

2022 - 75 Years the Azalea City

Permanently on the Lowndes County Historical Society website is this brief article on the “Azalea City” slogan that informs of the public debut being 1947. It mainly offers tribute to Richard J. Drexel. The Drexel information in this website article is sourced from a Valdosta Daily Times memorial editorial in 1986, and a retirement article in 1959.

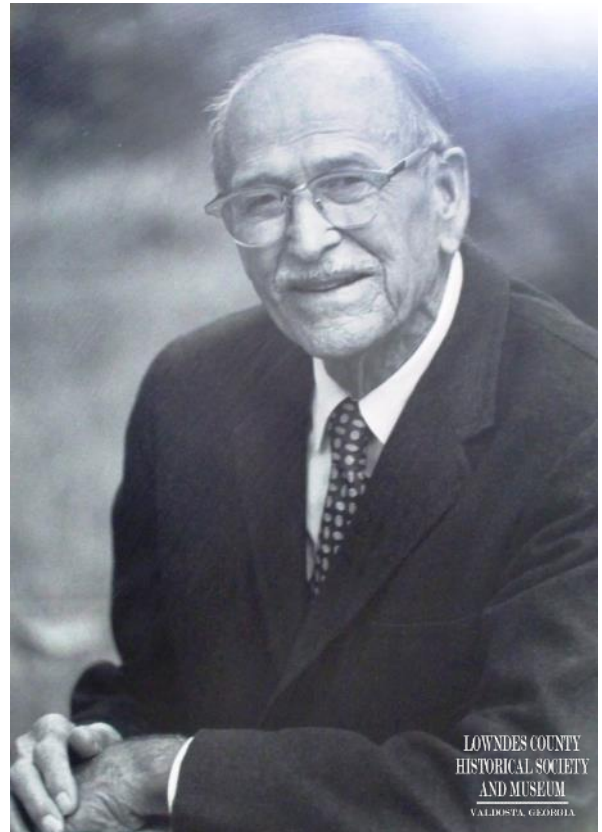
“When driving through Valdosta during the early spring one cannot help but notice the large number of azalea bushes that seem to be in bloom on almost every corner. Valdosta’s title as the Azalea City is because of one man, Richard J. Drexel.

The name may sound familiar to many in Lowndes county because Drexel Park, located on East Brookwood Drive near VSU, is named for him. Mr. Drexel, a native of Indiana, went to work for the City of Valdosta, according to the **Valdosta Daily Times**, [as] “the city parks everything— laborer, foreman, designer and supervisor.” In 1925 he began planting hundreds on public property and private land throughout the city. His first task with the City of Valdosta was to clean up the very overgrown park on the college’s land. After cleaning out the debris, underbrush, and even a moonshine still, he started planting azaleas. He planted hundreds, expanding to the college campus, Sunset Hill Cemetery, and along Patterson Street. Additionally, he gave away many extra azaleas every year to homeowners and churches in town.

Mr. Drexel also planted many of the dogwoods, crepe myrtles, and other native trees around the city. He didn’t set out to re-title Valdosta as the Azalea City, he just thought that the large, vibrantly-flowered azalea bushes looked good in town.

Richard Drexel retired in the spring of 1959 but continued to serve as a consultant and practiced landscaping privately. Upon his retirement, the city council stated in a resolution that “[Mr. Drexel] is in large measure responsible for the beauty of the city of Valdosta and its national recognition as a city of charm and floral elegance, and the improvements effected by him and his economy therein are indicative of his deep affection for the City of Valdosta.” He passed away on February 3, 1986 at a hospital in Macon, Georgia.

The title of Azalea City was not officially proposed until 1947 by the garden clubs of Valdosta.”



Richard J. Drexel

*Drexel's Planting
Made Azalea City*

Finding 1947:

Eventually, months after initial searches, a publication from 1947, the Georgia State Womans College yearbook, provided the first instance in which we found official usage of either phrase, "The City of Azaleas" or "The Azalea City." (*see images on page 3*) It was a full page in the back advertisement section of the yearbook, placed by the City of Valdosta. A similar ad was repeated in yearbooks that soon followed. This ad was "stumbled upon" while researching another topic. After finding the ad in the yearbook, emphasis could be placed on searching 1947.

When I began working at the museum in 2003, good friend Joanne Griner wondered casually as to Valdosta's beginning usage of slogan "The Azalea City" She had been the primary instigator in launching the Azalea Festival in 2001.

