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VALDOSTA, GEORGIA

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A Room for the Night

On the map of old Troupville, we see Smith's Hotel and Morgan Swain's Hotel. Nothing has been found about the latter, but the Smith's Hotel has been recorded in the History of Lowndes County in this manner: "The railroad was being built when the residents of Troupeville decided to move. The day the deed was signed by William Wisenbaker, granting the railroad six acres of land south of Hill avenue on which to build the station, "Uncle Billy" Smith tore off the wing of his hotel in Troupeville and moved it to Valdosta, where he operated a small hostelry for several years." This Smith Hotel was probably the first hotel in Valdosta. Mr. Willis Allen is recorded as to have "later built the hotel which was leased to Mr. Charlie Stuart and was known as the Stuart House. This hotel was very popular with the teaveling public until it burned in 1885. The hotel was located south of the railroad, between Ashley and Patterson streets." It was on Savannah Avenue.

In her diary, dated 1863, Mrs. Thannie Wisenbaker tells of the hotel in which she and her family stayed when they first arrived here from Rome during the War. She wrote that they were housed in the only hotel in town and it was very crowded. The building was near the rear of what is now Slocum's Furniture Store on Central Avenue. "It was a long rambling building, two stories high. Two small halls divided the lower flat. A child could stand in the middle of the hall and touch the walls on each side. The home was not painted, ... imagine how we felt when darkness came and our only light was a tallow candle!" Strange, scary shadows were alarming to a child who was refugeeing with her family.

The hotel was crowded with refugees who were called "furriners" by the country people. The crowds of people in the hotel were mostly men from every walk of life. The local lawyers and other local residents would come to the hotel to talk to the transients. The long veranda out front was ^{where} news was exchanged. The war was a good distance away and never really hit here, but local citizens were interested in news of events, relatives and loved ones.

The landlady, Mrs. Holton, "was a fine old Southern woman with many fine qualities. She was full of wit and good humor and would join in the discussions and her opinions were always well received. She was a sister of the late Mrs. Joe Ousley, and an aunt to Mr. Maude Ousley."

Mrs. Holton informed some of the residents one day that a certain couple were on the porch "sparking". Mrs. Wisenbaker, then quite a small child, thought it had something to do with sparks of fire, and wondered how they could do these two people any harm for they were sitting "10 feet apart". Still, they were courting, having a conversation at a distance.

Mrs. Wisenbaker and her family were in the hotel about three weeks. They wanted to move to a corner of Valley and Patterson Streets where later stood the Will Converse home, but the house at that time was so full of refugees that they changed their minds and moved out to "the end of Patterson", which was at Gordon. You could barely see the little cabin through the trees and Gordon Street was a tiny dim road.

Mrs. Holton's obituary appeared in the April 20, 1895 issue of The Valdosta Times. It said that Mrs. Rachel Holton, one of Valdosta's oldest inhabitants, had died at the home of her daughter, Mrs. William H. McLendon and was buried at Ousley station. She was proprietor of the first hotel, "it being located on Central Avenue on the corner west of where Mr. McKey now lives." It further stated that she had moved away but returned several years later to live with her daughter, that she was the sister-in-law of Dr. J. R. Burton, and an aunt of Mr. Robert Ousley.

In another April 1895, newspaper it stated that Charles T. Stuart had come to Valdosta on the first train that every reached our city.

And something more about early hotels in Valdosta, we find in the April 22, 1868 issue of The South Georgia Times, this ad: "Hotel in Valdosta For Sale. The Valdosta Hotel is now offered for sale, low for cash, or on terms farvorable for purchaser. The rent of the

building can be made to pay five times the interest of the money. The owner will exchange the Hotel for real estate in Savannah, or for Railroad stock. The lot on which the Hotel stands contains one acre enclosed, with garden, yard, ... D. James Dillon at Doctortown, Ga."

Visiting with Elsa

It was refreshing to visit with Mrs. Elsa Horn, a happy lady who lives alone and loves her neighbors. She does have two dogs and a cat, and the dogs have a sofa all their own.

After the June newsletter about theatres, Elsa Horn called me to say it was the Rex Theatre in which she first plaued. It was on Patterson, two stores north of Benny's Alley. She was interested in our newsletter, so naturally I took her a batch of them.

The visit was full of "I remember's", and believe me Elsa remembers a lot about Valdosta since her arrivel about May 1918.

"I can remember far back," she says with a far away look, "I can remember when there wasn't a Park Avenue. It was just a fence."

It was a visit full of laughter as well as nostalgia. "I don't know who to write back home any more," she said, laughing. "They're all gone!"

