

Letter to the Editor

Valdosta Daily Times, November 16, 1988

Valdosta's Name

This letter to the editor stated similar information. Lee Bradley wrote this letter in response to an article printed on October 23, 1988 in a series on "History of Lowndes County." A portion of Bradley's letter reads:

Val d'Aosta, in Italy, for which Governor Troup named his Laurens County plantation, does NOT mean "Vale of Beauty." Fifteen years ago, I researched the origin of the Italian city and region and found that the Latin name was Augusta Praetoria Salassorum.

Concerning Valdosta's mistranslation Bradley wrote, "No one seems to be able to document the reason for the original error."



*VSC Professor
Lee Bradley
In the
1977 Pinecone
Yearbook*

Letter to the Editor

Valdosta Daily Times July 25, 1973

About Our Unique Name

Sir:

I noticed in a column of several days ago the statement that the name of Valdosta means "Vale of Beauty." While no one can deny the fact that this city is indeed beautiful and a wonderful spot to live and work, I am afraid that the etymology of the name of Valdosta does not support this long-popular local translation.

We all know that Valdosta was named for Governor Troup's estate, Val d'Aosta, which, in turn, took its name from a valley and town in the Italian Piedmont, Aosta.

Now the problem lies in knowing the meaning of the Italian name for the town, Augusta Praetoria Salisorum. This town was, as the name implies, established by Augustus Caesar for the veterans of his Praetorian Guard as a reward for their victory over the native tribe the Salassi. The word Aosta, then, simply refers to the emperor Augustus.

In light on these facts, the name Valdosta loses its romanticized translation but gains through its contacts with Roman history, and the city can claim to share the beauty of the Italian region from which we take the very unusual and perhaps unique name of Valdosta.

C. Lee Bradley,
Assistant Professor of Modern Foreign Language
Valdosta State College

Lee Bradley waited twenty years to respond again to the 'Vale of Beauty' translation error. Because there had been recurring references to the phrase he came to the museum in April 2008 and asked me if I was telling people that Valdosta meant 'Vale of Beauty.' I said "No", knowing that it means Valley of Augustus or valley of the town of Augustus. I did ask Lee Bradley how Augustus became Aosta and he explained. Realizing that I would not correctly remember his explanation, I asked that he put it in writing, and he did so, dated May 13, 2008:

Romance Language morphology (the study of word formation) shows that Latin words and names with the intervocalic (between vowels) "g" lost that "g," as is seen in the comparison of the English name of the month August and the French name "août." (the circumflex mark indicates that an "s" has also been dropped from "aoust.")

Similarly, the name of the town Augusta, with a shift of the "u" to an "o" and the loss of the "g" became Aosta in modern Italian.

In the museum archives the phrase is found used in 1966 when the American Business Women's Club designated their local group as The Vale of Beauty Chapter of the national organization.

MEMORIALS

Dr. Joseph Harrison Brannen

by
Hank and Claire S. Lee

David Varnedoe Fender, Jr.

by
Donald O. Davis

Felton Davis, Jr.

by
Hank and Claire S. Lee

Lynette Mobley McClain

by
Mr. and Mrs. William H. Mobley, IV

Ruth Tullis Morrison

by
Mr. and Mrs. J. Edward Willis

The newspaper abstract below confirms that the name Valdosta was known in the state of Georgia because of the Troup plantation. Notices of his death were addressed from Valdosta, Laurens County.

ANOTHER DISTINGUISHED MAN HAS FALLEN

from *Milledgeville, Georgia, Newspaper Clippings*
(*Southern Recorder*)
Volume IX, 1853 – 1856
by Tad Evans

Gov. George Michael Troup died on the 26th ultimo, in the 76th year of his age. A friend writes us as follows:

Valdosta, Laurens County, April 30th, 1856.

Dear Sir; I regret to inform you that Governor Troup died last Saturday night while on a visit to one of his plantations in Montgomery County. He was sick only four or five days. His disease was hemorrhage of the lungs. His remains were followed to their last resting place by 100 or 150 citizens of Montgomery, who hastily assembled to pay the last sad rites of burial. He was buried by the side of his brother, The Hon. Robert L. Troup, of Montgomery. Knowing the long personal friendship which the deceased cherished for you is my apology for troubling you with these lines.

Note: Milledgeville was the State Capitol in 1856.

