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VALDOSTA, GEORGIA

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Information about the following families is still urgently needed: Belote, Vickers, Roundtree and Folsom. These are our county's earliest settlers and we want them to be represented in a big way in our history book. We are beginning to collect interesting stories; to date, we are working hard on the Converses and others.

Come by our Museum and see our newest collection. Our president, Mrs. Hagen, and others have displayed a collection loaned us by Clark Quarterman, Confederate (and Union too) memorabilia of Colonel T. A. Farries, Assistant Adjutant General of Louisiana. There are many interesting items, letters and uniforms, many signatures of famous people, a letter from G. T. Beauregard and a portrait of Lee.

More maps have come from Mr. Ferrell, pictures and lots of information.

Rachael Parrish called the other day to tell us that Auburn, her late husband, ran the street car and worked for ten cents an hour, and that Meta Coleman's father, Mr. Shaw, owned the street car line.

At our last meeting, Dinah Parramore announced that Clyde White and the members of the Child Welfare Clinic were giving us a filing cabinet and history and memorabilia of the Clinic's forty years of existence. Clyde told Lonie and me she was about through collecting and finishing the scrapbook. And now that the Clinic has closed, we will display this important collection that made history and life a little more livable in Lowndes County for many people.

For the March Newsletter I want to use an article that Akie Joyner and I are writing, concerning a "first" for Valdosta. It doesn't go back as far as most of the things we talk about, but it was a "first" and we think the story is funny. This brings up something Max Oliver spoke of one day, and that was the "firsts", that have happened here, or important, nationally recognized things such as: Boy of the Year (we had one once--who was he and where is he now?) Just recently Joy Moon was named Woman of the Year for Georgia. Two of our local ladies married governors. Whole articles could be written about some of these stories. Remember when Susie Mackey Thomas won a national contest? We were all listening to the radio then. I hope Susie will allow us to use that story.

Open Sunday continues from 2:00 to 5:00. Mrs. Hagen and the rest of us urge you to visit with us. So many people express the desire to come and to join. You are urged to join. And, by the way, those of you who haven't paid your dues are urged to do so now.

People who no longer live in Valdosta, but were born and raised here, continue to be interested in our history and doings of local citizens. I had a letter from Mrs. George Carson, the former Frances Klein Staten, who wrote from Atlanta. Her mother, now 87, was a Whittington, and her father was B. F. Whittington, our 1885 mayor. Mrs. Carson, being interested in our collections and stories and activities, has offered a picture of Mr. Whittington and one of her Great Grandfather, James Watson Staten, who died in Valdosta in 1892, along with historical information involving both families. Sounds like a chapter in our book. I'll be writing Mrs. Carson soon. This is the kind of interest we need.

Mr. Ferrell's article, following now, is about his brother, Claude, a couple of years older than himself. There are several articles about Claude, who, as Mr. Ed says, was not a bad boy, but he just had to be doing something all the time; a fast thinking, fun-loving prankster, who was two thoughts ahead of everyone. Their father was of the "Old School", very strict and proper. Claude must have been his favorite thorn. He kept things popping.

Not until Claude's death several years ago did any of his family learn of his excellent Naval Service and accounts of bravery and medals, for he was a modest man.

During the time of this story, the Fire Chief in Valdosta was Mr. Mose Oppenheim, who, they say, wore an overly large Texas hat and sat on the front seat of the fire engine in pursuit of duty. We saw Harriet and Dewey Foster (present Fire Chief) the other day and he has some pictures of historical interest to loan us. So after you have read Mr. Ferrell's story, maybe you can come by the Museum and see the way it was.

CLAUDE FERRELL AND OKLAHOMA in 1908

by

Ed Ferrell

Claude spent several summers in Alabama with our Uncle Ben Burch, who was in the livestock business. He bought car loads of horses from Oklahoma and Texas, then sold them to farmers. Encouraged by Uncle Ben, Claude would ride the wildest horses at the age of eight and nine.

Against Father's better judgement, Uncle Ben gave Claude a pony to ride in Valdosta. He picked out an extra large pony and shipped him by freight to Valdosta for Claude. Claude named him "Oklahoma". He proved to be a very spirited and fast horse. The Valdes Hotel had a stable in the rear for heavy truck horses that hauled the guest's baggage to and from the stations. Father had an annex stall built for the new arrival with a convenient rack at the stable door to hold the bridal and saddle. I think, that secretly Father was as proud of Claude's riding and "dare-devilry" as Uncle Ben was, but wouldn't let Claude know.

When Oklahoma arrived, Claude at the age of eleven, immediately got busy to thinking of ways and means to put the horse to a good and proper use, so as to stay in the good graces of our Father. "A horse was born to race..." was Claude's ingrained training in Alabama.

Valdosta's progressive Mayor and Council, had installed a modern Fire Department, equipped with automobiles to replace the heavy fire horses. The new building was on Toombs Street just half a block from the back of the Valdes entrance. The hotel was on the corner of West Hill Avenue and Toombs Street. There were wide porches on both streets. Any vehicles coming out of the back of the hotel usually turned right into the street going to the station.

Claude had a secret plan worked out with Oklahoma. After only the first month Claude had taught Oklahoma to hold his head close to the stable door, and whenever he saw Claude coming he would take the bridal in his mouth, then turn halfway around so Claude could throw the saddle on him and with this arrangement, Claude could be on him and off for parts unknown, in only a moment. They rode everywhere, in town and country. He and Oklahoma were close pals, and knew each others every move.

