



## 100 Years Ago: An Eventful Day in Downtown Valdosta

### HENRY FORD, AUTO KING, WAS IN VALDOSTA TODAY



Mr. Henry Ford, of Dearborn, Michigan, inventor of the Ford cars, president of the Ford corporation, alleged to be the richest man in the world- a citizen who “walks with kings nor loses the common touch”-spent last night and Thursday morning in Valdosta. *Valdosta Times*

**After 99 Years:** During Covid the museum received what was discovered to be unique surviving newspapers from 1923 and 1920, plus Wild Land Tax Ledgers. The 1923 and 1920 *Valdosta Times*, exist no where else, not electronically and not even on microfilm. The full year binders did not exist for microfilming projects several decades ago. These 1923 papers are Saturday issues only, meaning they were saved by a County office for the Legals. The Saturday paper repeated full or partial articles from during the week. Thus finally, after 99 years you could say, we now have the fascinating local report of Henry Ford in Valdosta. The **Saturday, April 7, 1923** paper reprinted at least a good portion of the **Thursday, April 5, 1923** article.

He later went with Mr. V. Blackburn over to Blackburn’s Studio and spent about a half hour, during which time a dozen sittings of the multi-millionaire manufacturer were made. Mr. Ford asked Mr. Blackburn to send him proofs of the photographs so that he might select some of them. *Valdosta Times*

A great many people gathered to get a look at Mr. Ford, and many of them were introduced to him. He wore a light gray suit of clothes with a black derby hat. He is small of stature, sharp face and brownish grey eyes, and walks briskly. *Valdosta Times*

The Henry Ford 1923 Valdosta portrait by Blackburn is at *left*. In relation to Henry Ford’s drive around Valdosta that is *mentioned below*: Ashley Hall at VSU, joining the earlier Converse and West Halls, had been built in 1921, and in 1922, the Williams Street Valdosta High School. Some buildings not yet constructed were the Daniel Ashley Hotel and Ritz Theater, both 1926, and also the 1925 Coca Cola Building on Savannah Avenue.

**Note:** The “dotted-line style” text boxes in this newsletter each contain segments of the **Valdosta Times** article **April 7, 1923**

He drove about Valdosta some while here and declared that it is the best-looking town to its size **he has seen. “All you need is more good roads and to advertise your advantages.”** *Valdosta Times*



LOWNDES COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY AND MUSEUM  
COLUMBIAN, GEORGIA

**The Ford Dealership, West Motor Company,** appears to be the location where most of the interaction with Henry Ford occurred. The business address was 123-129 West Central Avenue, now Laws Furniture.

The owner in 1923 was W. S. West Jr., age 21, son of the late U.S. Senator who built the Crescent, W. S. West, Sr. The father was age 50 when his one child was born. West, Jr. was fourteen when his father died. West, Jr., could have led or advised Henry Ford's automobile tour of the town.

**Photo left upper:** West Motor Company, Jared B. Johnson, Jerry McRee, Zaida Brown, Arthur Paramor (5 people, 4 names) The framed photo above the wall case is an earlier image of Henry Ford.

**Photo left center:** West Motor Company, W.S. West, Jr. and driver Tom Young Ashley. **Note:** If you know the car year and model, please inform us.

**Photo page bottom:** Current Laws Furniture, West Motor Company in 1923.

**Photo below:** 108 W. Central Avenue, Blackburn Studio was on the right side, now part of the First United Methodist campus. This building is immediately west of the alley, and Mo's Mediterranean Table, formerly the King's Grill location. The paper reports that Blackburn invited Ford to step across the street for his photo session.



He and his chauffeur came in from Ft. Myers, Fla., in a Lincoln car. Mr. Ford was traveling In Cognito, or, rather, he did not register at the hotel where he stopped, as he was trying to avoid the crowds which usually flock to see him. *Valdosta Times*

He later went to the Ford Agency here and quite a number of local citizens gathered about him to hear him talk. Introductions were so rapid, however, that he did not have time to say much, beyond the greetings of those who came to see him and meet him. He posed for a kodak picture which was snapped by Mr. M. A. York, of the Mackey Jewelry Company. He was in the center of a group of Ford employees. *Valdosta Times*

When told that this section would back him to the man for the presidency, he replied, "I wish they would stop that; I have a job now that takes all of my time and energy." *Valdosta Times*

**BELOW: In Valdosta, Georgia.  
On West Central Avenue.  
Henry Ford Publicly Shares A  
Surprising Observation Concerning  
John D. Rockefeller**

