

1930

## Annual Meeting of the Florida Historical Society

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THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE  
FLORIDA HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
Held at Jacksonville, February 10, 1931

MINUTES

The twenty-eighth annual meeting of The Florida Historical Society (now seventy-four years since its founding) was called to order at the Carling Hotel in Jacksonville, at 10.30 A.M. on Tuesday, February 10th, 1931, by President Arthur T. Williams.

Invocation was offered by the Reverend Harris Mallinckrodt of Fernandina.

The Chair introduced Hon. John T. Alsop, mayor of Jacksonville, who extended to the Society a most cordial welcome to the city. He also called attention to interesting historical locations near by, particularly St. Johns Bluff, near the mouth of the St. Johns River, which, he said, is or should be a national shrine similar to Plymouth Rock.

President Williams thanked him for the warmth of his welcome and expressed his pleasure that the meeting was gathered again under Mayor Alsop's wing. In 1924, he said, the annual meeting was held in Tallahassee, in 1926 at St. Petersburg, in 1927 at Southern College, Lakeland, in 1928 at Rollins College, Winter Park, in 1929 at St. Augustine, in 1930 at Ocala, and now in 1931 it is back at headquarters in Jacksonville. The Society, he continued, has been nursed and fostered throughout its life by the most eminent men of the State, its outstanding jurists, statesmen, business and professional men, and it has never departed from its original simple objective: support of the true and disproof of the false. He gave a brief history of the Society and of its quarterly

magazine, which, he said, under the stimulating direction of its present editors, had attained authoritative rank in its field.

He introduced Judge George Couper Gibbs, "one whose ancestors were renowned in the State, and whose personality has won the esteem of all who know him."

Judge Gibbs gave a rapid comprehensive sketch which brought into clear perspective the evolution of Jacksonville to its present rank. He began by describing the skeleton of the mastodon now on exhibition in Jacksonville just recovered from the depths of Lake Wakulla, which had roamed the district probably fifty thousand years ago ; then pictured the dense forests of the region ; its early Indian inhabitants ; the coming of the white man, the quarrelsome Spaniard and the gentle Frenchman; the two hundred or more years of continuous spilling of blood ; the trying diversion of allegiance from Spain to England and back to Spain again and finally to the United States. Upon this broad and sound foundation he rebuilt in retrospect the village of Jacksonville, with its blockhouse and its four hundred inhabitants; lived again through its devastating fires and pestilence, and memorialized by name the noble citizens who gave their lives for the common good. All of this experience was summed up in a phrase, "the spirit of Jacksonville", which should prompt us and posterity to bear lightly and courageously the vicissitudes still before us. The Judge's talk won him unanimous applause.

The Chair introduced Dr. Cecil R. Oldham, Associate Professor of History at Rollins College.

Dr. Oldham's contribution was a gloria sung to his beloved science. "History is religious training. It insists upon the sanctity of Truth. Truth is the only merit which gives dignity and worth to History. It discloses the false glare of arms."

But a few generations ago history was untaught except to the favored few, when its accuracy was of less importance than its agency in shaping the policies of rulers. At Oxford it was suppressed because of its dilution with politics. The business of the historian is to see history on the same plane as other sciences, and to keep it uncheaped and unperverted in the teaching. "Crests" and "waves" must not be permitted to take the place of individual responsibility.

Until modern times, there was no collation of old records ; until the last two generations history has been but a companion to the study of Law.

"I make no apology for the plainness of this address; a plain setting, indeed, makes the bright gem of Florida history shine more brilliantly."

Dr. Oldham received the grateful thanks of the meeting for his illuminating address.

The Chair introduced Miss Alice H. Lerch, librarian of Rollins College, and formerly of the New York Public Library, who spoke on Florida's first newspaper.

The **East Florida Gazette**, a weekly loyalist paper, was first published in St. Augustine on Saturday, January 11th or 18th, 1783. It should not be confused with **The Florida Gazette**, published in 1821. It was printed by Charles Wright for John Wells Jr.

Until recently its existence was known of only by casual references in other papers, but Worthington C. Ford, searching English archives, found among the papers of Sir Guy Carleton, numbers 5, 14 & 16 of volume I.

Miss Lerch's paper was most interesting to her hearers.

At the request of the Chair, Captain C. Seton Fleming introduced General Charles P. Summerall.

