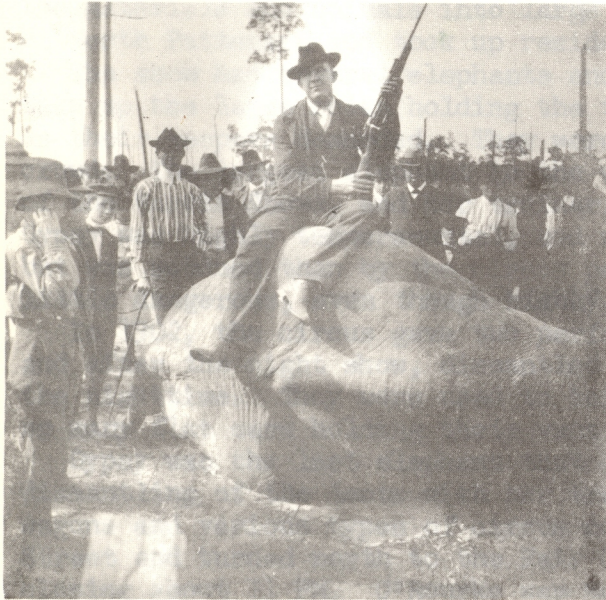


Albert S. Pendleton, Jr., President

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"Generations unborn," it was said at the time, "will be told about things that happened the day the mad elephant was killed near Valdosta."

And so, many stories have been told about Gypsy, the elephant, who ran rampage in the streets of Valdosta in November, 1902, killed her trainer, and was tracked down at Cherry Creek and killed. The above pictures are used through the courtesy of Horace Hunt.

There are two records dating Gypsy to times before 1902. One is a statement by Miss Corinthia Morgan, who moved with her family from Troupville to Valdosta. Miss Morgan said: "Did you ever hear of Gypsy, the elephant, and how she ran away? John Robinson's circus used to come to Troupville back in the old days, traveling over the dirt road with one elephant, the only animal with ivory tusks which the circus possessed at that time. The pachyderm was called Gypsy, a name she lived up to only too well. She will never be forgotten by the old inhabitants around here." This was told in connection with the rampage of Gypsy in 1902 and can only be assumed that the two are the same elephant. The circus at Troupville was apparently before 1860. A circus man in 1902 said: "Why Gypsy's about 65 years old. She toured the country with the O'Brien Circus way back in 1847, when they traveled in wagons."

Here is Mr. E. D. Ferrell's own account of Gypsy, a five-ton female elephant of Asian extraction, "the Biggest Born of Brutes."

GYPSY, THE FAMOUS ELEPHANT'S LAST VISIT TO VALDOSTA

by

E. D. Ferrell

Due to Valdosta being the largest inland "Sea Island Cotton Market" in the world, this long staple cotton being used in the manufacture of the automobile tire, the Georgia State Fairs were held in Valdosta for the first several years of this century. The Fair Grounds covered the area from the present site of the First Christian Church on Patterson street and

running North to where the Elementary school now stands, and East to Ashley Street. A one mile race track was inside the grounds, with many stables for horses and circus animals.

The Harris Nickel-Plate Shows were famous in those days, but not as large as Barnum and Bailey which later became Ringling Brothers. The Harris Nickel-Plate Shows selected Valdosta for winter quarters, as the Fair Grounds made it doubly attractive to winter here.

This circus always gave their last performance of the year in Valdosta at the circus grounds on East Hill Avenue and Lee Street adjoining the ACL railway tracks, where the animals and circus unloaded. After their night show, they then took down their huge tents, and loaded the materials and animals into large closed wagons, hauled by their horses to the Fair Grounds on North Patterson and took up residence for the winter season.

The show had several elephants and it was a sight to see them use their large snouts to take up the large poles holding the tents and also to push the heavy vans from place to place as their keepers demanded. They were also to perform in the circus in many ways to amuse the crowd. The largest elephant in the world, named Gypsy, was one of the advertised attractions of the Harris Shows, and her trainer, O'Rourke, was a stern task master with her at times. Gypsy was highly temperamental, and was known to have turned against her trainer in Chicago, but was subdued then by the circus people. She was considered by the circus people as a little dangerous, even though highly trained to perform.

In 1902, the circus gave two performances in late November at the circus grounds downtown, and after the night show, dismantled downtown and moved everything to the Fair Grounds during the nighttime. They were used to this regularly, as they moved from town to town by trains or many flat cars holding their vans and huge wagons with the animals inside.

Gypsy was the last elephant that night to leave the grounds, as she was used in the dismantling of the tents with her trainer, O'Rourke. The long caravan of animals walking, wagons and various types of circus conveyances proceeded from East Hill grounds to Patterson Street and turned north to the Fair Grounds. This continued most of the night after the closing about 11 PM. O'Rourke was mounted on Gypsy's head with his iron pointed weapon to guide her. The two were seen by many people quite late as far north on Patterson as present Gordon Street. However, no one could remember seeing Gypsy and O'Rourke north of there, so it was decided that he must have fallen asleep because Gypsy was seen walking south on the road which is now Toombs Street. This was around 2 o'clock in the night.

Gypsy, being a female, had small tusks, as only the males had the huge ivory tusks. Even though her body was the largest elephant alive, Gypsy's tusks were about the size of a 12 year old child's forearm.