Back home is St. Louis, Missouri. Once, when there was a flu epidemic here and when the theatres closed, Elsa's manager told her to take a couple of weeks off. She went home to St. Louis. On her return she went to the station to buy a ticket. "It took everybody to find Valdosta on the map."

Elsa Horn began playing the piano for silent movies in 1918, but in 1929 she organized her first band for the opening of Twin Lakes. They played at the Pavillion and in the band were Charlie Joyner (now married to Clyde Thomas), G. R. McGowan (Bubber's brother), Weedie Bramblett (who married a Joyner), Jack Mixer (brother of the late Burk Mixer), O. D. Williams (a railroad man), Cecil Barker (of Lake City) and two unnamed men. A very good-looking Elsa appears at the piano in several pictures. Mr. Blackburn was to take a picture, but one of the men did not show up. Because they were advertised as a nine piece orchestra, they found the first man who fit the uniform that all the men wore, and had his picture taken with the rest of the orchestra. He could not even play a musical instrument.

Another band picture showed Jack Hinton, singer, Jack Mixer, a very handsome Fred Pindar, and Tib Sampson and a boy whose last name was Monk, both from Moultrie. When he wasn't busy in his father's ice cream business, Sam Breedlove sometimes played with the bands. These bands also played in front of the stage at the Woman's Building. No dancing was allowed there because the club women did not want the floor scratched.

The bands also played for dances at Blue Springs just over the county line in Brooks.

"I remember playing for Clyde and her friends a lot (Clyde McKey White) and Annabelle Converse was usually with them. I can still hear Tuni Converse singing, 'I Never Knew I Could Love Anybody', in his beautiful tenor voice."

Elsa played for Mrs. Crockett's dance studio and for Marion Converse Bright's dance studio. And she also played for the USO, 1954-1955.

"I can still play the old tunes and sometimes I hear them on radio and T-V. It's all been a lot of fun. I'll be 79 in December! And you know what? I think I'll make it!" With her sense of humor and happy chatter, I know she will!

The following are several articles from the May 11, 1895 issue of The Valdosta Times:

Naylor Items.

A birthday picnic will be given at Mr. J. W. Carter Sr., about 2 miles east of here on Friday 11th inst. A large crowd and a grand time is anticipated.

The telegraph office, which was at Stockton, has been removed to this place, which will be of great benefit and convenience to the town. Mr. Dampier was transferred to Stockton, and Mr. D. L. Turner will act as agent and operator

here. Mr. Turner is a bright young man, of high reputation, and the citizens are glad to welcome him in their midst. (signed) Puer.

To The Public

I have opened up my stock of Spring Millinery in the Post Office building on Central Avenue, and cordially invite you to call and see my goods before purchasing elsewhere. My goods are bright, new, stylish, and pretty, and I offer them to the trade at a remarkably low price. If you want nice millinery cheap, call on
Mrs. Julia F. Cornwall.

On the Square.

I am now in the Jewelry and Music business and want to stay in it. My motto is square and honest dealing with everyone. I profess to know my business, and if at any time I misrepresent any article in any way I am willing to pay for it by refunding the money, and will let you keep the goods for nothing. When I say gold, I mean gold, when I say silver, I mean silver and when I say brass you know that I mean brass and nothing else. When you want goods in the future try me and be convinced.
Yours Respt.,
P. M. Childress.

Wool! Wool! Wool!

See A. J. Strickland before you sell your wool.

Picnic on the Lake.

A Large Crowd Spent an Evening on the Island.

A large crowd of young people went down to Lake Park Monday evening and spent several hours picnicking on the Island in Ocean Pond. Lunches were carried with them and served by the light of the moon. The hard rain which fell here was unknown to the party until they returned, as the evening was clear and pleasant at Lake Park.

The following is a list of those who went on the trip: Misses Eleanor Hampton, Ivey Abbot, Georgia Smith, Edna Purdue, Reba Jones, Coma Young, Corra May Parrish, Cleo Braswell, Eula Tally, Fannie Tally, Lilla Whittington, Alice Jones, Mrs. Hynds. Messrs. W. C. Peeples, T. S. McKey, S. F. Hardee, B. S. Richardson, Will Knight, R. B. Myddelton, E. P. Dunnaway, Jim Morgan, J. S. Kingsbery, D. D. Smith, A. J. Strickland, J. B. Willis, S. S. Myddelton.

Chaperones. Mr. & Mrs. W. C. Willis, Mr. & Mrs. O. K. Jones, Mr. & Mrs. W. H. Griffin, and Mr. & Mrs. A. T. Moore.

The party was joined at Lake Park by Mr. Cap Wells and Miss Clyde Smith.
(end of Times clippings)
