

# Fort Valley Its Century of Progress

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state that within the next several decades the Hiley variety ranked "second to Elberta as the leading peach of the Southeastern States."

One of the important varieties prominent during the early 1900s was the J. H. Hale, which had out-of-state connections. It was discovered by J. H. Hale as a single tree in a lot shipped to him by David Baird, of Manalapan, New Jersey, and planted on his farm at South Glastonbury, Connecticut. Buds from this tree were taken later to Hale's farm at Fort Valley. Mr. Hale introduced another variety, the Early Rose, which was found as a "chance seedling" in a Fort Valley alley just off Main Street by the late John H. Baird, son of the David Baird mentioned above, and overseer at that time for J. H. Hale in Fort Valley. This "soft-flesh cling of fair quality and good color" became in its day much prized by housewives for pickling and preserving.

Through the efforts of Dr. O. I. Snapp, entomologist of the U. S. Peach Insect Station set up in 1920, and Dr. John Weinberger of the U. S. Horticultural Field Laboratory and his successor, Victor E. Prince, insect enemies have been dealt with, and several new varieties of peaches have been bred and tested in Fort Valley. Before being released to growers, varieties are selected for color, size, shipping quality, and short dormancy. But all is not peaches around Fort Valley. Pecans, chestnuts, plums, some cotton still, grains, livestock, and pine-tree farming make a diversified program of agriculture.

Within the town are such industrial concerns as the Blue Bird Body Company, the Woolfolk Chemical Works, the Happyvale Flour Mill, the Pearson Basket Mills, the Fort Valley Oil Company, and the Coca-Cola Bottling Company. Three super-markets with ample parking provide excellent shopping facilities, as do the clothing, furniture, drug, notion, and jewelry stores on Main Street.

The post office, city hall, and court house are comparatively new buildings of modern, tasteful lines that lend dignity to a block on Church Street to the west of Main Street. The Peach County Court House, finished in 1936 and opposite the City Hall, is the realization of a county dream. Housed in the rear of the court house is the Thomas Public Library with its inviting fan-lighted doorway.

It has been recorded that as early as 1878 there was a public library organized in Fort Valley. Then on November 25, 1890, we find a meeting being called to "discuss and formulate a plan for establishing a public library in Fort Valley." There seems to be no other data on

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the earlier library, and apparently the later organization did not go through in 1890. It was not until 1915 that the present library was organized in permanent location with around 400 volumes from the private library of Dr. and Mrs. E. G. Thomas. Dr. Thomas was a former Atlanta dentist who had established a practice in Fort Valley.

Since inception the services of the present library have always been free to the reading public; and at no time has a deposit ever been required of transient users of its materials, numbering at present 17,093 volumes and around 65 periodicals. The library, supported by city, county, and state funds, and by the dues and services of its own Library Auxiliary with assistance contributed by various civic organizations, is used freely by students of the Fort Valley schools in addition to their own school libraries. Miss Parmelee Cheeves, Miss Gena Riley, and most lately, Mrs. C. J. Jones are the librarians who have served the Thomas Public Library, one of Fort Valley's most important cultural assets.

Present-day Fort Valley, with an estimated population of 7,000, is unique in that its water, light, sewage, and natural gas are handled by an elective Public Utilities Commission independent of the mayor and council. This board purchases power and natural gas, using profits arising from the re-sale of these utilities to enlarge, expand, and improve the distribution of utilities and to retire bonds issued for the improving of streets and the building of the city hall. A second example of municipal ownership and maintenance is Oaklawn Cemetery.

For the most part Fort Valley is a friendly town, neighborly and church-going in its habits. Very often there pervades in the air an aroma of wood smoke and pit barbecue; one knows at such times that something besides barbecue is probably cooking—by way of planning, fund-raising, or celebrating. Whenever Fort Valley has put herself into her planning, her fund-raising, or her celebrating, the outcomes have usually been productive, even original.

Residents—men, women, and young people—have the choice of a number of religious, fraternal, patriotic, civic, and service clubs. The several garden clubs, with the largest total membership of any club, have planned and are carrying out a city-wide beautification program by which approaches to the town are being made more pleasing by the planting of flowering and shade trees of particular kinds for particular sections. In this enterprise club leaders have utilized the consultant