

Albert S. Pendleton Jr., President

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Our first "Tour" of Valdosta and Lowndes County was a success. I went places I've never been before. Though we weren't able to linger at our stops, we know how to find these interesting places for longer visits. Thanks again to Jane and Tom Shelton for "guide" and commentary. The "Tour" would not have been a success without them. The end of the "Tour" was a real reward, lunch at Ocean Pond. Hope you saw Carey Cameron's article about Ocean Pond in May 13 copy of Sunday's Florida Times-Union. It was lengthy, excellent and with pictures. Mr. & Mrs. Carl Sessions sent me their copy of the article because I missed it. I thank them very much. Let's plan another "Tour".

We believe Frances Dekle has a most interesting program this month. Let's all play, "Remember When", and bring some items about our families or just an interesting item or items and share them with the Society at our meeting, May 31. It could be a story of ten years ago, or fifty years ago - even some one hundred year old happening. We couldn't play "Remember When" on that last item (100 years), but some of you can tell about things of which you have a knowledge. Write it down if you want to - but please come to the meeting and let's tell or read some stories of interest. The history of Valdosta and Lowndes County belongs to everyone -- and let's share it together.

Brother Ed Ferrell does just that. It's high time we had another article by Mr. Ferrell. I have missed them as much as you have. In research we see ads and items about the local hotels and trains of which Mr. Ferrell writes. On July 15, 1905, the Florence Hotel was listed as having W. F. Bamberg as Proprietor, and rates were \$2.00 per day. This hotel was on the southwest corner of South Patterson and West Savannah avenue. The Stuart Hotel was directly across the street, now the site of Barnes Downtown Drug Store. And the Valdes, of course, was on the northwest corner of West Hill and North Toombs.

Not only must we thank Mr. Ferrell for his stories, but at the top of each one, he has this inscription, "Requested by Mrs. Gloria Sorenson and Mrs. Caro Marquis, as told to them years ago." And so we thank Gloria Dalton Sorenson and her daughter, Caro, for the preservation of our history. We also want to thank Dot Dalton Paine for her help and encouragement.

"Let's Meet the Train"

by

E. D. Ferrell

The first decade of this 20th Century saw the end of passenger and freight transportation in our nation, as it had been since our Railway systems had been operated in the 19th Century. By 1910 the advent of automobiles had changed the good old railroad days entirely and our very way of life was launched into a fast moving "rat-race" comparatively, and each year since then we have stepped up our pace so rapidly, that many thinking people wonder how much faster we can go until we run off the track. That's a debatable question, pro and con, only Time will tell.

In my eight decades of living from 1890 through 1970, in retrospect, I consider the first ten years of the century by far the most pleasant and happy ones. During those years we had largely recovered from the aftermath of the Civil War days, and except for the short Spanish American War in 1898, we were in the most tranquil period of all time in our History, and we enjoyed that for several years until World War I lifted its ugly head.

Our family moved to Valdosta in 1902 when my father E. D. Ferrell opened the new Valdes Hotel, and this gave the hustling city of Valdosta, three nice hotels - The Valdes, The Florence and The Stuart Hotel. These nice hotel facilities made Valdosta a popular week-end town for many of the commercial salesmen (drummers, traveling men - Commercial tourists and one

or two other names that are unmentionable here, nicknames given these fine businessmen by some of their own group). Most of the salesmen that called on the Valdosta business firms regularly, or came especially from nearby sections just to spend their Sunday, were out of Atlanta or Savannah. Their homes were too far away to get back by train every week-end with the loss of time. So Valdosta benefited tremendously in a business way by having so many of these boosters for our town. They found sufficient amusements for enjoyable week-ends.

My first two years in Valdosta were my early teenage years, and nothing gave me a bigger thrill than to meet the trains with our train porters from the Valdes, and to see the three negro porters from the Valdes, Florence and Stuart Hotels vieing desperately in competition with each other, for the stream of salesmen getting off the train at Valdosta, to stop with their respective hotel. It was a real show to watch them in operation. In those days, a big segment of the whole town people never missed seeing the trains come in. Nothing afforded more real excitement for old and young and of course, every relative who came by train for a visit with their kin-folks was met at the train by all their relatives and the greetings among that group was a thing to behold. Believe it or not, relatives in those days were welcomed visitors, and it was a standing joke, among the jokesters at to how long "Aunt Mary" or "Cousin Jane" was going to stay. Some one said that one bride and groom stayed with the kinfolks until their second baby arrived.

But, back to the Hotel porters soliciting guests for their respective hotels. The police never missed a train's arrival, on the pretense of law and order, but mostly to enjoy the trains as much as we did. The police did have a job to regulate the spirited conduct of these porters, or they may have murdered each other on the spot. The long trains with the express car and baggage and mail car and the smoking car and two or three or more passenger cars and maybe one or two sleeping cars with berths for the long trips, created a little problem at the railroad stations as the passengers on the cars in the rear may have to walk nearly a block to get to the depot building, waiting rooms and ticket offices. The hotel porters were made to keep behind a certain line at the street sidewalk. The travelers usually had two bags, one in each hand, and as they walked towards the porters from the train car, the porters would go into action - "Hotel Valdes!" "Hotel Stuart!" "Hotel Florence!" They announced in their loudest voices and stretched out their hands hoping to receive the forthcoming guest's baggage to take to a hotel free. The porter for the Florence Hotel was well known by his sonorous voice that sounded like Caruso when he hollered, "Hotel Florence!" His name was Flukas and he could almost drown out the Valdes' and Stuart's voices. Due to the spirited grabbing for the guest's bags, the police made a rule they must stand five feet apart and confine their solicitations to voice only. The Valdes was further from the depots than the Florence and Stuart and had a one horse dray to haul the baggage to and from the Valdes free. Some salesmen carried several trunks for samples in certain lines of business, such as clothing, or department stores they sold. Free sample rooms were furnished those, and their customers came to the hotel to the sample rooms. So, to go to the trains with the negro porters was a thrill beyond measure for a boy my age. All sorts of excitements were at the railroad stations when a train arrived.