When I quizzed Albert Pendleton he told that the reason the slogan became so appropriate was from Richard Drexel's plantings but that he had not seen any document on the slogan's date of origin. The historical society began in 1967, so the success rate in documenting earlier events from clippings in our archives does vary.

City Directory business names using "azalea" begin in 1951 with Azalea Studios. In 1953 The Azalea City Florist appears in a directories. In 1957, the introduction to the city directory refers to Valdosta as "The Azalea City" and says, "during the spring months most every garden is ablaze with a multitude of colors blooming from almost every variety of this beautiful shrub." But we understood that 1957 would not be the first official recognition.

Between 1958 and 1961 there were no city directory references to businesses using azalea in their names. In 1962, however, the Azalea Beauty Shop opened and in 1966 there was an Azalea City Motel. The Azalea City Industrial Park announced upcoming occupants in 1968, Texture Tex and Elcona. The Azalea City Baptist Church joined the azalea listings in 1970. By 1975 there were nine "Azalea" or "Azalea City" business listings and by 1980 there were 21.

This incomplete information had to suffice at the time of the 2004 Azalea Festival as the Historical Society prepared a Kid's Page for distribution concerning the name Azalea City and azaleas. We, however, remained cognizant that spotting any earlier references to the Azalea City could answer our question as to when the designation began.



Drexel: More than Azaleas, "Palm Avenue" on the College Front Lawn

As the Azalea Festival now draws attention to our beautiful Spring and keeps the name Drexel Park in our minds, we need to remember the iconic VSU campus view that Drexel's vision gave to the city. The palm trees lining the walk from Patterson Street to West Hall were also a Drexel beautification accomplishment. The earliest photos, circa 1930, show the palms were planted as saplings. Drexel would harvest seeds, or dig up wild dogwood, magnolia, palm, etc. from the woods to be planted in town. Recognized across the state, Drexel supplied us this iconic view.

Our Community During 1946-1947 Chamber of Commerce Timeline

1946 "Prinsho Veneer started making plywood panels in August. We got our first commercial air service at this time by the National Airlines. Air Mail became a reality this year and the Wainer Brothers formed a construction company. Lowndes County joined the Alapaha Soil Conservation District. Valdosta Broadcasting, WGAF, was formed by local citizens this same year and the Elks Auxiliary and Exchange Club were begun."

1947 "Valdosta Industries No. 1 was formed to construct a 10,000 square foot building for Metal Products, a division of Thompson Industries. Littler Griffin Hospital completed new construction. The Wildcats were state champions and the Book Review Club, Hadassah Sisterhood, Shrine Auxiliary, and Amvets all formed organizations in 1947."

The *above*, from the museum archives, is a *Chamber of Commerce Timeline* printed in the **Valdosta Daily Times** in 1988.

VALDOSTA, City of Azaleas and Turpentine

Above: In 2006 the museum was donated close to 40 VHS Class scrapbooks that began in 1958. The library at the 1974 VHS was being remodeled. These are a wealth of information. With these scrapbooks were notebooks and files of loose clippings, etc. Over a period of time the above article clipping was found, it from the February 5, 1950, *Atlanta Journal Magazine*. The above is the secondary headline, the primary is larger and with color. The article is a most positive presentation of Valdosta/Lowndes, with several color photos, and is evidence of the new "Azalea" slogan being promoted around the state.

"The Georgia pine and the Florida palm 'shake hands' in Valdosta and Lowndes County."

Within the Introduction narrative to the 1947 City Directory, written by the Chamber of Commerce, the above sentence is found. It is a folksy expression that was unknown to us at the museum. We share it here that it might on occasion serve expressive purpose in promoting our community.

VALDOSTA

"THE AZALEA CITY"

(Courtesy Valdosta and Lowndes County Chamber of Commerce)

Valdosta took its name from Governor Troup's country home, "Val de Osta," which, in turn, had been named for a beautiful Italian valley. It was incorporated on Dec. 7, 1860.

Spring from a modest origin, Valdosta now is a growing young city supported by business and industry, and backed by a substantial agricultural area, with schools, colleges, churches—all contributing to the well-being and prosperity of a progressive citizenry.

Congratulations to the

1947 SENIORS

of the

Georgia State Womans College

and ...

