

Dr. Dale H. Peeples, President

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## MISS CARO LEWIS

by

Gloria Dalton Sorenson

Our mother, Emma Mae Ferrell Dalton, was the sweetest and most loving person I've ever known. Counseling us to count our blessings every day, she taught us to remember loved ones while they are with us. She practiced that in all ways.

I shall attempt to express the love and appreciation I have for a wonderful friend. She is a former Valdostan who recently celebrated her 101st birthday, Miss Caro Lewis.

Born on October 17, 1886, in Valdosta, Georgia, Caro is a refined, intelligent, personification of a Southern Lady who had a career. Mary Lee Lamar and John F. Lewis were the progenitors of five daughters and a son. They were: Pearl, Caro, Mary Frances (who died young), Helen (Mrs. Emmett MacKenzie of Macon, Georgia), Lamar (Mrs. Julian Gamon of Jacksonville, Florida) and John F. Lewis. Caro is the only living member of that lovely family.

In those days Valdosta was a progressive town, one of the smallest towns with a street car system. The population was 2,500 the year Caro was born. Later becoming the world's largest Sea Island cotton market, some reports stated there were more millionaires per capita than any other place.

Our families have been friends since we moved here in 1901. Caro and Pearl were bridesmaids in Mother's wedding in 1905, and Helen and Lamar were flower girls. Graduating from Lucy Cobb College, Athens, Georgia, Pearl was voted the prettiest girl in school and Caro majored in music. Caro and Edna Briggs (her family lived two doors away) enjoyed playing violin duets and were sought after to perform at weddings, church services, and other affairs.

In their beautiful Victorian home at 401 North Patterson Street (present site of the United States Post Office), the Lewises led an exciting life. Ten years after Caro's birth, telephones were installed. Their number was 65, and customers were instructed to answer, "Here, 65." The telephones were not to be used during lightning storms, were to be dusted often, and answered immediately. One more thing, non-subscribers were not allowed to use the instrument.

Caro has always loved children, and Miss Margaret Dasher said she recalled Caro's taking a group of young people on hikes to Barber's Pool. Vallie Dalton (Mrs. Clarence Staten) and Sarah Cranford (Mrs. R. E. Bradford) were in the group.

Uncle Ed Ferrell (Connie Ferrell's late father) told us some of the customs at the turn of the century. Sunday afternoons were reserved for calling on young ladies, nothing prearranged, for it was understood that someone might call, so the ladies were waiting. There were the Ashley girls, the Fenders, the Converse, the Lewises, and many more. The girls would be at home and hopeful they'd be called on. The four Lewis girls were very popular and loved to dance. Dances consisted of a group of five or six young men getting together and asking five or six young ladies to join them for the evening. Often this was at someone's home, the Converse's third story ballroom was used and the Valdes Hotel was a popular place. (The same Converse home has become the Converse-Ferrell-Dalton house, for that is where the Ferrells and Daltons lived. The Valdosta Hotel was managed by the Ferrells.)



Mr. John F. Lewis was a leading businessman; he owned a bank, an insurance company, extensive real estate, and the Lewis Outdoor Advertising Company. Caro had an aptitude for business. Mr. Lewis trained her, and she worked with him in the bank and later when their offices were located at 401 North Patterson Street. The bank (The Citizens Bank) was located next door to the present-day King's Grill.

The Lewis family went abroad in the thirties. The trip was delightful with side visits to points of interest. Finally, Mr. Lewis balked, "I am not going to view one more church, one more museum, or one more castle." And he didn't.

The Lewis girls dressed beautifully and wore darling hats becomingly. My older sisters would report they'd seen Caro and Pearl in new hats and conclude they'd been to Paris again. Caro always enjoyed a joke on herself and told this story. She was driving her car when an officer stopped her to warn her about driving in the middle of the road. It was hardly anytime until he pulled her over again, and she said, "Officer, I don't know why, but this car only drives down the middle." He was very understanding, but she got the ticket. In the early forties air travel was a novelty and scary, and Mrs. Lewis was concerned when Caro travelled by air. John F. spoke up, "Let her fly, let her do anything but drive a car. She will be safer." New there's a younger brother for you!

Caro and Pearl travelled extensively. There was a trip to Paris in the spring, and New York in the fall was almost traditional. They also went to Canada, Brazil, toured the United States, loved Mexico and many other places. Sometimes I was the recipient of an outfit from New York. They were thoughtful and generous to many people.

With her great interest in fine and different dishes, Pearl had a gourmand's dream come true. The dream (a reality) was her very own kitchen across the big back porch from the family kitchen. It was equipped with stove, mixers, utensils, and just every item or food stuff needed to prepare the exotic recipes she collected. Pearl was generous and often sent our family a tray with some elegant creation. You can imagine how well it was received by the ten Dalton children. (Only one boy in the group.) A family joke the Lewises enjoyed was Mr. Lewis' comment when Pearl served vichyssoise. "Daughter, that was fine, but next time, heat it a bit more."

