

Albert S. Pendleton, Jr., President

July 30, 1973

VALDOSTA, GEORGIA

VOL. II No. 9

Many thanks to Mrs. G. Robert Whitfield (Mary Avera) for a copy of "The Merry Worker," the school paper of Miss Annabelle Myddelton's private school on Troup Street. It is dated February 1901, with "Mary Avera, Editress." Mrs. Whitfield's mother was Miss Beulah Whittington, first cousin of our member, Frances K. Staten Carson who actually mailed us the little paper. The names of students mentioned are: Willie C. Harris, Allan Powell, Mary Clark, Marguerite Whittington, Louise Blackburn, Marion Whittington, Edna Booker, Luie Davis, Kempton Blackburn, Jim Shields, Jimmie O'Neal, Gena Barnwell.

The Ben Hill Roberts family have given us quite a number of things; Mr. Ben Hill's World War I Navy uniform, souvenir albums, old newspaper and many pictures. A post card album of places of note, including Valdosta, is most interesting. Thanks to Tommie Jean Blanton and Marion Anice Cross for these keepsakes.

We are deeply grateful to Tom McLeod for many interesting pictures; several stages of the building of the post office (present City Hall) on Lee Street between Valley and Central; a view of the old Opera House (Valdosta Theatre) on Lee Street, the present site of the Lee Street Baptist Church; and an airplane picture, first air mail flight to Valdosta, about 1940. These are valuable pictures and we appreciate them.

Many thanks to Dr. W. Lewis Holder, formerly of Valdosta, now of Baltimore, for a picture of the first Southern Airways passenger and air mail flight to Valdosta. Lewis states that the date is unknown but the plane is a Douglas DC-3. National's first passenger and air mail service to Valdosta was inaugurated September 1, 1946, using a Lockheed "Lodestar" twin engine propeller aircraft.

Valdosta's First Aeroplane Flight

by

E. D. Ferrell

Immediately after Wilbur Wright's flight of 200 yards at Kitty Hawk, N. C. in 1903, proving that man could fly, there was a frantic rush by inventors and scientists to be first in building and perfecting a plane that was practical and could fly long distances. By 1908, this had been accomplished to a remarkable extent, and while planes of that period would be laughed at today, they were the first in aviation as it is in our age of 1972. Man has achieved the unbelievable miracle of having flown to the moon and returned, with no end in sight of further advancements.

In 1908, just five years after Wright's flight, a few homemade planes had been built and successfully flown by a lone pilot, at a remarkable distance of two miles and over. Needless to say, this required dare-devils of reckless bravery and courage.

One of these brave pioneers was Jummy Ward, a lightweight jockey of Chicago, whose light weight made him suitable for such flights, as weight was considered a factor. Jimmy Ward had flown successfully at several State Fairs in 1908, and had achieved nationwide fame for his daring feats. He was indeed a hero in the eyes of the public.

At that time the Georgia State Fairs were being held in Valdosta, even though in the extreme Southern part of Georgia. South Georgia's agricultural varieties and its lumber and naval stores, made it desirable for the State Fairs to be held there.

The State Fair grounds were several blocks facing North Patterson Street and extending back to Ashley Street (at Alden Avenue). The entrance to the Fair Frounds was where the present First Christian Church now stands. An electric car line ran from Hill Avenue on Patterson Street to the Fair, and a spur car line from the Fair grounds to the Cotton mill at Remerton.

One of the main attractions of entertainment in 1908 was highly advertised as the Dare Devil Jimmy Ward was to fly a plane entirely around the mile race track inside the Fair grounds. Most likely there was not a soul in Valdosta who had ever seen a flight. Two flights a day were made all week and the large grandstand for the race track was filled to capacity, when Jimmy Ward thrilled the crowd. It turned out that at the end of the week, the wear and tear on the plane had made it unsafe for further flights, and much to his regrets he had to cancel further engagements.

Jimmy Ward and his wife had stopped with us at the Valdes Hotel for a week, and when he decided his plane was unsafe, he dismantled it, and the engine was packed in a large wooden box. His hotel bill for the week was unpaid and he was not in position to pay it, so insisted on my Father holding the plane engine as security until he was able to mail the money to him in a week or two. Father didn't have too much use for the engine, so preferred Jimmy taking it on home with him, but that cost money too, so he insisted Father hold it. Many of Father's friends had a lot of fun kidding Father and asking him when he was going on tour to make flights in his newly acquired airplane. He really had acquired a hot potato. The engine sat on the back porch of the Valdes for about three weeks when Ward sent for it to be sent by Freight (not expensive express). I can't recall seeing another flight myself for several years. My first time to fly myself was at Daytona Beach in 1917 by a flyer charging \$5.00 for a flight of a few minutes. Even then anyone crazy enough to go up in an aeroplane was considered a nut. Mine was a dare, and I lost my cap on the flight as the cockpit was wide open.

As I have often told my friends, my own personal experience and observations in my life as an Octogenarian during this 20th Century, leave me in awe of the full realization of God's power, and seeing for myself how "The Heavens declare the Glory of God and the Firmament showeth his handiwork" proves that the "Fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom". Only a fool will say there is no God.

E. D. Ferrell Nov. 30, 1972.

Fred Pindar, our member, remembers the planes at Pine Park. They were "crates", he said, which landed in the middle of the race track. (They really had horse races there at the fair grounds as part of the entertainment.) There was no fuselage on the plane at all, the pilot sat in the hole in the breezy open.

When the site of the landing place was changed, it was moved to Howard Dasher's farm on Clay road, southeast of Valdosta (off East Hill Avenue). At this location, Fred remembers that once an automobile tire was dropped from an airplane high above a small crowd. The advertisement worked for the tire really bounced and did not tear up.

Airplanes would come to Valdosta for shows, tricks & stunts, or just plain gassing up. Regardless, many of the town people would turn out to see it. When a pilot gassed up his plane, he'd filter the gas through chamois cloth so there would be no settlement in it. He probably lost about ten percent of the gas during this lengthy method. Trick flights were "wing walking" and probably "diving". There was a charge to go up in the "barn storming" airplane at \$5.00 a ride.

Fred also remembers dirigibles that would come over, and the Goodyear Blimps. The pilot had a "cat-walk", and if he walked to one end, the blimp would fly around, but walking to the other end, it would come down.

Fred, nor I, remember when airplanes moved to our present site, but it was only a field when I remember it and that was the middle of the 1930's. Fred remembers that a Mr. Faircloth, a pilot, crashed into the trees trying to take off. He was killed. I remember some passenger type planes which charged for flights, and it was on Sunday afternoons that I'd go there with Mack Greer.

Of course, the August Newsletter is due now and I will do my best to get right on it. But I wanted to say that I have a special letter planned for September. Look for it! Dues will be due then.

Albert S. Pendleton, Jr.