

Yesterday & Today



NEWSLETTER OF THE LOWNDES COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



Editor's Note

Regardless of your politics, I think it's safe to say that the recent numerous acts of political violence are tragedies and solemn reminders of how fragile existence truly is, not to mention the uncertainty of life in the modern world. Each day we draw breath, we have no way of knowing if it's one of thousands more to come or our very last.

The preservation of history has always been one way of coping with these unsettling truths, of capturing moments that would otherwise escape the collective memory. The way we go about that process differs, of course, depending on our motivations or interests. Genealogy helps our progeny understand who they are and where they came from. Documents shed light on the thinking and actions of our ancestors.

Objects, though, seem to hold special meaning. They demand that we do more than just read or write; they require us to engage all five of our senses—not to mention our personal experiences and perspectives—to fully comprehend their significance. And to ensure they'll endure, we must not only protect them from damage, but cherish and celebrate them as well.

That's what makes places like the Lowndes County Historical Society & Museum so important. Recently the Museum acquired a sword owned and used by Major Philip Coleman Pendleton during the Civil War (page 2), and through the generosity of his descendant, Mike Pendleton, M.D., it will soon be on display for viewing by members and guests alike. The Museum has also hosted multiple field trips in recent months, including a group of 8th graders from St. John the Evangelist School (page 5) who marveled at the scale of early medicine bottles as well as Gypsy the Elephant's journey from Asia. In this Lowndes County bicentennial year, we're also reminded of the two brave souls who had the foresight to save the Carnegie Library from certain demise (page 3). And without the efforts of the Sons of Confederate Veterans this past June, the Museums' beloved school bell would have remained silent (page 4).

When the world feels like it's falling apart, or we can't move beyond the inhumanity of losses that escape explanation, the study of history not only comforts but heals us. Like Major Pendleton's sword, it can slice through the noise and the grief to illuminate the lessons everything and everyone that has come before us has to teach. This fall, let us pause to remember the past, examine it with open hearts and minds, and recommit to safeguarding its legacy (lowndescountymuseum.com/membership). There can be little doubt that's what all of those who have fallen would have us do.

Amy Faeskorn

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Correction

In the June issue, volunteer Jackson Sutherland was identified as a junior at Lowndes High School. He is a senior at Valdosta High School. The editor regrets the error.

VSU Acquires McCall Architectural Collection

by Douglas R. Carlson, VSU Archivist

The Valdosta State University Archives and Special Collections is increasing its effort to bridge student learning with engagement in South Georgia historical communities.

Recently, the VSU Archives was fortunate enough to acquire a large collection of blueprints, drawings, and documents from prominent Moultrie based architect Wm. Frank McCall, Jr. He practiced in the classical tradition at his firm in Moultrie from the late fifties until his death in 1991. McCall enjoyed nationwide recognition and designed both residential and commercial properties throughout the south. Clients sought his firm for what people still reverently call "a Frank McCall house." Locations of designs in Georgia include Moultrie, Thomasville, Bainbridge, Tifton, Valdosta, Macon, Atlanta, Sea Island and St. Simon's Island.

This is a large collection and the full archival processing time by VSU students is estimated at 2-3 years. The archives will create a searchable database as well as digitize parts of the collection. It is planned to first identify and catalogue local residences.

The McCall Collection is a significant addition to the community archives initiative. As of August, The Archives and VSU students have digitized, preserved and published portions of 14 local community collections.

Lowndes County Historical Society, Quitman Brooks County

Museum, Grady County Historical Society, and Berrien County Historical Foundation are some of the participants.

Contact archives@valdosta.edu for more information.



Frank McCall

Executive Director's Corner

The museum is honored to display a remarkable artifact recently contributed by Mike Pendleton, M.D.: a Civil War sword once carried by Major Philip Coleman Pendleton. This sword is more than a relic; it is a link to a man whose influence shaped both military and civic life in South Georgia.

The sword was crafted at the Macon foundry of William J. McElroy, a New York-born artisan known for his finely etched and beautifully made blades. According to Alan Pendleton's research, Major Pendleton carried it while serving with the 50th Georgia Volunteers from March through October 1862. It later passed to Second Lieutenant (later Captain) William Frederic Pendleton, commander of Company D, the Valdosta Guards, who bore the sword until he was wounded in 1865.

After resigning from the army due to ill health, Major Pendleton devoted himself to rebuilding and serving the community. In 1867, he founded the South Georgia Times, a newspaper that grew into today's Valdosta Daily Times. That same year, he also served as agent for the Lowndes County Immigration Society, traveling to Scotland to recruit new settlers for South Georgia.

