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VALDOSTA, GEORGIA

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We appreciate Miss Thera Hambrick for giving the History of Valdosta State College at our last meeting. It was a most interesting program. Many of us remembered quite a number of people and events of which she spoke. Thank you, Miss Hambrick for speaking to us.

Our program for March is Mrs. Fred Schroer giving the History of the Schroer Family. This is the family of our member Walter Schroer. Mrs. Fred Schroer is a professor of History at Valdosta State College. The meeting is March 29th.

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HAIL TO THE CHIEF!

We all like to stand in good with the police chief and I'm sure our Chiefs had plenty of friends. Just think of all the good stories they can't tell. 'Cause they wouldn't dare!

My father thought it was the best place to visit in town--the jailhouse, that is. My earliest recollections are filled with visits there early Saturday mornings or late Sunday mornings, to see who they had. Sometimes we knew some of the people behind those steel bars. Daddy would visit very early nearly every morning, or get the local happenings at the Roosevelt or White House Restaurants, or Dixie Cafe or Downtown Cafe.

If you've ever noticed our pictures at the Museum, we looked like just another frontier town back in the beginning. There was a saloon here and one there. The first chief was all alone in his job, he was it -- policeman, jailor, janitor -- you name it. And they bought him some steel bars, because he was sure to need them. And he did.

The first Valdosta Police Department began in 1877 with H. W. Coachman as marshall of the town. He was the only policeman and his duties were to collect city taxes and enforce whatever laws were violated.

A few years later T. R. Smith was made marshall and his assistant was James Allen. Shortly, Allen met a violent death from an unknown assailant in 1883. He was then serving as nightwatchman and J. S. Barnett was the town marshall at that time. This was the first slaying of a local officer of the law. A \$250 reward was offered. Later the mayor and council passed a resolution in appreciation of Allen's services and regret of his death.

Barnett served as Valdosta Marshall 20 years. He was assisted in this period by Ashley Rogers, J. S. Brammen and C. A. Smith as night watchman. Others were added periodically.

First Valdosta police Chief was Calvin Dampier in 1898. He had been a member of the force since 1888. Levi Pressley was the first assistant Chief. In the early part of 1900, Gypsy, the elephant, killed her master-manager on the streets of Valdosta, ran rampage and was tracked down and killed by Dampier with his high-powered rifle. Another happening during Dampier's time was the Rawlings-Carter Tragedy of 1905-06. Although it happened in the county, many things about the trial and people involved our local police chief.

Dampier was followed by W. P. Kendall and R. L. Kemp succeeded him. Homer Passmore served as Chief to 1948. Our present police Chief came at that time. Chief Wilbur Perkerson, a native of LaGrange, served 14 years on the LaGrange Police Department before coming here. At present, as in 1962, the department provides police protection on a 24 hour per day, seven-day per week basis.

In 1958 the department was located at the old city hall on corner of S. Ashley, now the vacant lot beside Southern Salvage Company. That year it moved to the large, modern building on North Toombs Street. Last year when the City bought and moved its business to the old Post Office, the police department took over the entire building on Toombs Street.

By 1962 there were 36 policemen, five radio equipped patrol cars and about 12 motorcycles equipped with two-way radios.

Now, in 1973, besides Chief Perkerson and Assistant Chief Lois Arnold, there are six captains, 4 lieutenants, 5 sergeants and 38 patrolmen. Last but not least, in the school department are 15 school-traffic ladies. There are ten patrol cars and four motorcycles.

Chief Perkerson says he has enjoyed all these years with us, the department has made much advancement and he's looking forward to many more years making more. He told me that

when he came to Valdosta there was no record system. Now with the one they have, everyone, even the FBI, tell what a good system they have.

The Chief came to us March 9, 1948 -- Happy 25th Anniversary to the Chief!