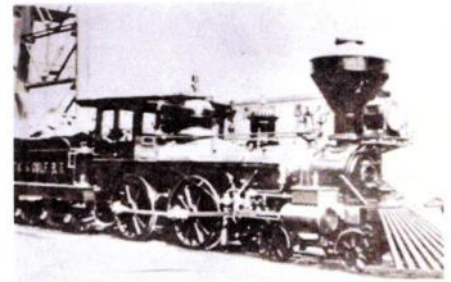
Welcome to the

UPPERCLASSMEN and FRESHMEN

"THE CITY OF AZALEAS"

welcomes the opportunity of being your home during your college days and of sharing your culture.

May your associations and your memories of our city be such that you will return after college days.



VALDOSTA SLOGANS

- 1860 No.15
- 1864 Waldo Sta.
- 1891 Gem City of the Wiregrass
- 1899 Queen City of South Georgia
- 1910 Metropolis of South Georgia
- 1917 On the National Highway
- 1925 The Beautiful Capital of Lowndes County
- 1940 The Heart of South Georgia: Where Industry and Pleasure Meet the Year Round
- 1947 The Azalea City
- 1971 There Are No Strangers in Valdosta
- 1979 Winnersville, USA
- 2006 A City Without Limits
- 2008 TitleTown USA
- 2010 Sesquicentennial Celebration

Sources: Lowndes County Historical Society

At left: The yearbook ad shown was the first listing we found that "officially" promoted the title "City of Azaleas" or "The Azalea City." In 1948 the names of officials were included.

At left above: After finding the first "Azalea" mention we found another in the Introduction narrative to the 1947 City Directory. No businesses yet showed using "Azalea" in their name.

Above: The 1947 beginning date for "The Azalea City" was found in time to be included in the Sesquicentennial list of slogans in 2010.

Albert Pendleton began the Lowndes County Historical Society Newsletters 50 Years Ago with Volume I, Number I, being published November 1971

Albert Pendleton's first newsletter began his significant recording, not only of our local history and culture, but of the development of the historical society, museum and archives.

It was a single page typed document and the entire newsletter is presented here. It immediately provides us clues to museum development. In covering the first "Open Sunday" it shows when the Patterson Street museum was ready for visitors. It only opened on Sunday afternoons with volunteers.

The society formed in 1967, with an area of the Carnegie Library basement serving as the first museum space.

The A. Griffin Estate then provided free use of the Fender home that is now the Manwell DeCoudres offices. This Fender home was next door to the Dr. Archibald Griffin Patterson Street home and had been purchased by the Griffins.

The museum would "return" to the Carnegie building in 1977 as it was a surplus property of the County when the new South Georgia Regional Library opened on Woodrow Wilson Drive.

Editor's Note: We have separated the paragraphs in the newsletter and inserted topic bars for ease of reading.

Volume I, Number I

[The First Open Sunday]

Our first "Open Sunday" at the museum was held November 7th with twelve interested visitors. Lonie and I sat down for coffee and a visit with two sisters, Mrs. Rachael (Auburn) Parrish and Mrs. Cecelia Lawson.

[Hahira Confederate Veterans]

They have a picture of Confederate veterans (Hahira) which includes their father, Lawrence Folsom Lawson, and have offered the Society a copy. Sometime soon Rachael will loan us a gramophone and records.

[Six Volumes of Pioneers of Wiregrass Georgia]

Cecelia and Rachael were interested to find their ancestors recorded in one of the Huxford volumes, of which we have six. These books cover the early families of South Georgia.

[Young People Visit Museum]

We had about six young people come and I believe they really enjoyed their visit. Go yourselves as members and help talk to these people and tell them about our exhibits and history.

[Microfilm Reader Useful though Owning no Film]

People are really interested, and they enjoy our microfilm reader, though we have no film of our own. We borrow old county and state records on film. We are ordering film and will have some of our own very soon.

[Margaret Graham: First Family History Program]

Mrs. Margaret Graham, who gave us our first family history at a meeting, said she has to go to Dr. Huxford's books for early Roberts information. Mrs. Graham's talk, about the Roberts' who live in a house older than Valdosta, was most enjoyable and is on tape at the museum. A history of the Pendleton Family will be presented next.

[Richardson Photo Collection]

Mr. Ralph Richardson came by "Open Sunday" of the 7th and was interested to see copies of some of his valued old pictures of Valdosta. He has offered to let us copy more, particularly the J. T. Roberts home on Wells Street, "With chickens in the yard."