Now, after nearly a century and a half, the sword has come back to Valdosta from Pennsylvania. Its return is nothing short of a miracle.

As we reflect on treasures like this, we are reminded that our museum depends on the support of its community. Gifts—whether in the form of artifacts, documents, or financial contributions—allow us to continue preserving and sharing our history. We invite you to take part in this mission and to visit us soon to experience our 200 Years of Lowndes County exhibit in the Bird Annex. Together, we keep our story alive.

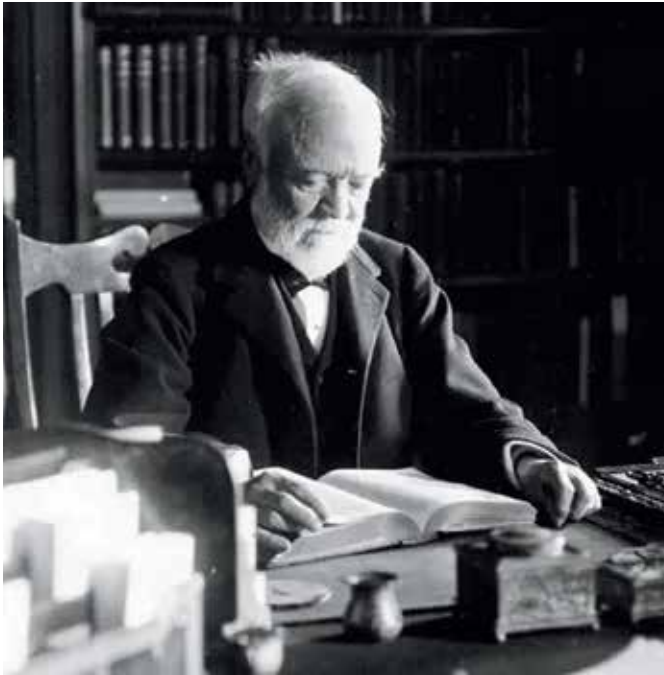
A handwritten signature in dark ink, likely belonging to the Executive Director mentioned in the text.

The Day the Lowndes County Commission Saved the Carnegie

by Ron Irwin

Happy 200th birthday, Lowndes County! Lowndes County and the Lowndes County Historical Society have deep connections. The County has owned the Carnegie Library building (now the Lowndes County Historical Society Museum) for almost 50 years.

How that came to happen is a story of courage and determination on the part of County Commissioners in 1976. In a rising tide of “out with the old and in with the new,” the Carnegie was in a bullseye.



Andrew Carnegie

The Carnegie Library was the first project for famed Valdosta architect Lloyd Greer. Constructed between 1913 and 1914 for \$40,000 (\$15,000 of which was a gift from Andrew Carnegie), it opened to the public in June 1914. A beautiful, rock-solid edifice, it served local residents until 1968. In that year, South Georgia Regional Library constructed a new headquarter library on Woodrow Wilson Drive, and the Carnegie became a branch. Over the next few years, the building encountered major problems, including water intrusion. It was closed in 1976 due to water damage to the roof and ceiling. Then the Carnegie was targeted for destruction. What happened next is told to you by the man who was the Carnegie's savior.

Botie Q. Chitty, Jr. (1928-2009) was the founder of the world-traveling vocal ensemble the Singing Americans. He also wrote a book about his life here entitled *The Valdostans*. In 2007, near the end of his life, Mr. Chitty visited Valdosta from his Atlanta home and spent time at his beloved Museum. Later that year, with encouragement from then Museum Director Donald Davis, Mr. Chitty wrote this account of the events surrounding that fateful time for the Carnegie.

“In 1976, Fred DeLoach, Norman Bennett, and I (Botie Chitty) were elected County Commissioners of Lowndes County. About that time, the city building inspector appeared before us and informed us that the old Carnegie, unoccupied, was ‘falling down,’ and he wanted to tear it down. Lloyd Greer, a master architect, designed and supervised the building, and I could not believe that it would be ‘falling down.’ I made the motion that we three inspect the site before making a decision. Fred and Norman seconded the motion.

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I called Felton Davis and asked him to meet us for the inspection. Someone called Veran 'Bubba' Blackburn, and Bill Amos, a local builder. When we all arrived at the library, I saw Bill and a fireman climbing up the ladder truck, getting up onto the roof which had an access door leading to the attic.

Felton Davis inspected the west wall that the inspector said was 'falling down', and said the wall was sound. Bill Amos got inside the attic and discovered that years earlier, someone had neglected to fully close the access door. Rain had dripped on the ceiling beam and rotted it.

At a subsequent commission meeting, we voted 3 – 0 to make repairs and later voted to let the historical society have full use of it."