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From the Valdosta Times, April 16, 1887: "Easter Picnics. The Easter picnic at the Blue Springs, Friday of last week, was largely attended by the citizens of Lowndes and Brooks. The Valdosta portion of the party reports a good time. Our orchestra went up...and the young people danced on the bareground, like the American aborigines. There was also an Easter picnic at the Boyd's Pool, 7 miles south of Valdosta, Saturday, and was well attended."

The Valdosta Times, April 16, 1887: "Mr. W. H. Penland, of Naylor sends us two eggs found in the same nest and evidently laid by the same hen, which vary greatly in size. One is as large as a turkey egg, and the other is about the size of a plum. The hen evidently put in fancy work for Easter, knowing, doubtless that it was an occasion for designs in eggs."

Spring, through the years in Valdosta, has made various appearances, early or late, and always beautiful with flowers. When we were young our favorite playground was Brookwood Park, the dirty stream and going into the woods and brushy parts. From time to time I've worked on a piece of writing that is an impression of young years and recent years, the different seasons, and the Spring of 1954 in particular when our azaleas tried to bloom their utmost. Remember all that when you read this impression, and that the things I say about the park may not be true now, but they could be. I also think of the man who cared for it for years and made it beautiful. It was Mr. Richard Drexel. He worked hard to make it a showplace.

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#### BROOKWOOD PARK

Deep, deep in the South where Spring and Summer come earlier and more abundantly than anywhere, the ground reaches freezing only very little, and snow rarely ever falls.

In February the awakening sounds are first from hundreds of sparrows or "tweets", invading the land in mass-like droves. As warm air comes and goes, alternating with cold spells, mockingbirds fly with melodic sounds. Silently and slowly blades of grass begin to green again, and the redbud tree blooms a deep rich lavender.

Down in Brookwood Park along the Mile Branch gigantic and beautiful pine trees reach high up and a weeping willow tree drapes over the water in a sad and serene mood. Along the banks of the shallow stream dark green elephant ears dance on springy stalks, waving their frosted looking leaves in the breezes. Months later they die with first frost of the next winter season but only to grow green again and be new again with another spring.

Listen! Listen to the songs of earth, a constant melody of all the trees and wind and birds that fill South Georgia with their own special melodies. Can you hear the hummingbird song? The purest melody in all the world? There are robins, the raucous bluejay, a few brown thrashers, orioles and woodpeckers and the bird that calls, "Bobwhite, bobwhite". It is the quail, a nesting bird, and homebody, lover of home and family calling to all.

At night in the park, the wisp of sounds drape over your thoughts like dim cloth and filmy fairy napkins. And when it rains you feel the fresh clean rain on your back or see it fall through the trees. Night or day, you hear the music in the air, and everlasting music, playing loud and soft everywhere, unending themes of love and beauty and youth. For God gives a song to everything and causes it to sing; the wind through the trees, the snap of a branch, a call from someone, even the sound of a car horn may change the key in which you are singing, and certainly the occasional metal clanging of chains of swing sets against metal posts and the joyous calls of the summer boys and girls as they play in a wading pool.

Along the edges of the shallow stream small green bonnets overcrowd their world of sand and water and green foliage sprouts everywhere. The tadpoles appear first as dark round spots in the water. Then their bodies elongate and by Summer they have proven what a frog is like.

The word beauty is exemplified in myriad colors of azaleas that grow under stately pines over the park and in parts line the stream. Huge dark green bushes of azaleas, awakening from a winter sleep, shedding hard husks from fattening flower buds and a glorious red, lavender, white and pink Spring is revealed.

Dogwoods, covered with small white blooms resembling a light snow, are spotted generously in the Park. And crepe myrtles of delicate pink and lavender tones line the streets that

border the woods. But one is mostly aware of the long leaf pines of South Georgia, brown and evergreen, each an eternal masterpiece, put there as if by the loving hands of God.