My first memory of Caro was the delight of going to swim at Barber's Pool with Caro, Pearl, and my aunt Vallie Ferrell (Sister). Nothing was as refreshing on hot days as the cool, clear water at the pool. We would go late in the afternoon and almost have the pool to ourselves. One afternoon Mr. Barber called Caro aside to advise her that she could save money by buying season tickets. It seemed a good suggestion to me then and still does.

I recall so many incidences about Caro and her generosity and especially her love for children. Lamar's family spent many summers in Valdosta. Her Jeanne and Julian were beautiful and had charming ways. Caro planned picnics, trips to the movies, drives, but their favorite thing was the stories she read. Caro kept them interested and entertained.

During the height of the depression, I went with Caro on some errands. The first stop was to a modest house where she collected the rent. It was meager, but then, she presented the family with a large bag of groceries. Another time Caro asked me to shop for a black dress and veil. The husband of a poor family had died, and the wife was too emotionally overcome to cope. It was such a kind and thoughtful deed.

Caro has told me that she felt close to all the children in our family as she watched them grow up. When I came along, she thought she would not see much of me. I don't know how it happened, but we had a special bond ever since I was young. It is a blessing to have a fine person interested in what you do and to love you.

Eliza Peeples MacLemore and I were so mischievous and such tomboys. The night I wore my first long dress, Mother sent me to the Lewises so they could see the "sight." Later Mr. Lewis said, "That was a fine dress, but Gloria still walks like a boy." Caro paid Walter McDaniels to teach me to dance in their big upstairs hall. Walter would put a record on the phonograph, and we'd dance the hours away. She arranged for Dorothy Dixon to give me piano lessons on the piano in the First Christian Church (which was located on the corner of West Hill Avenue and Toombs Street at that time). When I went to Georgia State Woman's College, Caro ordered two pair of jodhpurs, riding boots and a riding coat from Best & Company in New York, then paid for me to take riding lessons



from Edith Lowery (Mrs. Johnny Oliver). It was a present I appreciate to this day.

When Mr. Lewis died in the late thirties, Caro was able to settle the estate. It was a monumental task, and I recall her working long into the night - month, after month, after month. It was a job few men could have done. The family was appreciative, but it almost broke her health.

Caro was in New York when John and I married; but on her return, she sent me to Mr. Blackburn to have pictures made in my wedding dress. It was the dearest and most thoughtful thing anyone could have done. Our children love the pictures, and I cherish Caro for her thoughtfulness.

When our first daughter was born, we named her Caro Lewis Sorenson. A few days later, three lovely ladies came to the hospital. They were Caro, Pearl, and Mrs. Lewis. Caro laughed and told about their visiting Mother when she returned from the hospital after I was born. Mrs. Lewis had knit a cap and sweater, so Mother called to Adelma to try it on me. Evidently Adelma was not too interested, and the Lewises were horrified to see an indifferent older sister let my head loll all around. Maybe it was at that point Caro felt that I needed a guiding hand.

When Mrs. Lewis' health failed, they moved to Miami Beach where the winters were less severe. It was sad, indeed, when she passed away. Mr. Frank Rose bought their home on Patterson Street, and then felt so sad that it had to be torn down for progress. He carefully saved the beautiful wainscoting, mantles, paneling, parquet floors -- anything that he could and used them in his home in the Cherry Creek Hills.

Over the years we have kept in touch through letters and visits. The most thrilling visit was to join Caro and Pearl in Paris in 1950. It was right after the Berlin Airlift, and John was Commander of a Weather Recon Outfit at Furstenfeld Air Force Base, Germany (near Munich). He put me on an Air France Airliner, and an hour later I was met in Paris by two of the most stylish ladies. We did the city! Our adjoining rooms at the famous George Fifth Hotel were stately. The days began with cafe' au lait in their room, and we lunched at the Ritz or some fine restaurant Pearl wanted to explore. We went to many grand restaurants and toured everywhere.

What an education they gave me! Madam Tussard's Wax Museum was even more interesting, for Caro's knowledge of history is amazing. She described the scenes we were viewing in detail. They had tickets to one of the big designer's salons, and we also went to the historic Opera House to see "Carmen."

One of the biggest events was dining at Tour de Argent; their pressed duck is world famous; and to this day, each order is numbered. This was 1950 and one of the first nights the lights in Paris had been turned on. It was spectacular! Every street corner seemed to have artists sketching and selling for very modest prices. I bought nice scenes of Notre Dame, Monmatre, and the city square filled with bright umbrellas.