[The Suitsus Dairy at Ashley and Bemiss]

Ralph informed us that the "Dairy Dinner," I call it, picture at Suitsus Dairy was at the location where the S & K Drive-In used to be, now an Enco Station at the point of Ashley Street and Bemiss Road. The dairy later moved out Baytree Road beyond the railroad track. (*see dinner photo page five*)

[2nd "Open Sunday" Kept by Emma & Joe Stevens]

Our second "Open Sunday" was November 14th and Emma and Joe Stevens report a dozen or more visitors. Mrs. Elwyn Dasher brought a picture of her father-in-law, John R. (Bob) Dasher, Mayor 1930 (died same year in office), adding to our growing number of pictures of city and county officials.

[Photos of Mayors and Officials]

We have the following pictures of city-county officials: P.C. Pendleton, Mayor, 1930-32, 1932-34, J.T. Roberts, 1906-1916 (5 consecutive terms), Maxwell Oliver, Mayor, 1960-62, 1962-64, Marion Bright is having a copy made of her father, Tom Converse, Mayor 1916-18. And she has other pictures to offer us.

[Edith Mixson photo donations included Golf]

Among the pictures presented by Mrs. Edith Mixson was an early Jack Oliver Tournament: J.E. (Ned) Thigpen, M.M. (Massey) Belote, J. T. Mathis, James Dasher, George H. Feagle, Maxwell Oliver, Billy Oliver, Russell Peeples, Johnny Oliver, George Converse, Winston McKey and Mr. Jack Oliver.

[Professor Lomax and Macedonia Baptist]

Prof. J. L. Lomax has promised a copy of the history of Macedonia Baptist Church that had its beginnings at Troupville. He said the church was near the site of Lowndes High School on what was the McKey Plantation.

[Albert asks for Stories of Local History]

We are continuing to tape family histories and reminiscences of local people. The Society is planning a book on family histories, pictures and local stories. It will be a contribution to the history of Lowndes County, certainly not a complete one, but a volume, with more hopefully to follow. Let us record the things you remember about old Valdosta, your family and friends, stories that should be preserved and shared by all.

[Zant Tours Shelton & Stevens at old Troupville site]

Tom Shelton reports that he and Joe Stevens were invited Monday Nov. 15th to the old Troupville site by Walter Zant of Correctional Institute, to be shown a recently



Lowndes County Historical Society, Inc. Officers and Trustees Beginning January 2022

Officers

President - John R. Bennett
1st V.P. - Ron Irwin
2nd V.P. - Mary Young Manning
Secretary - Carol Irwin
Treasurer - Ed Hightower

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Through 2024
Jennifer Schroer Altman
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Above: The photo referenced by Ralph Richardson. This early Suitsus Dairy was located between the juncture of Ashley Street and Bemiss Road. To promote the dairy industry in Lowndes County, the directors of the Chamber of Commerce dined in the milking parlor of Suitsus Dairy as guests of Jim C. Hunt circa 1919. From left: Phil Pendleton, C. R. Hawk, J. M. Ashley, J.Y. Blitch, Frank W. Webb, W.R. Strickland, John T. Mathis, J. F. McCrackin, W.H. McKey, J.C. Hunt, C.C. Brantley, E. D. King, A. F. Saunders, J. R. Dasher, P. R. Lilly, James D. Gould and Albert J. Little. Note: milking stalls on each side of the room and a bottle of milk at each place setting on the dining table. "Suitsus, it suits us."

The museum also has three different post cards of Suitus. Two are of the attractive residence and grounds. The cards variously state that the area is the Gateway to Florida, and on the National Highway, The Good Roads Route.

(continued) discovered Troupville cemetery four hundred yards up river. There was much overgrowth, evidence of old cedars, outlines of graves and a few wooden markers, but no discernable names.

[Albert Suggests an Old-Fashioned Christmas Atmosphere]

I believe we had planned to be closed on Sundays in December. But I'd like to see us have an old-fashioned Christmas atmosphere in our Museum and be open one Sunday afternoon, have scenes of the way it was, serve old-fashioned candy and cookies. This is a project for all the society and with only your approval, so this is merely a suggestion and we can talk about it on Nov. 18th at our meeting.

[Need 1905 Issues of VDT]

A request: Does anyone have copies of the June 1905 *Valdosta Daily Times* that they would loan me, ASAP? Please let me know. They are not on micro-film anywhere.

[First Attempt at a Newsletter]

This is our first attempt at a newsletter. Send us information, requests, anything we should let our members know. Next meeting, November 18th.