Through a misty glass we see the Park in terms of shade and sun, as well as color, a quiet place but a place where children play, and lovers go and talk, and meet and part; for school projects and amateur botanists, it is a haven for insects, handsome butterflies, the largest grasshoppers ever seen or caught and locusts shells that cover the brown trunks of pines in the Fall. Colorful leaves in rich autumn shades of red, brown and gold can be gathered just before the cold winter season from dogwood and camphor trees.

There always comes a time in a boy's life when he decides to go down the branch to explore the woods and penetrate the glorious mysteries beyond; an exciting expedition down stream, into more woods and old fences, honeysuckle and wild things.

The misty glass is clearing and children of all the years watch the ripple in the stream, and as if fascinated, go to it, are drawn to it. Then they wade in the water, carefully float leaves, catch tadpoles and minnows and crayfish, and sail favorite little boats.

One can see boys now, catching minnows and tadpoles, wearing just pants, polevaulting across the stream and tearing through the shallow water as if a day would never end. But a day does end, and after a night of sleep, the thief of all our precious hours, boys are back at it again another day, running and polevaulting or swimming in the small wading pool nearby. But in the ending of each day comes the familiar sweet call, "Bobwhite! Bobwhite!"

When in Summer late afternoon is suddenly in the forest of deep brown cathedral pines, and the shadows are almost gone, and when regrets and worries have all slipped away, a soothing dusklike dark lacy sheets, descends and crickets and frogs begin their night caroling. Butterflies are folded, concealed, and a few birds flutter from tree to tree, choosing the right perch for their evening song.

Bobwhite are tenderly gathering in a family circle, touching themselves safely together for one day they will be scattered, flying different lanes, nesting in different woods, being shot down somewhere in some near future.

Through the Park the branch flows slowly, perpetually, rippling almost silently to other woods, other streams. Night, creeping into every crook and cranny, seeping into the green growing grass, rises upward and filters quietly into every secret corner, a prelude to the diamond sparkle of moonbeam on the dew. A bobwhite calls...in a moment, another answers.

The birds will tell me and the frogs and crickets of Summer at night will repeat it for all to hear, that a thousand spirits and sadnesses can't change anything. All the hopes and dreams of the past are over and the height of the music that is played in the Park now is of the future, a hopeful tune that is played brightly. But like any other song, like youth, it is gone too soon, softer and softer into nothing. Like a grand melody that is regretfully ending, and is gone. But oh, it burned brightly, and with what seemed an everlasting fire, yet is gone. But, rest weary traveler of this city, of these special lanes, lean on the blankets of God's green life in this special place and think not of yesterday, but of tomorrow.

In a radiant March sun, a woodpecker hammers stubbornly away at a pine tree, and then another dives down to disturb him and play. After a feathery Indian dance in mid air, the first woodpecker finds his tree and resumes his knock, knock, knock. Bullet shaped humming-birds, colorful and glistening, can be seen zipping from one bloom to another. Lightly swaying, ominously full of redbugs, is the low hanging Spanish moss, renting free space on any tree.

Along the Mile Branch near the Formosa azalea with fat buds about to burst into lavender glory, a large redbreasted robin lights on the edge of the stream. He walks boldly near the water, then smoothly and possessively stalks up the bank of dirty white sand. With one big flutter of wings he is up and drops right in the middle of the stream. Wings fluttering vigorously in shallow water, he peers around to see who is watching. A wild fluttering of wings in the branch water again and he looks sharply from side to side. Strutting stiffly up the bank, he shakes water from his feathers dog-like. He shakes again and swiftly springs up and is off, darting freely through the trees. The Formosa azalea open to reflect a lavender world, following the elegance of the pink Elegans azalea already in bloom. All over our town, but especially here, we are an Azalea City.

And in this great Genesis of awakening, on a clear innocent day of a deep blue sky, like one of the beautiful, even fragile days that has happened each year since the beginning of time, Spring has come to Brookwood Park.

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"The Times": April 5, 1884: "March came in like a polar bear and went out like a lion with his tail hoisted into April." There you are...see you 29th. Albert Pendleton