"Florida's most distinguished son" was the Captain's declaration.

The General valued the work of the Society and always read its **QUARTERLY** with keen interest. The patriotic spirit of the people of Florida, as revealed by their cooperation as soldiers whenever help was needed, was his theme. The militia organizations never faltered in danger, and constantly displayed high chivalry.

The regiments and companies which have played a part in Florida's history were all recorded by the General, and his paper, which will be published in the **QUARTERLY**, is a mine of historical wealth.

"The history of Florida soldiers" he concluded, "guarantees that her sons of the present and the future will not dim the glory of those of the past."

Mrs. Francis M. Holt entertained with three short folk songs, gay and graceful in theme and melody. In response to an insistent encore she sang The Suwannee River, and the plaintive, rich coloring of her sustained tones revealed to her listeners a new and lovely expression of the song, and the height to which her artistry has risen.

The meeting recessed for lunch.

More than one hundred persons sat down to lunch in the dining room of the Carling Hotel. Mr. Alston Cockrell was toastmaster and General Summerall the guest of honor.

Mr. Cockrell introduced the General, the president and officers of the Society, and several other ladies and gentlemen who had contributed to its work and welfare.

He then introduced Senator A. M. Taylor, speaker of the occasion.

The Senator said he had been told that there were three noted old landmarks in St. Augustine, represented by Ponce de Leon, Pedro Menendez, and A. M. Taylor.

In 1885 a pageant was given in St. Augustine, representing the landing of Ponce de Leon, and on the last day of the pageant, christened Flag Day, the five flags of Florida were displayed and honored. So much publicity followed this that Spain looked up Ponce de Leon and found that he was buried at San Juan, Porto Rico.

“We got busy and memorialized Congress by act of legislature to procure the remains of Ponce de Leon for Florida. On the floor of the House, Mr. Wetmore moved to amend that the remains of the late lamented Adam and Eve be also procured. However the effort to get Ponce de Leon failed, because he was now a celebrity and would not be given up.”

Menendez also was brought into notice by the pageant, and it was decreed that his remains should be removed to the Cathedral at Aviles, Spain. The Senator was member of a committee which went to Aviles to officially view and confirm the reinterment of the bones of Menendez. The ceremonies and mishaps were described in the Senator's inimitable way, and we all felt that the honors which came to him through the use of violent gestures combined with the evident goodwill of the interpreter, were fully deserved.

The Senator's talk was greatly enjoyed, as evidenced by the frequent bursts of applause and spontaneous laughter.

The Society then went into business session.

At the request of the president, vice-president Cumberly took the chair.

It was moved and seconded and carried that the roll call be dispensed with.

It was moved, seconded and carried that the reading of all officers' reports except the treasurer's be

dispensed with and that they be published in the **QUARTERLY**.

Treasurer Davis's report was so encouraging that it could not be set aside and it was heard with much satisfaction.

The Building Committee through Mr. J. W. White reported that the times were unfavorable to do anything concrete at present, and Mr. Arthur Williams thought that postponement was very wise. Upon motion the Committee continued with the same personnel.

Upon motion the secretary was instructed to send resolution of thanks to the manager of the Carling Hotel and to the speakers of the occasion for their help in making the meeting a success.

A resolution of gratitude to the officers and particularly to the editors of the **QUARTERLY** was unanimously carried.

The Chair appointed Messrs. White, Cash & Roberts a committee to nominate officers and directors. After a short retirement the committee reported its choice of nominees as follows: For president, Mr. Arthur T. Williams ; 1st vice-president, Mr. P. K. Yonge; 2nd vice-president, Mr. Frederick Cubberly; treasurer, Mr. T. Frederick Davis ; secretary, Mr. Francis M. Williams; assistant secretary, Mrs. Emma Rochelle Porter; for directors, Messrs. Frank Drew, A. J. Hanna, Julien C. Yonge, Mrs. Roy V. Ott, A. H. Roberts, Geo. P. Raney, Jno. P. Stokes, and C. Seton Fleming.

Upon motion, unanimously carried, the secretary was instructed to cast a ballot for the nominees specified, which he thereupon did and they were declared elected.

Mr. A. J. Hanna, of Rollins College, Winter Park, invited the Society to hold its next annual meeting there and the invitation was accepted with pleasure.