The circus people decided that with the trainer asleep and no one to guide her, the elephant must have wandered off the main street. When she reached the First Baptist Church on the corner of West Central Avenue and Toombs Street, O'Rourke probably slipped off her head to the ground. The circus people knew her temper and they decided she took advantage of his fall and knelt down on her knees and crushed his body to death. Then, while rolling his body one tusk hit the large granite curbstone at the sidewalk of the church and the tusk was broken off. The pain of the tusk must have enraged her terribly and she started running like wildfire back to Patterson Street. By that time some of the circus people became aware of her being loose, and they rushed to the scene with large pitchforks. When they could get close enough, two of the men with pistols fired into her body, one shot after another. Gypsy was roaring in a high screaming voice and shook the town with roars. While the circus people were trying to subdue her, the local citizens, who were still up, were running from her, frightened to death.

Our cousin, James Madison Pearson, a young man 20 years old, was night clerk that year for my father at the Valdes Hotel. Mat Pearson later entered the Army and became a General. At one stage of this terrible elephant hunt in downtown Valdosta, Gypsy was surrounded by the circus people on the corner of West Hill and North Toombs at the east side of the Valdes Hotel. The Valdes had a large wide porch on the side of the hotel and the doors to the Hotel were wide high doors leading into a long hall which ran right down the center of the hotel. Gypsy was raging with pain and had injured three of the circus people severely, but the others managed to save them from being crushed to death by shooting her with pistols or sticking her with pitchforks. The First Christian Church on the corner of West Hill and Toombs Streets across from the Valdes Hotel was under construction, and one incident occurred there that was gruesome. The workmen on the church building had a long wooden ramp to haul their wheelbarrows of bricks and mortar up. This led to the large window sill. One of the circus men

was close to Gypsy and she started frantically after him. He ran hurriedly up this ramp, and she deliberately caught up with him, wrapping her long trunk around his body and slamming him to the ground, and was trying to kill him. He was quickly saved, but left an invalid. She also hurt two other circus men badly, besides having killed O'Rourke at the church north of the Valdes. At one time she tried to get up to the porch and the doors of the Valdes, but Mat Pearson, the night clerk had presence of mind enough to run back to the electric switch-board in the office and turned off all the lights in the hotel, thus changing her course. She could have literally torn up the side of the Hotel but was too large to get inside the hall, even though it was very wide. This terrible ordeal went on for about an hour uptown, and finally, they felt the pistol shots were taking effect on Gypsy as she seemed to quiet down a little, but still was screaming loud. They finally ran her back to Patterson Street and were trying to get her away from town to the Fair Grounds, but had no other hope of saving her, but to try to destroy her. They chased her to the Fair Grounds and got her inside the grounds, but with a burst of speed she ran through the high boarded wooden fence on the Patterson side of the Fair Grounds and headed north out the country road. The Chief of Police was Chief Dampier, and he had a large Krag-Jorgenson high-powered long range rifle. He and one of his assistants in his buggy, followed her and noticed she was gradually slowing down. When she reached Cherry Creek, north of town, on a sand road, she stopped and laid down. Chief Dampier walked close enough to her to get in a good shot with his big rifle and hit her in the neck and then pumped several shots into her body, killing her on the ground.

This had been a veritable nightmare, and Valdosta received much publicity in papers and magazines for years about the incident. O'Rourke is buried in the Valdosta cemetery. The next morning at the Valdes Hotel, as the hotel houseman (carpenter) came to work, he found the tusk on the ground near the Baptist Church corner, which she had broken off in killing O'Rourke. Arrington, the carpenter, sold the tusk to me for \$2.00 and we kept it in the hotel office for years, showing it to various people. I later lost track of it, as I was going away to school in those years.

A few years ago, the papers were filled with an experience the Waycross people had with a wild bear being killed on the streets. I told some of my friends jokingly, that Waycross was "small change", for Valdosta killed elephants on their streets instead of bears. This was a terrible ordeal for we Valdosta people, never to be forgotten.

From some newspaper accounts of the incident, it was said that there were mixed emotions of people returning from Cherry Creek that day, a mixture of sadness and yet relief. They had watched Gypsy as she looked at them and the rifle, as it fired. They had heard her shriek and had seen her die.

It took a big hole in the ground to bury Gypsy, and a detail of men chopped her up and buried her in several different holes near the spot. An estimated 3000 people rode out to see the dead elephant. The incident was the only topic of conversation in town.

Late that same Sunday, O'Rourke, the trainer, was buried in Sunset Hill Cemetery. Ulmer's Undertaking Parlor (downtown) was in charge of arrangements. Six beautiful white horses pulled the hearse through downtown Valdosta to the cemetery and the grave some twenty-five yards behind the Sexton's house. The circus and town people mingled together and solemnly attended the funeral service. It was found that O'Rourke's body had several broken bones and was badly bruised. It was placed in a very fine casket, bought by Mrs. Harris, owner of the Nichol-Plate Shows. He was buried at four o'clock, and his tombstone says he was 44 years old.

I daresay we can repeat the prophecy that there are generations unborn who will be told about the elephant, Gypsy. Many thanks to E. D. Ferrell and to Horace Hunt.

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Albert S. Pendleton, Jr.