

AUGUST 29, 1972

VALDOSTA, GEORGIA

VOL. 1 NO. 10

Helen Hightower has loaned us for a short time the scrapbooks of Miss Annabelle Myddelton. Susie Thomas and I have read them and copied the articles of local papers as well as state papers. They are quite interesting. We found two articles about Blind Jim, two of a Georgia girl who meets the Mikado of Japan in 1931, Catherine Pendleton Cranford of Valdosta, many weddings are announced and described, 1890-1899. In these wedding articles the bride and groom are always described. One said of the bride: "...is a young woman of many excellent traits of character--a womanly woman". And the groom was "...industrious, of good habits and has a bright future before him". A wedding was described as this, "The Church was darkened, and the artificial lights pictured a beautiful scene. The altar-piece was handsomely decorated with floral festoons and bouquets". Besides lillies, ivy vines, potted plants and various flowers, palmettoes seemed to be a favorite decoration. Many of the wedding couples went to New York for their honeymoons, while others went to New Orleans, and some toured Florida. Here is a portion of another wedding, "The occasion had been anticipated as the leading social event of this season, for the bride-elect was conceded one of the most popular and most attractive of Valdosta's young ladies, and the groom is widely and favorably known for his work in educational lines.. The church at the hour of marriage was a scene of great loveliness, the chancel and the alcove a mass of pot plants and trailing vines, while the air was laden with the delicate perfume of many blooms, the loving testimonials of appreciative friends". It seems that friends sent flowers also. In some announcements a list of wedding presents was recorded. "The Times" always congratulated them and wished them "a long life of unalloyed happiness". Miss Myddelton's scrapbooks are full of pictures, poems, stories and articles from around the world. Thank you, Helen, for loaning them to us.

"The Times", through Virginia Culpepper, has given us some pictures of old Valdosta. These were some they had left over from the Heritage issue, and Virginia promised the Society some copies. Thank you, Times. I was in the museum the other day and Clyde White was one of my visitors. We stood and looked and talked at length at one particular picture, the one of the McKey building with two handsome drays parked outside it and nearby was the old street car. It is a very nice picture and tells and shows a lot about our old town. Now here is the article about Mrs. St. John in its entirety.

A VISIT WITH MRS. ST. JOHN

by

Albert S. Pendleton Jr.

Ever hear of Sun Shine, Georgia? Guayaba jelly? Tompy Roberds?

Susie Thomas and I heard about these and many more from Mrs. Hattie St. John, and left with armloads of priceless artifacts, gifts from Mrs. St. John to the Lowndes County Historical Society.

Susie had called to ask if we could come by and talk about Mrs. Eloise Wilcox, Mrs. St. John's sister, an expression teacher here for many years. Miss Hattie said she was descended from Reuben Thomson Roberds, Valdosta's first mayor, would like to tell us about her relatives and give us some important memorabilia. This included correspondence, invitations to balls, and other parties (1870's-80's), pictures, newspaper clippings, autograph books, the original deed to the Roberds property and Roberd's Confederate sword. The smaller things were neatly in boxes, according to relative, with information already written down. But we talked at length.

R. T. Roberds, born 1834, was descended from William George Roberds who lived near Allendale, S. C., a planter who went to the House and Senate of South Carolina. The

erds were French Huguenots, having anglicized their name from the original, La Robelle. While attending the Citadel in Charleston, R. T. Roberds (Tomp or Tom) heard of Valdosta being built on a new railroad line and decided this locality offered promise of success. He moved in 1859 and set up a mercantile business (we have a list of accounts, "R. T. Roberds, Esq. Valdosta") and courted and married Harriet Eliza Zeigler, daughter of William and Elizabeth (Howell) Zeigler, in October 1860. A copy of a letter he wrote her is in the Museum now. He writes of their courtship and has sent her "a bottle of guayaba jelly made from the fruit that grows in Cuba". The letter was addressed to "Sun Shine, Georgia", her father's plantation at the Georgia-Florida line near Belleville, Fla. That same year, 1860, R. T. bought the lot on Valley street and built his home.