The Lewis girls continued to travel and enjoy life for years afterwards. They travelled even into their eighties but did not recommend it. Once, when John was Captain of one of the first B-47 jet bombers, they were making record breaking flights across the seas. Caro and Pearl were discussing their trips to Europe and related how they would fly to New York, rest a day or so before the flight to Europe. John told them with the speed of the jets that it would not be long before they would be able to fly directly from Miami to London in the same length of time. Years and years later Pearl confided to me, "When John told us how air travel and times would change I was very polite, but I was thinking -- he's a nice young man but he does not have his facts straight." Don't you love that admission?

Caro, I've gone on and on but wanted to write this -- some memories of you. You've always made us so happy; and we, John, Your Caro, Bonnie, Sally Su, Johann and Gloria, love you dearly.

At 101 years of age Miss Caro Lewis is truly remarkable. Her health is good, she uses a cane but takes daily walks down the long corridor in her apartment building. Can you believe she does not have gray hair -- just like Ronald Reagan! The view from Caro's apartment is a wonder to behold. It overlooks the Atlantic Ocean, and there are no curtains or drapes to mar the view. Caro enjoys the Opera on Saturday afternoon, Wall Street Week, Washington Week in Review and still takes her Paris publication, "Match." I may be out of line but Caro confided that she does read the "National Enquirer." She



complained, "They've been sued so often they hardly tell anything anymore."

So that is a little background on a wonderful, thoughtful, generous, intelligent Southern Lady whom I love and admire. She can be so sassy about herself but never about anyone else. The worst thing I ever heard her say was that someone we knew was "very Yankee" -- I got the message.

It's a nice feeling to remember walking down to sit on the big "wrap-around" porch with Caro and the Lewis family. There was always an offer of delicious homemade custard ice cream (the secret is real vanilla beans and a churn). Their classical Southern home had the biggest dining rooms I've ever seen. The porch was so comfortable with the wicker rockers, big swing, and a welcome as big as all out-of-doors -- really gracious living.

Again (and again, and again, and again), we love you Caro, Gloria.

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#### CONGRATULATIONS TO FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH AND ITS MEMBERS

As of November 2, 1987, First Presbyterian Church has been placed on the National Register. One of the earliest churches founded in Lowndes County, it is outstanding for its history and architecture. It is also the first church here to be placed on the National Register. Much credit for all this goes to Dr. John Ricks, church member and professor of history at Valdosta State College. John and the church have provided the Society with the complete historical papers and photos of the church. (Much of their historical information came from LCHS files) The building of this church began in 1907, and was completed in 1909. (The Valdosta Daily Times recently reported the date as being 1920, which is quite wrong.) The church was dedicated in 1910.

Many years ago the original Vacation Bible School was started at First Presbyterian Church and was a city-wide event. The church was instrumental in helping black churches organize Vacation Bible Schools. More than that the Presbyterian Church has been instrumental in working towards racial harmony between the races in Valdosta and Lowndes County. We salute these grand members and their beautiful church on the corner of Magnolia and North Patterson streets.

#### MUSEUM NEWS

We have purchased three new books and added to the already existing county histories of Georgia in our library at the museum. These new ones are: A History of Burke County, Georgia 1777-1950, Montgomery County, Georgia, A Source Book of Genealogy and History, and Lincoln County Genealogy and History.

We regret to inform you of the death of Elizabeth Woodward Roberts, one of our oldest and most interested members. Her surviving children are Theron (Mrs. Tommy) Henderson and L. S. Roberts II.

Our thirteenth annual Heritage 100 Dinner was a huge success. Mr. and Mrs. Charles Prout of Skidaway Island, Georgia presented an excellent program, "Six Lives That Shook Georgia." These six are: James Oglethorpe, Nathaniel Greene, Eli Whitney, William Tecumseh Sherman, Margaret Mitchell, whose novel Gone With The Wind was published on June 30, 1936, and Martin Luther King, Jr., who was assassinated in 1968. The lives, writings, and beliefs of Mitchell and King are alive today.

For these thirteen years the Heritage 100 Dinner has been our only fund-raising event. We appreciate those who came and those who sent donations. During the evening Dr. William M. Gabard was presented a plaque for his work with LCHS as one of the founders and first president of the Society. Natalie Williams was recognized for many years of dedication to the Society and museum.

We are most appreciative to Jim Trantham of South Georgia Travel Bureau (new offices opening this month at 1300 Baytree Road) for three old city directories we did not have.

Many thanks to Gloria for her story about Miss Caro Lewis. It is such a wonderful story of someone I used to know long ago. Many happy returns to you, Miss Caro from,

Albert S. Pendleton, Editor