Mr. Ford has been in Florida [Ft. Myers] two weeks. He says that he had never seen John D. Rockefeller until a few days ago when he drove over to the Rockefeller place on the East Coast. He was pleased with the oil king, whom he says is much better looking than his pictures make him appear. *Valdosta Times*

John D. Rockefeller, 1839– 1937, was called the world's first billionaire. Henry Ford's seeing Rockefeller for the first time, this at Daytona (Ormond Beach), was a part of this 1923 automobile trip out of South Florida. Two days later it included his overnight stay in Valdosta on April 4. **Editor's Note:** We opted to not include a photograph of 83 year old John Rockefeller in this newsletter.

The advertisements *below* are taken from April 1923 issues of the *Valdosta Daily Times*. The 1923 *VDT* issues at the museum are unique surviving documents, not scanned, not microfilmed. Henry Ford visited West Motor Co., Ford Dealership, the morning of April 5, 1923, The *Times* article ran the same afternoon. These two ads appear in the *VDT* later in April 1923.



**Mr. Ford  
Owner**

Do you always use GENUINE FORD PARTS in your car or truck? It pays. We have just received a—

**Solid Carload of Genuine Ford Parts**

and can supply any part needed. This is the first car load of automobile parts ever received in Valdosta.

Insist that your Repair Man use nothing but GENUINE FORD PARTS. He can get them.

Our Repair Shop is equipped for doing any kind of repair work on Ford Cars and Tractors according to the requirements of the Ford Motor Company.

**First-Class Mechanics — Expert Workmanship**

Regardless of whether we do your repair work, always use GENUINE FORD PARTS.


**WEST MOTOR COMPANY**  
AUTHORIZED DEALERS

Lincoln *Ford* Fordson

**CARS—TRUCKS—TRACTORS**

West Central Avenue Valdosta, Ga.

LOWNDEN COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY AND MUSEUM  
VALDOSTA, GEORGIA



**TRUCK BODIES**

We have just received a car load of bodies and cabs for the Ford one-ton truck. These bodies are all substantially made and are very durable. Several styles in stock suitable for various uses.

The cabs are well upholstered, with ventilating windshield, adjustable to any position, and add materially to the appearance of the truck and the comfort of the driver.

It will be a pleasure to show them.

We also have in stock a few Ford trucks.

LOWNDEN COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY AND MUSEUM  
VALDOSTA, GEORGIA

**WEST MOTOR CO.**  
Authorized Dealers

LINCOLN *FORD* FORDSON

**CARS—TRUCKS—TRACTORS**  
**PARTS—REPAIRS—TIRES—ACCESSORIES**

WEST CENTRAL AVE., VALDOSTA, GA.

## AXE WAS WIDELY REPORTED

It was surprising to see how many newspapers would report Henry Ford's comings and goings. This trip was from Ft. Myers, over to Ft. Pierce; up to Daytona Beach and then down to the new Angebilt Hotel in Orlando; then to White Springs/ Genoa and on to Valdosta. In Valdosta was the first interaction with community, although a public visit had not been planned.

The current occupant of the W. H. Briggs location at 129 N. Patterson Street is R.I.S.E. A Real Estate Company

It was not known that he was in the city until Thursday morning when he went into the Briggs Hardware store to buy an axe and a handle fitted into it.

*Valdosta Times*

## W. H. BRIGGS HARDWARE COMPANY

In every trade center there are certain commercial establishments whose importance and high character constitute them as an essential part and element of the community in which they are located. This is especially true of staple lines like hardware and such a concern is the W. H. Briggs Hardware Company of Valdosta. This is the oldest business house in the city, in fact, probably the oldest established enterprise in South Georgia. It was established away back in 1856, and for many years has been the recognized leader in its line in this part of the state. They carry an exceptionally complete and up-to-date stock of hardware, implements, tools, stoves, ranges, household necessities, turpentine tools and supplies, American wire fence, plumbing supplies, pipe, pipe fittings, hay wire, barb wire, wire nails, sash, doors, builders' hardware, etc. Their main salesrooms which are located at 129 N. Patterson St., and 124-130 N. Ashley St., contain a total area of some 20,000 square feet of floor space and they also have a warehouse on the tracks of the Georgia & Florida Railway which contains about 5,000 square feet of floor space. They transact both wholesale and retail business and do business over a large and prosperous territory. By purchasing stock in immense quantities direct from the best manufactures and handling a large volume of business at a minimum of expense, they are in a position to offer as low prices on high grade goods as any house of a similar nature anywhere in this section of the country. In connection with these remarks it is but fair to say that the W. H. Briggs Hardware Company has been a good booster for Valdosta. It is the class of store that attracts trade to the city from the surrounding counties and by adhering to absolute square dealing with all mankind they have built up a patronage of which the management has every reason to feel proud and which makes the firm the recognized leader in its line in its town and field.