There is a letter written to "Major" Roberds. Since he was a Lt. Adj. in the Confederate Army and still in Valdosta at the time, it is easy to assume that the word was Mayor and not major. This and the mere fact that Mrs. St. John's mother told her that R. T. was mayor, and her mother before her said it. He was Valdosta's first mayor.

Roberds had written Confederate Headquarters for supplies and was turned down. He joined Co. D 50th Regiment Ga. Volunteers Infantry. He fought in many battles, Gettysburg included, but was transferred to Tennessee. There are letters of his bravery and letters of his death. There are descriptions of how Mr. Roberds was wounded and the amputation of a leg above the knee from which he didn't survive. All this happened at Knoxville where he is buried in a public cemetery, though his family was never able to find his grave.

The Roberds only daughter was Eliza E. and she married Mr. L. M. Collins. Their children were Hattie, Eloise and Tompy.

Tomp became associated with Rhodes-Collins here. He and his wife (Harriett Sherman) had one daughter, Mary Elizabeth, who now lives in Orlando with husband, Charlie Morris, and their son.

Hattie graduated from Bessie Tift and went to Draketown to teach at Draketown Baptist Institute west of Atlanta. She later taught in Griffin, Ga., and here she met Mr. St. John. After marriage, they lived in Jefferson and Winder, then moved to Valdosta in 1926. They had one daughter and three sons. Miss Hattie worked with the Famous Store for 26 years.

She remembers that Roberds owned two store buildings downtown. One was the old Postal Telegraph building, where Massingales is. The other was the Mathis & Youmans Music store or where Pearle Optical is now. She remembers her mother, who died in 1938, as a person who loved people, talking to people.

"She was always doing something for people, cakes, cookies," she says. "My mother and father were good dancers. And they attended all the balls given here and in Quitman as well. Mother loved balls and Father played the violin."

The talk of balls and parties is evidenced by copies of many invitations we were given. Samples are: Miss Mamie Roberds, Volunteers' Hop, at the Court House, Valdosta, Ga. Friday evening, December 26, 1879, Invitations by, Lieut. J. T. Roberts, Lieut. C. R. Pendleton, Sergeant C. B. Peeples, Private J. M. Wilkinson and Private J. B. Martin; Miss Mamie Roberds, Valdosta, Ga., Fireman's Ball, Stonewall Fire Co., Quitman, Ga., Court-House Hall Nov. 20, 1877; Mr. & Mrs. L. M. Collins, Valdosta, Cleveland & Hendricks Hop, Stuart's Opera Hall, Valdosta, Ga. November 21, 1884, On Committee: A. Converse Jr., W. T. Love, W. P. Roberts, M. B. Lane, D. C. Ashley & J. R. Slater.

There was an invitation to the funeral service of Mrs. H. E. Roberds (hand written), "...will be at the Methodist Church 3 o'clock, this Pm. Friends and acquaintances invited." She was born June 30, 1818 and died May 29, 1885.

"Mother's best friend was Zella Pendleton", said Mrs. St. John as she presented me with a picture and calling card of my great aunt. "They were always together and Mother spoke of her many times."

Mrs. St. John recalled: "Mama, Eloise and I went out to the old Converse place (off East Hill Ave. on Forrest Street) to a party. I remember this because it was wintertime and we had ice cream."

And then another recollection: "I remember we used to visit Miss Eugenia Ihly (Mrs. Jennie Darnell) whose family home was near the Valdes Hotel, some more of your relatives, Susie." And: "When we were children our doctor was Dr. Talley (he had a lot of children) and would always come to the house when someone was sick. He had a daughter my age, Essie Talley." She continued: "I was in the same grade with Tom Converse; Jamie Ashley also. We graduated in 1903 from the Valdosta Institute."

They lived close to the school and she could run over when the bell rang, get in line

and never be late. Students were jealous of that, and that she could run home during recess. The school was old Junior High, the playground in front of the downtown Library.

