn, but Miss Sannie reproduced it and tinted it on porcelain and is unusually pretty.

Previous to the display and receiving photographs, The Valdosta Daily Times printed an article and pictures about our Open House. Several pictures were published, Mrs. Edmund Pendleton, the former Stella Roberts, on her wedding day, Kitty Davis, holding her daughter Kitty Davis (Nolan), a picture of Tom Ashbury, one of Mr. Veran O. Blackburn, one of two children, Wibby McKey holding hands with his sister Susie McKey Thomas, and one of Earl McKey Jr., held by his nurse Bessie. The Times reported that Mr. Blackburn had been a very warm man, an attentive father. On Sundays at Lee Street Baptist Church, after Sunday School, he met his children on the steps of the church and gave each one a special hug and then attended the church service. Mr. Blackburn was official photographer for many school and college annuals. In a Pine Cone of G.S.M.C. of long ago, his ad slogan was

Photographs Are Forever." Among the Blackburn photographs was a scene of Emory Junior College main building (now North Campus of VSC) from the forest of trees that used to be in front of it (where now sits the hospital); the first school patrol including Veran Blackburn (the son), Bill Briggs, Billy Vallotton, James Oliver, with Rev. T. Baron Gibson, Dr. Mixson and motorcycle cop, Harry Garbut and others; an old scene of G.S.W.C. (now VSC); a Hi-Y Club group at VHS, probably 1944; and a photograph of the VHS Class of 1942.

The 4-H Club with Mrs. Love and Dr. Wayne Faircloth decorated the museum beautifully. All Sunday afternoon club members continued to serve punch and sweets, helping in many ways to make this a special day. Special thanks go to: Mrs. Amanda Love, Ms. Sally Black, County Extension Agent, Dr. and Mrs. Wayne Faircloth, Mrs. Margery Stephens, Mrs. Charlotte Wasson and club members: Kim Parr, David Blevins, Anna and Amy Faircloth, Leslie Wasson, Melanie Register, Laura Ledford, Leigh and Jill Sirmans and Christine Blanton.

Ann Turner Sineath brought several family pictures of Blackburns, Turners, and Sineaths. She also brought the well-known Henry Ford photograph made by Mr. Blackburn in the early 1930's (could be 1920's). Dan Strickland, Blackburn's brother-in-law told me that many years ago Henry Ford visited the Ford dealership here in Valdosta and Mr. Blackburn told him this story. Someone ran into Blackburn's studio and told him of the famous man's presence. "Hurry over," the man urged, "and take Henry Ford's picture." Mr. Blackburn replied: "If Mr. Ford wants his picture taken, he'll have to come to my studio." Ford did, and Blackburn snapped one of his best portraits.

Jewel Barnum told us she was at business school on the second floor above the Blackburn Studios. Word got to her and the other students and they looked out the window in time to see Ford leave the studio.

The photograph of Ford was used all over the United States and Ford is said to have been very pleased with it. The picture is handsome, stoic, thoughtful and perceptive, and quite memorable, a work of art.

More than 150 people visited the Open House. I met Randi Ashley formerly of Madison, Florida. She told Mary Young Oliver and me she was the step-daughter of Gordon Ashley, who was the son of Donnie and Sara Ashley and grandson of C. R. Ashley of Valdosta. Randi was with Dot Paine and lives with Betty Owens.

Here is a list of people who brought pictures: Mary Dasher, Margaret Dasher, Tillie Dasher Mathis, Emily McCall, Mary Frances Woodward, Frances Dekle, Margaret Langdale, Caroline Thomas, Leon Paine (Atlanta), Burt Tillman (Atlanta), Tilda Stubbs, Julia Bess Scott, Fainsey McClure, Jane McKey, Mary Ann Blanton, Ann Sineath, Nan Allen, Bill and Virginia Culpepper, Virginia Pendleton, Minnie Leigh Bolen, Lonie and Albert Pendleton, Walter Stembridge, Veran and Joella Blackburn and Mrs. Blackburn, Jane and Tom Shelton, Susie Thomas, Mary Young Oliver, Mr. and Mrs. Ernest McDonald, MetaColeman, Nancy Thornton, Pendleton Little, Mary Sue Wilson Southgate (Portland, Oregon), Marguerite Ford, Jewel Barnum, Lilla Kate Hart, Arlia Tomlinson, Audrey Peeples, Frances Fisher, the J. T. Roberts family and Dinah Parramore, and Genell Wilson of Echols County, who brought the 1907 photograph of her mother. Families represented, other than the names already mentioned, were: Moulton, MacKey, Wilson, Thompson, Williams, Branch, Jenkins, Bird, Woodward, Johnson, Converse, Jones, Shaw, Vinson, Wood, Strickland, Franklin, Hutchinson, Parramore, Redles, Knight, Graham, McCall, Conoly, Cranford, Winn, Davis, Stump, Giddens, Parrish, Twitty, Herrington, Allen, Sessions and others. Sorry I can't remember all to name.