Many merchants left their stores and strolled down when the trains arrived. If this generation can realize that there was not a single car on our streets then, they may well imagine the excitement of arriving and departing trains.

Flukas for the Florence had such a loud voice that the ingenious Stuart House porter, Jim Walker, solved that problem to some extent by getting a good size megaphone which he hollered through. "Stuart House! Stuart House!" The Valdes porter, Tom Jackson, was on his toes too, and came up with an effective idea. He had a nice metal sign made with a handle that read, "The Valdes, Brand New, Just for You." He'd hold the sign up if Flukas was too loud for him. The Florence served fine meals and always got their share of business, until the hotel was torn down to make way for the New Patterson Hotel about 1910. The salesmen who carried a big line of samples with trunks, occasionally got the train porters to help them unpack their trunks in the sample rooms. One of the Baltimore salesmen who got the Porter, Tom Jackson, to help him unpack, wanted to tip Tom and he asked him, "Tom, what's the customary tip?" "Boss", he answered, "One dollar is the customary tip". So the salesman gave him a dollar. Tom said, "Thank you, Boss, you're the first man ever give me the customary tip."

Finally, I had a tragic personal experience in 1904, in my own arrival by train at the ACL Railway station. I was fourteen years old and had attended a prep school in New Orleans that year. In New Orleans, I was boarding with my Uncle's home and my roommate was his son,

Hanson Ferrell, who was six years older than I, attending Tulane Medical College. A college boy his age usually needed money, especially in New Orleans, and Hanson, always had something to sell me if I got my allowances from home. A week before I was to leave New Orleans for home for summer, Hanson knew I had received a check from Father for my ticket and he sent me an extra \$5.00 for my meals on the train. Hanson had a small doctor's instrument case about eighteen inches long and round, about the size of a man's forearm. It was to hold a few small instruments like scissors that doctors used. Hanson knew I would have to change cars in Montgomery for Valdosta, and he sold me on the idea of what a mess I would have with a big suitcase and said I could check my suitcase and steamer trunk straight through to Valdosta and this little case would be just the thing for me to carry my tooth brush, comb and brush and handkerchiefs, which was about all I would need. So he talked me out of \$3.00 of my \$5.00 and I bought his instrument case. I was right proud of it, didn't feel cheated at all.

Back home in Valdosta, Emma Mae and Vallie, my sisters, had arrived home from college and brought four of their college friends for a visit with them. So the six girls were being rushed by a lot of the Valdosta college boys who had returned home. On the afternoon I was to arrive from New Orleans, about 4 PM, the boys and girls were having a get-together at the Valdes, and Emma Mae suggested the bunch all meet my train to greet me home. The girls had never met me, of course, and most of the boys were older and didn't know me, so I don't know whether they thought I was their age or not. Anyway, they were all eager to meet Emma Mae's and Vallie's brother coming from New Orleans. As already stated, meeting the relatives arriving by train was a must in those days, so the six girls and their boy friends all hiked down the two blocks to the ACL station to meet me at 4 o'clock.

They were all having a lot of fun with the usual "show-off"-smart alex's boys in the group. They were up near where the hotel porters stood, enjoying their usual antics. My train car was half a block from there, and I got off with my little doctor's bag, strutting my stuff for I was proud of it. When Emma Mae and Vallie spied me with the little bag they were shocked for a moment, but pointed me out to the bunch. There he is - and they all were awaiting me very eagerly. They were laughing up their sleeves at my doctor's bag, and a little embarrassed, I think, but they welcomed me with open arms and introduced me around, and of course my sisters said something about where did you get your bag. That gave the boys a tip off and one or two said, "Why, this is Dr. Ferrell, is it?" and they all took it up from there and had a big time kidding me all the way up to the hotel two blocks away. One of the boys pretended to get sick and asked the others to call the doctor to come to his aid. Just a lot of innocent foolishness, as it didn't take much in those days to furnish amusement. I was the goat, and of course some of the hotel help entered into the laugh about my bag. Mr. Clairborne, the hotel clerk, had discovered that I hated like fury to be called, Eddie, and he would seize every opportunity to call "Eddie" so that the crowd in the lobby could hear him. I could have killed him. I detested the name Eddie, and now Mr. Clairborn jumped on the bandwagon and told me how glad he was to have "Doctor Eddie" back home again, etc. The "Doctor" stuck to me for a long time, but I could take that, but not Doctor Eddie.

Oh, well, you must agree, we had problems in the "good old days" too. (Ed Ferrell 1971)

Thank you again, Mr. Ferrell. You make the past come so vividly alive, I could see all the episodes of which you have written. Write us more stories.

Remember when ... The Valway Theatre ... or the Strand Theatre? Do you remember when the Palace Theatre was "10¢ and 15¢ anytime"? You on the "Tour" saw the Primitive Baptist Church on Central Avenue and the beautiful interior. Did you know that in April 1896, it was reported that the New Baptist church was to be built at a cost of \$16,000? That is the present church on the corner of West Central and Toombs. And longer ago than that ... the Stuart Hotel burned a total of five times, was rebuilt and remodeled each time .. the last time it was called, Stuart Hotel #5. Mr. Stuart had the post office there for a while and his daughter, Ida, was supposedly our only lady post mistress in Valdosta. She was fired because people were not receiving their mail fast enough. Ida later married a man from New York and moved away.

Come to our meeting May 31, at 8:00, and we will discuss more of the past of our Valdosta and our Lowndes County.