

Bethinking of Old Orleans

C.W.Lattin County Historian

Vol. XVIII

6-26-96

No. 25

"ASK MR. FOSTER"

"Ask Mr. Foster", a statement which became a slogan, resulted in a world-famous travel service. Ward G. Foster was born in Albion, N.Y. in 1864 and first worked for his father C. T. Foster who was a general dealer in hats, caps, furs and robes. Their haberdashery was located on Canal Street or what later became East Bank Street in Albion.

Sometime in the mid 1880's, to avoid the inclemencies of the northern climate, Ward Foster had moved to St. Augustine, Florida. There he obtained an executive position in the construction of the Hotel Ponce de Leon. When this job was completed in 1888, he needed another job which led him to establish a curio shop under the name El Unico, meaning unique. It was only a 12 x 14 foot room in close proximity to several hotels. We can imagine that he dealt in pictures and souvenirs with the tourist market in mind. Likewise, tourists would ask him questions about the city, other spots to visit in Florida and how to get there. They found him to be of pleasing personality and very obliging. Soon people started telling others who needed directions "Ask Mr. Foster." Inundated with questions, he found it necessary to print one of the very first travel guides and played upon the phrase "Ask Mr. Foster". It was then that he found his life's work. He sold the small curio shop and opened a travel agency known as "Ask Mr. Foster". Soon he started to open offices in other parts of Florida and eventually Washington, Philadelphia, Atlantic City, Chicago, San Diego, and then Cuba, Bermuda, Mexico, Newfoundland, Germany and so on. By the mid 1930's his headquarters was located in New York City with over seventy offices located all over the world. In 1923 over 2 million people made his offices the target of innumerable inquiries about travel.

In checking with the Orleans Travel Bureau, we



believe that the "Ask Mr. Foster Travel Service" is no longer in business or has been consumed by some other agency within the past few years.

Our portrait of Ward Foster which accompany's this article was done around 1920. His demeanor and attire suggest he was indeed, a local boy who made good.