

1924

Notes and Comment

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Recommended Citation

Society, Florida Historical (1924) "Notes and Comment," *Florida Historical Quarterly*. Vol. 3 : No. 3 , Article 12.

Available at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq/vol3/iss3/12>

NOTES AND COMMENT

No meeting of the Society has been more successful than that held in Tallahassee on November 13 last, as will appear from a reading of the minutes which are included in this issue of the Quarterly. Never before had there been a like gathering of members from distant parts of the State - there were representatives present from eight counties. It is believed that this meeting will prove to be the first mile-stone in the progress of the *Society* since its renaissance. Nothing done there is more vital to the welfare of the body than the reelection of Arthur T. Williams as president. Not only has Mr. Williams served as chief executive for several terms but he has taken a leading part during the years since its reorganization.

The interest of Captain C. Seton Fleming, who was reelected vice-president, is also measured by years. The name will always be an honored one with us, for his father, Francis P. Fleming, was one of the two foundation-stones of the Society. During the second period of activity, under Governor Fleming's guidance and due largely to his labors, the body reached its highest point of prosperity and usefulness. The other stone was George R. Fairbanks, whose name is inextricably interwoven with the writing of Florida history and, to a degree, with that history itself.

The place and the time were auspicious for the annual meeting. Tallahassee is steeped in the essence of Florida history and not even St. Augustine has seen so great a number of its stirring events. Though no meeting of the *Historical Society* is known to have been held there before, its residents have always taken a full share in its activities. After the reorganization Robert W. Williams was vice-president, and Governor Bloxham was a director, while during both periods many Tallahasseeans

were members. During the past year more than one-third of all new members have been enrolled from Tallahassee.

It was there, now nearly one hundred years ago, that the first body of this kind was organized: *The Florida Institute of Agriculture, Antiquities and Science*. A copy of an address delivered before this body, at its first anniversary, by Colonel James Gadsden has come down to us. In discussing the purpose of the association he says

"* * * and to excite a spirit of inquiry among our citizens at large, with a view of shedding light on the history of Florida, are the objects aimed at. * * * The last object of the Institute, is essentially historical. The importance of historical societies in our country cannot be too highly appreciated. The researches of individuals fortunately excited and judiciously directed by them have already effected much in recording traditions and in rescuing from oblivion valuable manuscripts shedding light on that subject of deep curiosity: the early history of the new world. * * * It cannot yet be too late to be enlightened on those indications of former settlements, which are to be found in every part of Florida, and particularly in the vicinity of Tallahassee - 'Who reared these fortifications, who constructed these roads, for what purpose or by what means are questions which should not be propounded by idle curiosity alone, or answered by conjecture, as vague and as distant from the truth, as the present time is remote from the era when these works were made - To enquire therefore into the past, to preserve the materials of the present day, and to treasure up facts relating in any degree to the history of our Territory cannot be otherwise than considered as objects of deep interest and worthy of attention."

To those far-away members who do not know

¹ *Oration, Delivered by Col. James Gadsden to the Florida Institute of Agriculture, Antiquities and Science, at its First Public Anniversary, on Thursday, the 4th January, 1827. Tallahassee, 1827.*

Guyte P. McCord: At the annual meeting Mr. McCord was elected a director of the Society, and is chairman of the Committee on Membership. He is a lawyer of Tallahassee, and as Mayor and as Commissioner has taken a leading part in the metamorphosis of the place. Though some must regret that change, it had to come, for the old towns cannot exist as they were under modern conditions. - As in his other public activities, Mr. McCord takes a sincere interest in the affairs of the Society and brings to them a like force. To his enthusiasm is due much of the success of the late meeting.

Even the far-away members know Joseph Y. Porter, as their fathers did - for Dr. Porter's public activities are reckoned by decades instead of years and his membership in the *Society* now spans near two of those. He is one of the Committee on Membership and is as active in this work as is its youngest. For an unbelievable number of decades Dr. Porter has led the public health forces of the State, as well as most of the popular movements of that nature. His *Reminiscences*, which he is now writing, and a portion of which it is hoped he will allow to be published in the *Quarterly*, will be a record of all important health matters in Florida for the past half-century.

As it is with countless other questions relating to Florida history, we all seem to be quite ignorant of the age of St. Petersburg. The town is looked upon as one of the vigorous striplings of the State, but perhaps we are all wrong - it may be only that the fountain of youth is thereabouts. Dr. A. H. Phinney, one of the vigorous striplings, has been doing a bit of good and painstaking research work in digging into that question and gives us the result in this number of the *Quarterly*. Doubtless his article is preliminary to a claim that St. Petersburg is the oldest town in the State - and hence

in the United States. After reading his arguments one must surely be ready to agree with his conclusions were it not for the claims of St. Augustine, Pensacola, and New Smyrna. It has been suggested that this question of priority be decided by vote of the members of the Society in these four towns. Dr. Phinney, as one of the Committee on Membership, has been hard at work, hence at this time the evidence seems to show that St. Petersburg is the oldest town in the United States.

Mr. A. H. Roberts, of Tallahassee, a member who has taken an active interest in the *Society*, and General J. Clifford R. Foster have been digging (historically) into the vaults under the *Dade Pyramids* in the National Cemetery at St. Augustine. Their research so far has been successful, and we trust the result of their investigation will be made known in the next number of the *Quarterly*.

*With the annual dues at two dollars, two hundred additional members must be secured to support the **QUARTERLY**. That our journal may not fail and that other work be undertaken, all who feel an interest in Florida and her history are earnestly asked to become members of the Society.*