The officer of this company are C. C. Jones, President and Treasurer and E. C. Ball, Secretary. They are among our leading financial citizens and business men, stand high in all circles and have contributed both time and money toward the upbuilding of the city and county.

While the clerk was waiting on him Mr. Ford was looking at some kegs of various sizes and incidentally remarked that they would be the very thing to put "shine in." He did not want a keg, however. *Valdosta Times*

*At left:* The interesting article on Briggs Hardware is from a 40 page, 1926 publication in our archives titled *Valdosta. Ga. Up-To-Date*, it a unique surviving document covering dozens of businesses. W. H. Briggs Hardware is recorded as beginning in 1856. That would be in Troupville before the establishment of Valdosta in 1860. The Briggs Hardware business is listed up to ca. 1930. The Ashley Street addresses began being occupied by Roddey Hardware, beginning in 1942, and were so for many years until Roddey moved to Northside Drive.



**William Henry Briggs 1836-1910**

Hightower Collection, LCHS Archives



**In 1923 an Axe,  
in 2023 many Axes**

In researching for this newsletter, to our great surprise, we found that the Skoll Axe Throwing venue occupies a same address as W.H. Briggs Hardware. Briggs Hardware occupied 129 N. Patterson and on N. Ashley Street four addresses; 124,126,128 & 130. 128 is Skoll and 130 now used for the 2nd floor.

**Henry Ford's  
Downtown Valdosta Axe  
W. H. Briggs Hardware**

It seems Henry Ford's purposed activity for Thursday morning in Valdosta was to purchase an axe, it from Briggs Hardware, and garden seeds, these at another business.

Later that day he would join his wife and group in Albany as they were coming up from Ft. Myers in the Ford private rail car, Fairlane. Headed north, near Rome, Georgia they would make their first on-campus visit to Berry College.

Once in the past, Martha Berry had asked Ford to support the school, her main hope to provide education for poor mountain children/youth.

Ford, weary from unceasing incessant financial requests, reached into his pocket and gave her a dime.

She made a great positive of the gift, bought peanuts, planted and replanted from those the dime had supplied, making financial gain for the school. From her ingenuity and honest diligence, the Fords began significantly supporting the Martha Berry school.

Valdosta was the last private public chance for Ford to easily make a purchase. He purposed to purchase the axe and seeds first thing in Valdosta that Thursday morning. Perhaps this came to him as a late idea to be a thoughtful gift to present to Martha Berry, symbolic of her breaking the ground and planting seeds.

In checking, the Berry archives, for the 1923 visit, only note the donation of the large planned gifts, trucks and tractors.

So we have a question mark in confirming if Henry Ford's Valdosta purchases were a special symbolic gift to Martha Berry. But if not to her, to whom and where?

Martha Berry was so well thought of that US27 in Georgia, from Tennessee to Florida, is designated the Martha Berry Highway.

*At left upper:* Logo for Skoll Axe Throwing in downtown Valdosta. *Left Middle:* An ad from a 1919 *Valdosta Times*. *Left lower:* From *The Sunday [Florida] Times-Union and Citizen*, October 22, 1899. Special Valdosta Exposition issue celebrating the completion of the Atlantic, Valdosta and Western RR from Jacksonville to Valdosta, it was soon purchased by the GS&F.

**SOME OF OUR SPECIALS:**

Collins Broad Axes  
 Kelly Club Axes  
 Rixford Club Axes  
 Council Hacks  
 Rixford Turpentine Axes

**W. H. BRIGGS HARDWARE COMPANY**

VALDOSTA, Wholesale and Retail GEORGIA

THE SUNDAY TIMES-UNION AND CITIZEN, SUNDAY, OCTOBER 22, 1899.

**W. H. BRIGGS' SON, THE LEADING HARDWARE DEALER**  
 OF THE TURPENTINE SECTION.

Buys by the Trainload  
 BUYS WITH CASH,  
 and Gives Customers the Benefits of Discounts and Savings in Freight.