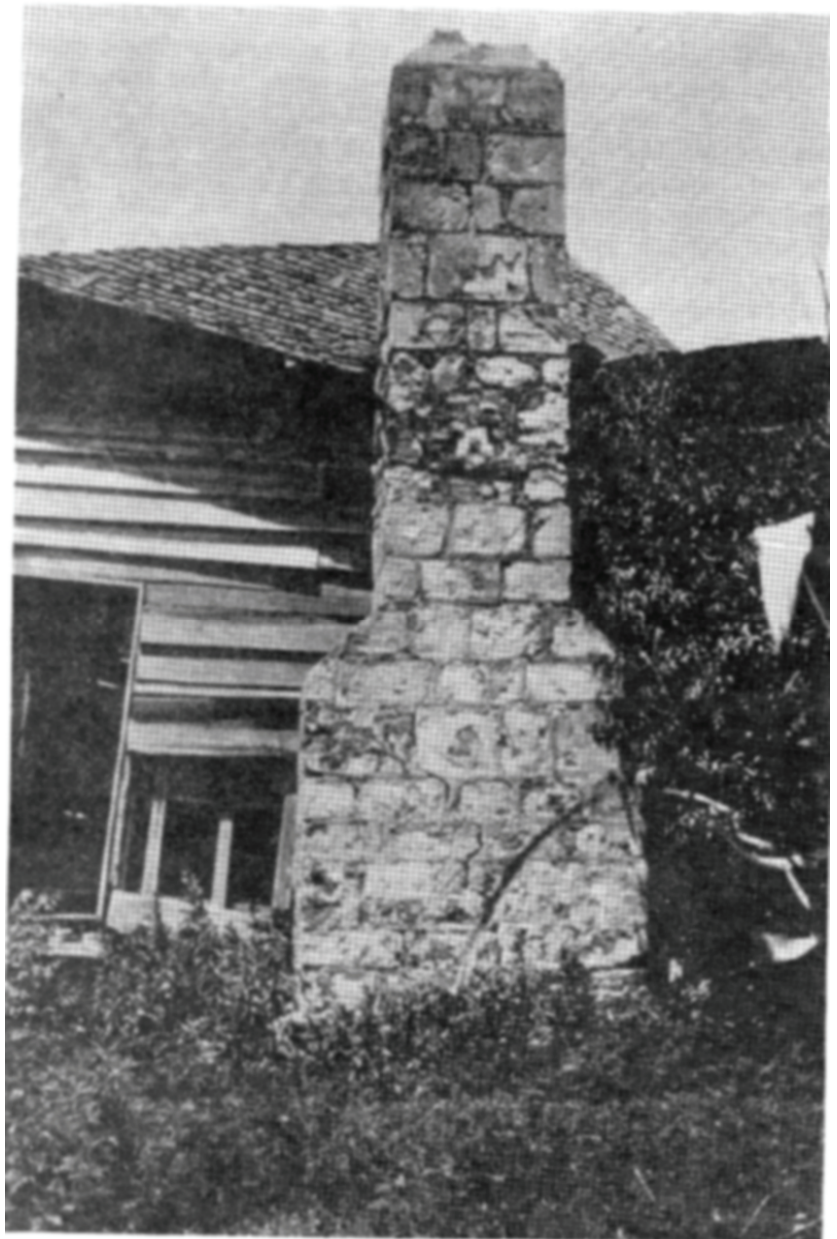
The Valle d'Aosta

Valdosta's Namesake

By Jerah Johnson

Professor of History, University of New Orleans (now retired)

This article was first printed in the May 1987 issue of the LCHS newsletter. I spoke with Dr. Johnson a few weeks ago and he said it would be fine to reprint his article. He has Wisenbaker and Lane kinship ties to Lowndes County and maintains contact with Harold and Marion (Lovie) Godwin Gulliver. Dr. Johnson discovered the photograph below. It shows the remains of the 'ballroom' of Governor George M. Troup's 'Valdosta' Plantation as they appeared in 1900. High up on the sandstone chimney can be seen the Governor's initials and the date 1852. *continued on page 3*



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The Valle d'Aosta Valdosta's Namesake

by

Jerah Johnson

Professor of History at the University of New Orleans

Valdosta, or Val d'Aosta as its owner sometimes spelled it, was, for a quarter of a century, the home of Governor George M. Troup, during which time it became ... the most famous plantation in Georgia Typical of Georgia planters houses of the ante-bellum period, "Valdosta" was no grand, white-columned mansion, but a simple, sixroom, log house with an open "dog-trot" hallway and mud chimneys.

The only thing exceptional, or in any wise elegant, about it was that in order to provide a "ballroom," Governor Troup in 1852 added to it a large frame room with a hipped, single roof and a sizeable sandstone chimney. That room was plastered inside.