Next time you're driving by the Museum, thank Mr. Chitty and Commissioners then and now—and come on in and see what almost wasn't!

Ron Irwin is Past President of the Lowndes County Historical Society.

Ding-dong!

The Sons of Confederate Veterans' Chris May and Camp 680 restore the Valdosta Institute bell to its former glory

by Renate Milner

The beloved school bell in the Museum's backyard is ringing once again, thanks to the generosity and ingenuity of Chris May, Division Commander South of the Sons of Confederate Veterans, and his local SCV Camp 680 (Col. Edmund N. Atkinson Camp).

Originally housed in the bell tower of the old Valdosta Institute school across the street on Central Avenue, the bell was installed in the Museum's backyard in 2007. For years, it was the highlight of school group visits, joyfully rung by local children as the final moment of their visit.

Two years ago, the wooden bell wheel rotted beyond use, and efforts to fix it stalled. Though multiple people were asked for help, no one was willing to take on the challenge or knew how to approach the repair. Replacement of the wheel was estimated at around \$3,500, including shipping.

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Richard Terry, John Jones, Chris May, Sheila Tucker, Mike Winters, and Avery Blanton from the Col. Edmund N. Atkinson Camp 680

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When I asked Chris for his input, he walked over to the belltower, took a look, and said without hesitation: “I can fix that.” No pause, no doubt—just a solution. Within a week, Chris had designed and built a steel lever, counterweighted and painted to match the bell housing. In late June, members of SCV Camp 680 installed the new mechanism, and the bell rang out once again.

The camp donated this project to the museum to honor the children of Valdosta and Lowndes County. The bell also plays a role in the museum’s Veterans Day ceremony each year in recognition of the end of World War I and honoring the veterans of all wars. And sometimes we ring it simply for the joy of hearing it.

This contribution is part of the SCV’s ongoing mission to serve their local communities through historic preservation, public service, and educational outreach. Camp 680 and others across the state have been involved in cemetery cleanups, monument restoration, flag placements for veterans, and partnering with schools and local organizations to promote the understanding of Southern ancestry and historical experience.

As part of their continued support, Camp 680 repainted the rusty bell cradle and tower in August, making the restoration complete.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to Chris May and SCV Camp 680 for their decades-long friendship, their generosity, and their willingness to take on this challenge with such creativity and determination.

LCHS appreciates our business and organizational members. If you have artifacts related to your company’s history in Lowndes County that you’d like to share or donate, please contact us at lchs.research@gmail.com.

From National History Day to museum regulars

Twenty years on, St. John the Evangelist teacher Pamela Rickman brings her students’ understanding of Lowndes County history to life



Rickman’s class on a field trip last spring

When Pamela Rickman’s son was in middle school back in the ’00s at St. John the Evangelist Catholic School—where she also teaches middle grade social studies—he and several of his classmates began work on a project for National History Day. An educational initiative that invites middle and high school students nationwide to conduct in-depth research on a topic of their choice and then present their findings at local events, the annual contest prompted Rickman to help her son and his fellow students seek out the Lowndes County Historical Society’s resources. “Once they found out about what we were doing, the board voted—

unbeknownst to me—to provide funding for the students so they could take their projects to the next level of the competition,” Rickman recalls.

Grateful for the show of support, Rickman soon began incorporating more Lowndes County history into her 8th grade curriculum and chaperoning regular field trips to the museum with her class; two decades later, she’s still leveraging experiential learning to ignite her students’ curiosity.

While at the museum, she makes them aware that the exhibits are not just about “this family’s ancestry” or “that civic group’s contribution” but a broader, shared past shaped by people and events well beyond the region. “I ‘loop’ with my kids, which means by the time we reach the 8th grade we’ve been together for two and a half years,” she says. “By that time I know them well and can prepare ahead of time for an interesting and engaging trip that will help them understand the bigger picture of what we’re studying.”

Gypsy the Elephant is—no surprise—a perennial favorite, and a tie-in to the 7th grade unit on Asia in the World History curriculum helps students connect the dots between the statue before them and the wider historical context that brought Gypsy to Valdosta in the first place; Rickman’s colleague in 7th grade literature also incorporates George Orwell’s essay “Shooting an Elephant” into that year’s studies. Even street signs they’ve driven past since they were young provoke unexpected learning opportunities. “Many students whose families are based at Moody enjoy knowing about our local military heroes such as William Eager and his proposed use of a modified shotgun for the U.S. Army in 1917,” says Rickman. “There’s always that a-ha moment about how Eager Road got its name!”