2021 Memberships (final)

Patricia C. Barefoot
Saint Simon's Island, GA
Julia M. Lee
Gary Minchew
Tim and Pam Oliver
Tommy J. Thomas

A gracious Thank You for supporting the Lowndes County Historical Society and Museum in 2021.

The year ends with over 400 memberships that represent 585 people

Leona Redles Pendleton passed away on November 26, 2021. She gave years of exceptional volunteer service to the Society. A few days before, on November 18, she turned age 96. We contacted her daughter Catherine in recognition of the birthday and told her about the *Dedication* below that we had just come across in preparation of this newsletter. Albert Pendleton wrote the history of Lowndes County through his newsletters, and his articles published in three volumes named *Way Back When*. In the last volume, in his humorous style, he included the following *Dedication*.

"This volume is dedicated to my wife, Lonie, always to Lonie. She has supplied me with love and encouragement, typing paper, PaperMate Liquid Paper and typing ribbons."

Valdosta Kiwanis Marks 100 Years 1922-2022



Our Community During 1922-1923 Chamber of Commerce Timeline

1922- "Valdosta High School [Williams Street] was erected that year and our college became a four year school. About then the Tarts started making barrels, everyone was talking about the need for better roads and the Chamber drove ahead for the establishment of a local tobacco market to serve area growers."

1923- "The area shipped its first commercial honey, the city spent \$1,110. for paving, and we got a tobacco warehouse and the Chamber urged the city to establish a Traffic Bureau."

The *above*, from the museum archives, is a *Chamber of Commerce Timeline* printed in the *Valdosta Daily Times* in 1988. Highlights of various years.

Photo right: Dr. Alex Alvarez, then Mayor John Gayle and 2015 club president Nearing Adams. Mayor Gayle presented them a Proclamation recognizing 100 years of Kiwanis International in 2015. Alvarez is current president, also having served in 2017-18. Dr. Harry Hamm is immediate past-president. The Mayor's father, Jack W. Gayle, Jr., was President of the Kiwanis Club in 1973-74.

Best wishes to you for a

*Merry Christmas
& Happy New Year*

from the
Trustees and Staff of the
Lowndes County Historical Society
and Museum

In the publication, *A Pictorial History of Lowndes County, Georgia 1825-1975*, Dr. Joseph A. Durrenberger wrote a synopsis article on local civic clubs, Rotary, Kiwanis, Lions, Exchange and Civitan. Dr. Durrenberger, who lived to age 102, was a Kiwanis member and president in 1937, and was also president of the Lowndes County Historical Society 1974-'75. A good portion of information in this article on Kiwanis is taken from his report.

Kiwanis International was organized in 1915 by a group of professional and business men in Detroit as a weekly luncheon club and grew rapidly in the United States and Canada. The Kiwanis Club of Valdosta was chartered January 24, 1922.

The motto of Kiwanis International is "We Build" and its stated purpose is "Service to youth, community and nation."

Locally, during the depression years of the 1930s, with no state or community school lunch program in existence, the Underprivileged Child Committee of the Valdosta Kiwanis Club became the focal point of the club's activities. Out of this grew the Kiwanis Milk Fund which, for over a period of years, provided 30,000 to 40,000 half-pints of milk annually for underprivileged children in the WPA nursery school and the city's elementary schools.

Other youth oriented activities promoted by the Valdosta Kiwanis Club included financial and manpower assistance to the Boy Scouts, Little League, Girls Club and the 4-H Clubs. Kiwanians were the guiding spirit in the movement to build a permanent 4-H camp at Twin Lakes.

In 1926 the club began furnishing school books for about 200 children in the public schools, and this work continued until 1937 when the State of Georgia adopted a free school book system. Other early activities were helping establish a Soft Ball League in Valdosta and in 1934 the School Boys Patrol.

Kiwanis was early in youth leadership participation in the formation of Key Clubs in high schools and Circle K on college campuses. Valdosta Kiwanis Club was the local sponsor/supporter of the Star Student program at Valdosta High School. The group has participated in various community fund raisers and charities.

Records show that in early years Kiwanis met at the Valdes Hotel restaurant. Later for many years they met at the Ashley Oaks Restaurant, it and the adjoining motel complex owned by James M. Beck, a Kiwanis member, and former mayor and state senator.