But it was not "Valdosta's" looks that made it famous; it was what went on there. Standing on one of the highest of the many hills of Laurens County and overlooking the Oconee River and the little town of Dublin seven miles to the north, "Valdosta" was fabled all over the state for the huge hunts, barbeques, and dances Troup held there from shortly after the he was governor in the 1820s until he died in 1856, still head of the planters' political faction and an ardent advocate of secession.

Georgians Knew of "Valdosta"

That the founders of one of new towns in the state should have chosen to name it Valdosta for the Troup plantation was in no way surprising. Far more Georgians knew of "Valdosta" than had ever heard of "LaGrange," the estate, just outside Paris, of Revolutionary War General LaFayette, even though there was a town in Georgia named for it.

Note: LaGrange, Georgia, established in 1828, is the county seat of Troup County, established in 1826 and named for Gov. Troup. Troupville in Lowndes County was established in 1837.

What was perhaps a bit surprising, however, was that Governor Troup had named his plantation for a valley in Italy, a place with, at best, only a tenuous and curious relevance to Georgia and the South.

The Valle d' Aosta

The Valle D' Aosta, or the Valley of Augustus, is a small mountain valley lying in the heart of the Alps at the junction of the Italian, Swiss, and French borders. Only about twenty-five miles wide, it runs along the Dora Baltea River from the foot of the famous Mont Blanc south eastward for about fifty miles. The whole valley is somewhat smaller than the rectangular area between Valdosta, Madison, Tallahassee, and Thomasville.

The Borders are Alp Mountain Summits

From Valle d' Aosta's edges, fingers of the Alps stretch downward towards the river, cutting the already small area into sixteen or so even smaller valleys and creating spectacular vistas. In Valle d' Aosta live 115,000 people (now ca.125,000), of whom about one half are Valdostans or, as they call themselves, Valdostainis. The rest are Italians who have moved into the area in recent times. Today a part of Italy, Valle d'Aosta was historically and linguistically tied to France. Hence its natives refer to it, in French, as the Val d'Aoste or, sometimes in their particular dialect, as Val d'Aosta.

Salassi tribesmen

In the ancient times primitive mountain Salassi tribesmen made the Valley their home and plagued the Romans with piratical raids on there trade routes through the Valley. Secure in the hills the Salassi had so fierce a spirit of independence and such ferocious war skills that they were able to stave off, for over four hundred years, repeated attempts by the Romans to subdue and absorb them, though they were completely surrounded by the Roman Empire.

It was only at the height of Roman power under the Emperor Augustus that the imperial legions managed finally to defeat the Salassi and forcibly integrate the area with the empire in 25 B.C. At that point, The Romans built the fortress town of Aosta, named in honor of the Emperor Augustus, and gave the name to the entire region. *Continued on page 4*

Editor's Note: Julius Caesar's first invasion of Britain was in 55 B.C. When the Romans had spread through Europe and were crossing the channel to invade now England, they still had not yet conquered this nearby valley that is now a part of Italy.

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Roman, Germanic, Frankish

After the collapse of Rome, The Valley of Augustus fell under successive waves of Germanic invaders, most notably The Ostrogoths and Lombards, eventually to be incorporated into the realm of Frankish kings. During the five hundred years the Valley remained in their hands, French became its language. But its spirit of independence continued, nourished and protected in the numerous craggy hideaways.

When the Frankish realm fragmented after Charlemagne brought it to its peak, local nobles began to consolidate small, regional political units of their own. Among them, the early counts and later dukes in Savoy carved out of southeastern France and northwestern Italy an area for themselves and included the Valley of Aosta in it. But they soon found that in order to maintain even titular authority over the Valley, they had to accord its inhabitants the privilege of managing their own affairs through a local law-making assembly.

In this quasi-independent status the Valley remained throughout the latter Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and the early-modern centuries. And because Savoy was tied more closely to France than to Italy, the Valley's language and cultural development followed the French model.

New Italian Kingdom

It was not until 1868 that the unification of Italy broke that pattern. At that time the Valley was incorporated into the new Italian kingdom, and the process of Italianization began. But that Valdostani resisted the process, and in more recent times, since WW II, have succeeded in forcing the Italian government to recognize their traditional liberties.

Today the Valley constitutes the smallest of five "autonomous regions" recognized by the Italian constitution as having the right to their own law-making assembly and language. But its French language tradition continues to be steadily eroded by Italian. At the present only a small number of Valdostani any longer use French as a public language, though some still speak a mixed French-Provencal dialect at home.