Rickman is still amazed by how many articles the museum makes available to its patrons, especially with regard to the New South and life in the post-industrial, Progressive Era. “The things from the Grange and the turpentine industry, equipment from the cotton mills or early fire department uniforms—it’s just so much more meaningful to kids this age when they come into contact with the actual artifacts,” she observes. With scale sometimes hard to gauge from a digital image, students are often astounded to find objects different sizes than they thought, and Rickman believes they don’t soon forget the lessons of the field trips. “When they see the labels on bottles of patent medicines they can’t believe how small the print is,” she laughs. “That’s when I know history has truly come alive for them.”

Event Calendar

Georgia Trust Fall Ramble Special Hours

Friday, Oct. 10 and Saturday, Oct. 11
11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Armistice Day Bell Ringing



Tuesday, November 11
11:00 a.m.

Gen. James Jackson Chapter DAR will honor the armistice agreement that ended World War I at the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month in 1918

Holiday Open House

Tuesday, December 16
4:00 to 6:00 p.m.



Memorials

Walter G. Altman III
Lucy R. Greene

John W. and Margaret Langdale
John W. Langdale, Jr.

Lota B. Smith
Kathi and Roy Hunnewell
J. Edward Willis

Jesse Moore
Amy Faeskorn

Wayne Hall
Jim Hathaway

Honorariums

Gerald Bailey
Amy Faeskorn



Man of Mystery

Attorney James Jarvis is asking for the Society’s help in identifying the man who appears in a portrait currently hanging in the St. John the Baptist Masonic Lodge.

Help us solve this puzzle!
milner.renate@gmail.com

How the sausage gets made—for more than 100 years



A truck from the early days

Like so many local industries founded in Valdosta, Sunset Farm Foods started in a backyard, and though it's not old enough to celebrate a bicentennial, its legacy is firmly rooted in the history of Lowndes County.

"My great-grandfather, Walter W. Carroll, bought a cow or pig from a neighboring farmer, butchered it on his property out on what's now Touchton Road, and went out and sold the meat," explains Tom Carroll, CEO of the company since 2013. "After that he began processing at the abattoir [the facility the city maintained and rented out for more sanitary slaughtering and food preservation] and it just grew from there. He and my grandfather were very enterprising people." The company was officially founded in 1918 and has been at its current location since 1934.

Over the years Sunset Farm remained family-owned, with Tom's father, James D. Carroll Jr., and uncle, Walter W. Carroll II, joining in 1965 and 1971 respectively. After Jack Knight invented the company's signature seasoning recipe in 1969, it focused exclusively on the pork sausage that's made the company a household name throughout the region. "I think what sets us apart is the flavor," Tom says. "It's deeper and more interesting than what you find in the national brands. It's a quality product that people keep coming back to."

Sunset Farm benefitted from the growth of the regional economy in the mid 20th century. "If you look back to the '50s and '60s, chain restaurants didn't operate the centralized production they do now," explains Tom, who spent some summers working for the company as a teenager. "We actually made hamburger patties for some of the area McDonalds back in those days."

After going under federal USDA inspection in 1975, the company was able to widen its distribution territory, in particular to Florida, eventually expanding to most states east of the Mississippi River. Sunset Farm has grown its sales to five times what they were when Tom took over from his father and uncle in the late '90s; today its sausages can be found in supermarkets throughout the southeast as well as most states east of the Mississippi River, and its products can also be found in military base commissaries worldwide. "We started out at Moody, then Albany. We're everywhere from Japan to Guantanamo," he says.

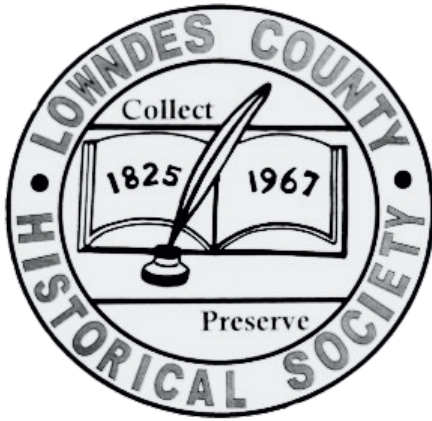
Although he retired from the company in 2012, James Jr. continued to maintain an office and came in regularly to headquarters until his passing in 2022; Tom's grandfather passed away at the age of 93 and often told the family how proud he was of their success. For the foreseeable future, the company will continue to stay in the heart of Lowndes County, contributing to the local economy and culture as it has for so long. "Since our family is from here, and has stayed here, there's never been a reason for us not to keep it in the community," Tom says. With plans to keep entering larger markets in the sector—full distribution in Publix is at the top of the list—Sunset Farm Foods will likely hold a place in Lowndes County history for many more years to come.



Jimmy Carroll, circa 1960

Renew your membership online today!

lowndescountymuseum.com/membership



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