In those days, everyone went to fires. Valdosta's new system had fire hydrants in all areas of town and fire signal boxes from which to turn in a fire alarm. When an alarm was received at the Fire Station, loud iron bells would ring out the alarm. The three new automobiles, fire engine, hook, ladder and hose truck afforded quite an attraction for Valdostans, as automobile fire equipment was still a novelty.

The loud bells could be heard all over town. The Valdes Hotel was so close the bells were really heard there. Most guests attended fires for excitement, a free attraction.

Claude's secret scheme was to prove to Valdostan's that automobiles could never outrun a good race horse. Claude's first chance came one day about 2 p.m., right after the big afternoon dinner. He was in the hotel lobby when the firebells started clanging and ran like wild-fire to Oklahoma's stall. Oklahoma was ready in no time and Claude galloped out across the hotel yard and up Toombs street to the Fire House. There Claude held up to let all three fire trucks out. When the fire trucks were a safe distance away and gaining all the speed the engines could muster, Claude and Oklahoma took out after them and usually caught them in about two blocks. He made sure he kept a short distance behind them, then maintained that distance like a magnet the entire trip to the fire. This first fire was about two miles away and turned out to be a grass fire. It seems Claude was the main attraction, and the firemen on the back of the last truck had a front row seat to this one man show. After the fire had been put out everyone had a good laugh with Claude. His strategy had worked, and he was in the good graces of the firemen, as they saw he was a trained rider and had sense enough (they thought) not to get too close, or to interfere. It was Claude's lucky day as Father and some of the hotel guests had come out on the porch and had seen the trucks and Claude race by. Claude was a hero. Father was a little concerned, and after the firemen came back to the station Father walked over to the Fire department and asked the Fire Chief if Claude had interfered. Father was assured that Claude had done nothing wrong. So, the ground work was layed, but he wanted to get one more day fire in so as to fortify his position. Three weeks later he repeated the same routine, being careful as before to keep his distance on this day fire.

Claude and I roomed together and our room was near the long main hall which lead way back to the back stairway. It was just perfect for his scheme. The first "Night Ride" was about 1:00 in the morning. The Fire bells rang out, and before I could get out of bed, Claude was up and had his pants and shirt on. Back then boys wore short pants buttoned on to their shirts with large buttons, two separate garments. He was out of the door and gone before I was even fully awake. He and Oklahoma fell in line with the last fire truck and reached the fire on time. It was a small fire so it didn't take long. Claude decided he had better get back home as soon as possible to see how Father was going to take a "Night Ride". He was waiting for Claude alright, but since he returned so promptly, even before the fire was fully extinguished, Father didn't have the heart to tell him he couldn't go to the night fires, so with just a mild lecture Claude got by.

Claude became a real favorite with the firemen. But then one night it happened. Claude and the firemen were on their way to a night fire and temptation struck. The fire trucks were going full speed down Ashley Street, and Claude saw a safe place along the road. With a new burst of energy he galloped at full speed around the fire trucks and beat them to the fire. I always had a sneaking idea that some of the firemen put the idea into his head, and dared him to pass them that way. Anyway, the Fire Chief, realizing that this could lead to problems told father, very diplomatically, about the incident, but urged him not to be too harsh on Claude, just to tell the boy not to pass them anymore. Who knows, maybe the Chief's pride had been stepped upon, as he and his men were very proud of the new equipment, and rightly so.

Father dutifully reported this to Claude and warned him against ever repeating this incident. He told him IF HE EVER passed the fire trucks again it would be the last time he rode on Oklahomato a fire OR to a funeral!

Claude knew Father too well, and he knew when he layed the law down he meant it. He never passed another fire truck after that warning. But as fate would have it, another incident turned lady luck against Oklahoma and Claude.

It happened about 10:00 one night. The Fire Bells started ringing. The Valdes lobby was filled with "Traveling Men" and some of the local wives had a foursome of bridge going in the Ladies Parlor. Naturally when everyone heard the clanging of the bells they stepped to the porch to see the fire trucks rush by. All the crowd on the porch walked off the hotel porch to the street and were watching the trucks. Claude must have been sleeping very soundly, for he failed to hear the first bells and woke up only as the sound was dieing in the distance. He heard enough to wake him and then realized that he was late. In his haste and excitement he forgot to stop and put his shirt and pants on. He heard the trucks turn up Hill Avenue so he jumped on Oklahoma and came from behind the hotel, turned right onto Toombs street to get to Hill Avenue. All this crowd were in the street, including Father. Claude could barely slow down to let people get out of his way, and he almost ran over some of the guests in trying to catch the fire trucks. The crowd took it good naturedly and didn't mind the narrow escape of being hit. But not Father! He stood there watching Claude ride away in the distance, in his underclothes. Back then, even men had to have modesty before the ladies. Father retreated to the hotel and sent the night porter to retrieve Claude. Father might have been able to take Claude's ruthfulness in racing through the crowd, but the underwear was "the straw that broke the camel's back".

It was after this that Claude was forbidden to ride Oklahoma any longer, and the next day Father bought Oklahoma from Claude for a very fancy price. Our moral here is, --Don't fight fire in your underwear.

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How will we know of the past if we do not tell it. And why should we tell it? Well, you can't have a past without a future. How can we know where we are going if we don't know where we've been. And how can we learn of the past without a teller of tales. Thank you again, Mr. Ferrell. I live with the feeling that I want to publish all his stories at once so you can read them as I have. But you'll have to wait and get them one at the time.

Jane Shelton will give her "Jones Family History" February 24th at the Museum.

See you there.

Albert Pendleton