MEMORIALS



**Joyce Ferdinand
'Fred' Anderson, Sr.**

by
Donald O. Davis
Mary D. Gray
J. Edward Willis

Walton Thomas Carter, Jr.

by
Margot Pearlman

Dr. Frank Thomas Corker

by
Margot Pearlman

**Thomas A. 'Tom' Davis
Tavares, FL**

by
Charles and Letty Allen

**Robert Owens
'Bob' DeCesare, Sr.**

by
Charles and Letty Allen

David Drumheller

by
Margaret E. Langdale
East Palatka, FL

Marie Sirmans Giddens

by
Mary D. Gray

Carroll Edward Hightower, Sr.

by
Donald O. Davis
The Valdosta Heritage Foundation

Ann Kirby Lackey

by
Mary D. Gray
J. Edward Willis

Gretchen Burnette McCoy

by
Margaret E. Langdale
East Palatka, FL

John Thomas McTier, Jr.

by
Mary D. Gray
Alfred C. Willis, Ph.D.
J. Edward Willis
Dr. and Mrs. Owen K. Youles

William Daniel 'Dan' Parris, Jr.

by
Dean N. Brooks

Leona Redles Pendleton

by
Donald O. Davis
J. Edward Willis
The Valdosta Heritage Foundation
The RBL Barn Family,
Amanda Morris
Perry Morris
Justin and Laurie Roberts
Bret and Heather Rogers
Chad and Jennifer Schneider
Brandy Stone

Nell Patten Rocquemore

Lakeland, GA
by
Dean N. Brooks

Susan Elizabeth Shingler

by
Margot Pearlman

Bonnie Maxwell Sorenson

by
Dean N. Brooks
Donald O. Davis

Richard M. 'Dick' Stewart, Sr.

by
J. Edward Willis

General (USAF Ret.)

William Troy Tolbert

by
Dr. and Mrs. Owen K. Youles

Leonard Ronald 'Ron' Wall

Leesville, SC
by
Donald O. Davis
Margaret E. Langdale
East Palatka, FL
T. Davy and Susan Shelton

**The Lowndes County
Historical Society
& Museum**

*Gratefully acknowledge
A Gift*

**In Honor of
James Keith Blevins**

by
T. Davy and Susan Shelton

**The Lowndes County
Historical Society
& Museum**

*Gratefully Acknowledge
A Gift from*

The Barnes Foundation

**The Barnes Families
Charles Wesley Barnes, IV**

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Historical Society
& Museum**

*Gratefully Acknowledge
A Gift from*

**The Loyce and Annette Howell
Turner Foundation**

**In Memory
Dr. Loyce and Annette H. Turner**

**The Lowndes County
Historical Society
& Museum**

*Gratefully acknowledge
A Gift from*

**The Lynn Pippenger Foundation
of Raymond James Charities**

**Lynn Pippenger
Largo, Florida**

**2022 Membership Application,
Lowndes County Historical Society, P.O. Box 56, Valdosta, GA 31603**

Membership Category

Name _____
Address _____
Telephone _____
Email _____

Individual \$25. ____
Family 30. ____
Business 25/50. ____
Contributing 100. ____
Patron 250. ____

MUSEUM CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Officers and Executive Committee

Interim President and 1st Vice President, Sally S. Kurrie; 2nd Vice President, Mary Young Manning; Secretary, Carol Irwin; Treasurer, Ed Hightower; Ron Irwin, John Reid Bennett; Past President, Patsy Giles (in memory)

January thru March 2022..... Annual Membership Drive

December 23—January 4..... Annual Museum Closing

Contact by the emails below or phone if necessary during annual closure

December Exhibit..... Jingle Bells Christmas Tree and History

January 20 (card will confirm)..... Membership Meeting in Annex

March 30-31..... Cabin Fever Classic Car Club in Annex (1915 and before)

The museum is open to researchers. The County is beginning renovations on the Carnegie building. Many exhibits have been removed for protection. and museum entrances may become restricted.

Lowndes County Historical Society & Museum

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P.O. Box 56 Valdosta, GA 31603
(229) 247-4780

Fax: (229) 247-2840

E-mail: research.lchs@gmail.com & ddavis.lchs@gmail.com

Web page:

<http://www.valdostamuseum.com>

YESTERDAY & TODAY

Newsletter of

Lowndes County Historical Society

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Executive Director.

Amy Brown

Textiles Curator and Research.

Harry S. Evans

Special Collections and Research

Renate K. Milner

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