Lisa Paillex Noyes, *above*, is a Valdostani descendant in Valdosta. Her father, Air Force Col(Ret.) Greg Paillex, of San Antonio, Texas has come to the museum when visiting Valdosta. His Valle d'Aosta family immigrated through Ellis Island. Lisa came to Valdosta via Moody AFB and is now a dental hygienist in the Drs. Broadfoot office.

Spectacular Views

The ante-bellum South, schooled in classical history, identified with the ancient Salassi as defenders of local liberties. And, at the same time Americans making the "Grand Tour" of Europe, developed a particular fascination for the Valley of Augustus, which they regularly passed through on their way from France to Italy.

The Valley developed a reputation for its spectacular views, a veritable "vale of beauty," as they somehow mistranslated its name. Combining those two conceptions, local liberties and beautiful vistas, Georgia Governor Troup found the Valley of Augustus an especially appealing name sake for his hill-top plantation. And in turn the founders of Valdosta seized in it as an appropriate name for the new frontier town they were building in a lush, if remote, natural setting.



Chamber of Commerce officials were surprised by a visit from Valle D' Aosta, citizens in the Fall of 1977. Johnny B. Lastinger is center. Far right is Fidele Roveyaz, then owner of a travel agency, who hoped to see exchange visits between Aosta and Valdosta.

Holiday Open House

The open house on Saturday, December 6 was well attended and featured:

Book signing by Susie McKey Thomas
In Search of the Hollidays

16th Annual Jingle Bells Christmas Tree

Social Costumes from Valdosta's Past

And as always
Items from our Archives



Seven Toth family members visited the museum Open House. Above is Dr. F. D. Toth, retired Dean of the College of Education at Valdosta State and current Interim President of Valdosta Technical College. Dr Toth took the opportunity to read 1951 articles about Shell E. Hartley and his efforts to build vocation education in Lowndes and surrounding counties and the great benefit this was to returning WWII soldiers. The Toth family enjoyed the academic and recreational aspects of the Open House. Below are three of the Toth granddaughters who enjoyed ringing the 1889 Valdosta Institute bell. The twins are Mary and Evie Toth of Valdosta, and on the right is Courtney Toth of Douglas.



Fomby and Sue Hardin enjoyed looking at the Herman Parramore "Peanut Bowl" scrapbook. It covers early 1950s VHS football. They assisted with identification and a few days later returned to the museum with his twin brother Billy and nephew from San Antonio, TX.



Tommy Thomas was glad to show Mary Kay Corbett information on early St. John's Catholic Church on exhibit. We told retired Coach Thomas that we had a file on him in our archives, he being the USA's all time winningest Division II baseball coach, over 1,200 wins.



During the Open House, Elaine McDonald Biskupiak, center, discovered a childhood photograph of herself in an exhibit. The image shows several family members fishing on Brown's Pond. At left, daughter Allison, and at right, husband, Todd Biskupiak.



The Man Who Wrote “Jingle Bells”

By Albert S. Pendleton

Of all the unusual past inhabitants we've had in Valdosta, James Lord Pierpont is one of the most surprising. Pierpont wrote “Jingle Bells,” but not in Valdosta and maybe not in Savannah where he settled after leaving his home in Massachusetts, 1850s.

Pierpont was born of solid New England stock. He married first in Troy, New York and soon went to California after the gold rush. Leaving his wife in Medford, Massachusetts with his father, he came to Savannah. His brother John was the Unitarian minister there. James taught music and played the organ in church. After his wife died in Medford, he married Eliza Jane Purse of Savannah.

During the 1850s in Savannah, young James wanted someone's opinion of a new song he had composed, went north to Medford and went to a singer who had a piano and played it for her. She liked the “merry little jingle,” and he copywrote it in 1857, as “A One-Horse Open Sleigh” – “Jingle Bells.” Some publishers today print the composer as “anonymous.”

James was the son of a noted Boston clergyman and uncle of financier John Pierpont Morgan. New Englanders contend that the song was written in the north, Savannahans say the South.

Pierpont's wife in Savannah was related to the Valdosta Pindar family, and to Myra Lott, Valdosta dancer originally from Waycross. Myra's mother was a Purse.

Though the song was popular, it is speculated that Pierpont made little money on his composition. When the war broke out he decided not to go back north as his sympathy was then with the south. He joined the Confederacy and wrote many stirring songs. His father was in the Union Army in Washington, D. C. as Chaplain, and later in the Treasury Department, a friend of the Lincolns and guest in the White House often.