Blackburn photographs were of babies, children, graduations, family gatherings, wedding, and local scenes. There was a very handsome picture of Ernest McDonald, Sr., in his U. S. Postman uniform of many years ago. Arlia Tomlinson told me the picture of her and brother Hoke was a VHS graduation photo of the 1930's. Previously, she and her family moved into Valdosta from Mayday. Her mother was a much sought after seamstress and they moved to Valdosta where her mother's business thrived. Arlia's graduation dress was white dotted swiss and had ruffles all the way down. Also, there was a picture of the four Tomlinson children, Arlia, Hoke, Burpitt and Wilma (Prewitte). A 1917 photograph was the wedding photo of Mrs. J. B. Johnson, a very beautiful picture. Mary Dasher's handsome wedding picture included Jerry McRee, Kathleen Winn (Knight), Howard and Mary, Gordon Converse, Mabel Smith and Herman Parramore. There were several poses of Mrs. Edmund Pendleton, the former Stella Roberts, on her wedding day, and one of her sister Maie Dell Roberts Covington on hers. So many interesting pictures in the Vinson photographs, a special one of Frances Vinson (Fisher), and John Sineath, when they were quite small.

On page one, top left photograph is Mrs. R. E. Dasher with Elizabeth (Mathis), and Tilly (Mathis). Top right is Mr. Veran O. Blackburn. Bottom left is Omer Franklin, with sisters Martha (Barham) and Betty (Mobley). Bottom right is Virginia "Sugie" Sineath and John.

Susie Thomas says a big thank-you to Mary Ann Blanton, Albert Pendleton and Lilla Kate Hart for assisting her and to the great response of all the people who brought photographs and who came to the display. Susie is most grateful to the 4-H Club who stayed with us on Sunday and served their own refreshments all afternoon. More than 150 persons visited the Museum, literally filled with photographs.

When Mrs. H. W. Peeples picked up her photographs she said that Mr. Blackburn used only the highest quality supplies in his studio. "And it shows -- nothing fades," she said to us, as she smiled at her photographs.

We all say thanks to everyone for a successful day, especially the people of Lowndes County -- Valdosta, Naylor, Hahira, Lake Park -- who came to their Museum. And they came from Tifton, Fitzgerald, Jacksonville and Atlanta.

Everyone is so grateful and pleased with the success of the Blackburn Display. It was a day to enjoy and remember, and a day of the photographic artistry of Veran O. Blackburn, photographs that will live forever.

MUSEUM NEWS

Thanks to Fred Deloach for a correction in the second football Newsletter, October 1986. I identified a football player (it was previously written across the picture) as "Edwards," when it is, infact, another good player, Dewitt Rogers.

A correction to the September 1985 Newsletter: In this story I stated there had been a kindergarten at South Georgia Normal College and have been informed that is not correct. School there began with the first grade and never had a kindergarten, said Elwyn Dasher. Also, I reported that the "training school" closed when the new high school was built on Williams Street in 1922. I'm sure many students changed, but the training school did not close at G.S.W.C. until 1933, leaving only the college years at Georgia State Womans College now Valdosta State College.

The Heritage 100 Dinner is not far off, February 26, 1987. Our program will be presented by Barry Phillips of Atlanta, formerly of Valdosta. Barry is an attorney with the firm of Kilpartick & Cody, the same firm as Gus Cleveland Jr. Barry, a graduate of the University of Georgia, is married to the former Gracie Greer of Lakeland, Georgia. Gracie is Governor's Executive Assistant for Appointments for Governor Joe Frank Harris. Barry and Gracie have a daughter and three sons. We look forward to the Heritage 100 Dinner and Barry as our program.

I had a very nice note from Gus Cleveland, Jr., who thanked me for the story of his father, Dr. A. G. Cleveland, in our November 1986 Newsletter.

Many thanks, again, to the Blackburns for being at the Open House, helping and bringing photographs and allowing us to have this display. Thanks to Mr. Dan Strickland for being there. When I saw Mrs. Blackburn it was the first time in many years. We used to be neighbors, they on College Street and we on Slater Street. She greeted me: "Years ago, I used to sit on my back steps with my children and you and Billy and peel sugar cane and feed it to you all. Do you remember?" Of course I do! Those were the days!

See you at the Museum,

Albert S. Pendleton, Editor