Sole Agent in the South FOR THE CELEBRATED **RIXFORD AX,** Warranted the Best Ax in the World.

The Herringbone Twilled Brass Cloth, Glue, Batting, Coopers' Tools.

If there is anything in the way of **TURPENTINE AND MILL SUPPLIES**

in hardware that he does not carry, it is because he does not know it, and he knows his business. Mr. Briggs will have an exhibit at the Exposition, and a easy manner, where he will be glad to receive and entertain his customers. The order book will also be handy. He invites the trade to visit him there.

**This locomotive information was unknown to us until 2019:** The ever-thinking Henry Ford was probably already planning on having a locomotive at his museum from the era of Thomas Edison's youth, or perhaps could the Valdosta Bray locomotive have accelerated or begun his planning process for an 1850s locomotive?

**2019:** At a Golfing function/ reunion for Kevin Klepper, Chadd Mathis told Donald Davis that he had seen the LCHS newsletter (April 2016) about finally identifying the Valdosta Henry Ford photo. Chadd worked for Billy Peeples a few years after college in property management. He shared the story that "Mr. Billy" had told him that Henry Ford once made inquiry about purchasing the locomotive at Bray's. Chadd shared that Ford was told they would just keep the old locomotive for the children to play on.

This seemed a somewhat strange an-

swer but later circumstances would provide the answer. With no *Valdosta Times* to search, Harry Evans, searching in the Thomasville paper on another local topic, came across the 1922 article of a devastating fire at Bray's Mill which included the locomotive which was left heavily damaged and no longer useable. We had not known of the fire, Now the 2019 conversation with Chadd Mathis fit the story. (**Bray locomotive photo below**)

**1922-** The Bray 1850s era locomotive rendered unusable after fire at plant.

**1923-** Henry Ford happens to overnight

in Valdosta in an automobile trip out of South Florida. One would think this Valdosta stop perhaps provided Ford the opportunity to learn about the existence of Bray locomotive and the story behind it.

**1924-** Henry Ford purchases the Satilla #3 from a lumber yard in Savannah. The Satilla #3 is recorded as the first locomotive to bring passengers to Valdosta in 1860.

**1929-** The Satilla #3, once renamed the Sam Hill, then The President, carried President Herbert Hoover, Thomas Alva Edison and Henry Ford on a ceremonial ride at the Grand Opening of the Dearborn museum.



His unexpected drop-down on Valdosta turned out to be a pleasant break in his journey northward, and he did not conceal the fact that he was enjoying the curious greeting with which he was received. *Valdosta Times*

**TheHenryFord:** With the 100th year of Henry Ford's eventful day in Valdosta coming soon, we decided to hopefully contact someone at TheHenryFord museum in Dearborn, this proved quite a research task of its own. We were finally able to leave a phone message with The Curator of Transportation, Matt Anderson. He returned the call and sent the casual correspondence email *below* to confirm information. Henry Ford came to Valdosta on his own in 1923 with the chauffer. Without Ford's secretary on the trip it is realized that these events are basically unrecorded history.

**Below: Email from Matt Anderson, Curator of Transportation, TheHenryFord, Dearborn, Michigan**

"Thank you for these great resources! It's going to take me a bit to digest the information, but I can tell at a glance that it's terrific. After our call I went searching through our database to see if we had a copy of the Valdosta portrait. We do have one- though I suspect there may be other copies floating around here, given how much Henry seemed to like it. It's fantastic to have the backstory behind the photo.

You probably know that in addition to the Satilla locomotive, we have the Fair Lane railcar in our collection. I mention this because our archives contains a fairly complete listing of transport fees incurred during the car's travels with Henry. There's an entry for a charge of \$1,612.83, dated March 21, 1923, for moving the car from Detroit to Ft. Myers. That list also includes subsequent charges for storing the car at Ft. Myers (\$198.03), and for storing it at Washington Union Station (\$3.60). It all matches with the story exactly as described in your newsletter. [March 2016 issue]

Again, thank you for forwarding the newsletter and the photos. I'll be sure to put copies in the files for Satilla and Fair Lane. When we get our copy of the Valdosta portrait published online. I'll have a great little story to tell with it."