After the War, James Pierpont moved to Valdosta where he taught music. According to Savannah author Margaret DeBolt and researcher Milton H. Rahn who provided much of this information, Pierpont's son Maynard Boardman Pierpont was born in Valdosta. The 1870 Lowndes County Census lists: Pierpont, James 48, Eliza J. 38, Lillie 16, Thomas 8, Josiah 5, and Maynard B. 4.

In Valdosta, James Pierpont became associated with Major P. C. Pendleton in a plan to import Scottish yeoman farmers to work abandoned plantations. The plan failed when promised money from Lowndes County did not arrive to Pendleton in Scotland (November – December 1867) and he was forced to escape an angry mob.

Several years after Pendleton died (1869) as a result of injuries sustained in a buggy accident, Pierpont moved to Quitman, Georgia, a larger town in those days. There he was the organist for the Presbyterian Church, gave private piano lessons, and taught at the Quitman Academy. He composed the “Quitman March,” a copy of which Quitmanites today would be overjoyed to have, as they have told me. Daughter Lillian Pierpont became the first librarian in Quitman in 1880.

Sometime after, the family moved to Winter Haven, Florida, and there is a gap of some years after this. James was born in 1822, and died in 1893. A good research project for someone interested in it would be what happened in those blank years, what happened to Pierpont's children by his first marriage and also the ones of his second marriage.

Ms. DeBolt and Mr. Rahn have done extensive research and so far as I know [in 1992] have not uncovered anything about the two families. Pierpont died in Winter Haven in 1893 at age 71, and his body was moved to Laurel Grove Cemetery in Savannah in March 1895, to the Purse family plot. This could indicate that the family also returned.

I visited Laurel Grove Cemetery and wandered how I could ever find Pierpont's grave in that large old cemetery and on a Saturday when no one was around. It was easy – just follow the signs, about five of them pointing the way to his grave.

Considered a song of nostalgia, *Jingle Bells* was originally a choral arrangement and not considered suitable for southern churches.

Maybe James Lord Pierpont is almost forgotten, but not his song *Jingle Bells*. We at the LCHS and Valdostans will not let him be forgotten. Where was the song written? In the north? Or in Savannah? I'll take Savannah, of course, anytime.

Note: This article by the late Albert S. Pendleton, Jr., is reprinted from a previous Lowndes County Historical Society newsletter issue, December 1992.

The earliest inquiry on Pierpont in our files is dated 1971. Tom Shelton answered using the 1948 *History of Brooks County* by Folks Huxford. Over the years other requests came and Albert with Tom uncovered additional Pierpont information in relation to Valdosta.



Converse Bright took a few moments at the Open House to visit with his cousin Susan Converse McKey Thomas as he waited for her to sign his reprint copies of *In Search of the Holidays*. Lonie Pendleton represented her husband, coauthor, the late Albert Pendleton at the function.



James and Teresa Steinberg are pictured in front of the museum with their grandchildren Kayleigh and Jake Steinberg. Before entering the Open House the grandparents explained that when they were growing up in Valdosta they came to this Library.



Ed Willis, a former Lowndes County Historical Society president, greeted Dr. James A. Sinnott who came for the book signing during the Open House.



Dr. Fred Ware and his grandsons Evan LeBoutillier and Addison LeBoutillier are shown above inside the caboose. Ed Willis explained various aspects of "caboose life" to them.



Rhonda Donald, St. Petersburg, Florida; Rhonda Taylor, Valdosta; and Holly Pittman Vaughn of Savannah were photographed as they waited for Susie Thomas to autograph their books.



Betty and Paul Thomas recently moved to Valdosta from Florida and purchased a River Street home in the Fairview Historic District. They checked early city directories for former owners of their home and plan to return for further research in the future.

MUSEUM CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Dec 25 – Jan 3 **Museum Closed**
Feb 8 **Society Program, Georgia Day, with James Jackson Chapter NSDAR**
Feb 28 **Historic Lace Making/ Tatting Class, 10 A.M. - 1 P.M.**

Officers and Executive Committee

1st Vice President, H. Lamar Cole; 2nd Vice President, Martha N. Gibson; Secretary, Joseph Tomberlin; Treasurer, Reden Hart; Past President, Julie Smith; Executive Committee: Mary McRee, Anita Shelton, and Susie Thomas

Lowndes County Historical Society & Museum

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YESTERDAY & TODAY

Newsletter of
Lowndes County Historical Society

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