Not too long ago Mrs. St. John attended a fiftieth reunion at Bessie Tift College in Forsyth and met again some old friends. That was 19 57. And now she seems a mighty 85 years young. She and her mother and sister Eloise, shared the same home for many years years on Valley street at Oak, the original Roberds home.

Eloise Collins married Mr. Wilcox, but when she became a widow, came home to stay in 1924. She taught expression in the home for 30 years. People say "Miss" Eloise Wilcox, and each remembers something about her, her pupils and recitals, sometimes held with music pupils of Miss Chloe Ivey, and other teachers of artistic ability.

There were musicals and plays and revues. In 1925 in an Operatta, "Yanki San", Anna Frances Ham was San Fan, John Robert Dasher was Prince Toto, John Winn the High Chancellor and N. E. Fry the Ambassador. Also in it were: Thelma Spivey, Caroline Parrish and Virginia Sineath. One of the six roses was none other than Virginia Jones. Others were Beverly Daugharty, Louise Stump, Barbara Harris, Charles Barnes, Johnny Roberts and Wibby McKey, Marion Converse, Hazel Gordy and Billy Ham. I would certainly like to have witnessed the Feather Dance by Robert Stump Jr., and Roscoe Mullis!

Space won't permit mentioning all the many names in programs and clippings, but a few more are: Nell Corn, Henrietta Denmark and Dorothy Jones.

Some mentioned most often were: Louise Blanks, Wibby McKey and Sarah Booth. There were several clippings of Sarah Booth's activities and Wibby McKey recited his famous rendition of "Casey At the Bat" at many occasions. Miss Hattie said she could hear Wibby now, his voice cracking at a certain point in his story.

Mrs. St. John spoke once more, bringing us back to the moment. "I have a big white platter that I'm going to give the Museum. It was William Zeigler's and he used it to serve large roast beef. It's too big for anyone nowadays to use."

Handed down to Mrs. Collins by an aunt in South Carolina were a broach cameo and silverware said to have been brought over with the Huguenots when they came to America. We were shown the silverware with a Fiddlehead pattern on the forks and a silver engraved pocket penknife.

"My grandfather's family wrote to him after he moved here to Valdosta in 1859 and asked, "How are you going to get along down there with all those cannibals?"

We all laughed at this. I guess we have our wild and wooly moments sometimes, but if you want to see a calm, easy-going stalwart lady, who likes to laugh, then make a visit to Mrs. St. John on Melrose Drive.

(May 1972)

It was indeed a nice visit. And I don't know about Susie, but I plan to go back, and very soon. Be sure to see these letters and articles and programs we've mentioned in other Newsletters. They are really genuine and rare.

I'd like to write about some of "Miss" Eloise's programs, the actual performances...what happened? The problems? The rewards? Some of you "roses" and "sunflowers" step forward!

From The Valdosta Times, June 3, 1899. At a House Party. Several young ladies of the younger set went over to Brooks County last week to spend a few days at a house party given by Miss Lota Wilson, seven miles above Quitman. The party consisted of Miss Camilla Stevens, Pearl Lewis, Kathlene Roberts, Kate Fielding, Ethel Briggs, Mamie and Lizzie Coffee and Ida Mae Fender. The young ladies returned home last night and report a very nice time, indeed.

An ad, Mar. 11, 1893, Tenney's Candies at Tillman and McRae's.

In Mar. 11, 1899, "That milk, cream and butter from the Valdosta Dairy is out of sight. Phone 135."

And Oct. 6, 1883, "Valdosta is the biggest town in America - to its size."

Jan. 26, 1884. "Mr. W. S. West, a young attorney from Florida, has located in Valdosta. We hope the move will prove pleasant and remunerative."

June 11, 1881, "Mr. R. T. Myddleton had some very fine peaches in town Thursday which he had plucked from his trees."

Don't forget our first meeting is last Thursday in September and we will elect officers. Clyde McKey White is featured speaker and will give the McKey-Holliday Family History.

Albert Pendleton