# Memorials

**Molly Huckaby Hardy**

by  
Janet B. Scott

**Rachael Salter Hastings**

by  
Van and Dot Hastings

**Ralph Hendrix**

by  
Sara Hendrix

**Mr. & Mrs. T. N. Holcombe, Jr.**

by  
Ginger H. Dees  
Guyton, GA

**Angela Griffin Hughes**

by  
Densol Griffin

**Martha W. McKey**

by  
Ida Little  
Hawthorne, Florida

**Christie L. Patterson**

by  
Suellen Patterson  
Athens, GA

**Ed Puckett**

by  
Pat S. Miller  
Lakeland, GA

**Kathryn Burgsteiner Stevens**

by  
Wade and Pam Stevens Bell  
Amelia City, FL

**Alex Williams**

by  
Ben and Carol Smith

**Nathaniel S. Williams**

by  
Frank C. Williams  
Wetumpka, AL  
Roxanne W. Brown

**A Generous Memorial  
Donation**

by  
**Wm. Otis & Beverly Fletcher**

**Recognizing  
Teammates, Classmates & Friends**

**Mary Alice Dowdy**

**Archie Griffin**

**Jimmy Carroll**

**Wally Colson**

**Kenny Howell**

**Greg Tucker**

**Joe Fletcher**

**Tony Fletcher**

**Ben Stanaland**

**Bozey Thomas**

**Gene Bennett**

**Thomas Johnson**

**Robert Johnson**

**James Dean**

**Kenny Wells**

**Leland Stephenson**

## **Lore of Lowndes: The Henry Ford Valdosta Visit.**

Soon the restorations of the 1905 Lowndes County Courthouse and the 1906, The McKey, now a boutique hotel, will be completed. Visitors, tourists and technology gamers will find points of downtown history a part of their Valdosta experience. The two previous newsletters also covered downtown lore. Much of the 100 Year Ford information is "new history" and further awakens W. Central Avenue as an area with historical stories. We just received items from The Bell House, another story.

Lowndes County  
Historical Society



**Membership Meeting & Program**  
*Museum Updates and Events, What's New?*

**Thursday March 23, 2023 at 4:00 PM**  
*At the Bird Building Annex, Briggs Street Entrances*  
**Refreshments**

Please RSVP to:  
**229-247-4780 or ddavis.lchs@gmail.com**  
Non-members are welcome at the function

**The Lowndes County  
Historical Society**

**Gratefully announces  
the Donation of**

**A Legacy Gift**  
by  
**Helen Preston Tapp**  
Atlanta, GA

**Gift in Recognition  
of the**

**The Lowndes County  
Historical Society & Museum**  
*for efforts in Preservation of  
Local & Family History*

by  
**Lynn Pippenger**  
**The Lynn Pippenger Foundation**  
of Raymond James, Inc.  
Tampa, FL

### Museum Calendar of Events

#### Officers and Executive Committee

**President, John Reid Bennett; 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President, Ron Irwin; 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President, Mary Young Manning; Secretary, Carol M. Irwin; Treasurer, Ed Hightower; Past President, Ex Officio, Sally S. Kurrie**

- January –March 2023..... Annual Membership Drive
- March 3.....74th Squadron Vietnam Vets, Wives Program at Museum
- March 10-12 ..... Azalea Festival
- March 16.....Program for Garden Center, Inc. Luncheon
- March 16..... Trustees Meeting
- March 23.....Society Meeting and Program
- April 4,5.....100 Years: Henry Ford’s Productive Day in Valdosta
- April 7-9 .....Good Friday, Easter
- April 13-15..... Bluesberry Festival Downtown Valdosta
- May 4..... Program for VHF Dinner, The McKey and the McKeys
- May 13.....Museum Upper Gallery, Lloyd Greer Tour of Homes by VHF
- May 29 .....Memorial Day Weekend

### Lowndes County Historical Society & Museum

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### Yesterday & Today

Newsletter of  
**Lowndes County Historical Society**

**Newsletter Editor**  
Donald O. Davis

**Museum Staff**  
Donald O. Davis  
Executive Director.

Harry S. Evans  
Special Collections and Research

Amy Brown  
Textile Curator

Renate K. Milner  
Archives and Exhibits Volunteer

Jeremy Petrella  
Exhibits Volunteer

Vickie Everitte  
Museum Volunteer

Yesterday & Today  
is a trademark of the

**Program &  
 Meeting  
 Thursday,  
 March 23  
 Notice inside**

Return Service Requested

Lowndes County Historical Society  
 P. O. Box 56  
 Valdosta, Georgia 31603-0056

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 PAID  
 Valdosta GA  
 PERMIT 13