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HISTORIAN

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OF HANCOCK COUNTY

Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi

June 2014

COMING EVENTS AT LOBRANO HOUSE

The monthly luncheon meeting will be held on Thursday, June 19, 2014, at noon at the Kate Lobrano House. Guest speaker for the program will be Russell Guerin, who will discuss his new book *Early Hancock County, A Few of Her People and Some of Their Stories*. **Reservations are required** and may be made by calling 467-4090. **Respectfully we must insist that you please call by noon on Wednesday, June 18, 2014**, to make your reservation, to help us plan seating which is limited to forty-eight people, and to apprise us of the number for whom to prepare. The price of the lunch is \$10.00.

RUSSELL'S WORK CONTINUES

Ever diligent, Russell Guerin continues to probe through courthouse records and files. Recently in looking for the original probate record standing files at the courthouse, he discovered two related books, which date from 1853 and cover some period of the Civil War. One is the *Treasurer's Reports and Probate Records*, and the other is the *Probate Minutes Book*. Currently he is in the process of writing synopses of the records contained in each book.



The home of John Ford

FORD'S FORT

By
Russell B. Guerin

Believed to be the oldest house in the Pearl River valley, the John Ford house, also known as Ford's Fort, figures very prominently in early Mississippi history. It was built in 1800 as the home of a distinguished pioneer who had chosen a site on what was known as the Federal Road. The Pearl River flows close by.

The nearest village is Sandy Hook, on Highway 35,

south of Columbia, and just north of the state line. The house itself can be reached by way of a county road, and so it is a good idea to have directions in advance if one should plan to visit.

Besides being a farmer, John Ford was a preacher who held regular services at his church and encouraged his slaves to attend. He was also a person of great influence in the Mississippi Territory; it was his home that was the meeting place in 1816 of representatives of fifteen counties who came to join forces in asking for Mississippi statehood. The representative from Hancock County was Thomas Anderson.

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Marianne Plum, Webmaster**LOBRANO HOUSE
HOURS**MONDAY — FRIDAY
10:00AM — 3:00PM
Closed: 12:00—1:00 (lunch)**MISSION STATEMENT**

“TO PRESERVE THE GENERAL AND ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY OF HANCOCK COUNTY AND TO PRESERVE THE KATE LOBRANO HOUSE AND COLLECTIONS THEREIN; TO RESEARCH AND INTERPRET LIFE IN HANCOCK COUNTY; AND TO ENCOURAGE AN APPRECIATION OF AND INTEREST IN HISTORICAL PRESERVATION.”

Although the Federal Road consisted of a cleared strip with a few wagon ruts, the Ford place was strategically placed. In 1814, when General Andrew Jackson marched his army toward New Orleans to confront the British invasion, he took the high ground along that road. After crossing the Pearl, he elected to rest for a short period at the Ford house. A story is told that the Reverend Ford allowed Jackson to occupy the main bedroom only after the general committed not to use profanity in the house.

Ford is recorded to have had thousands of acres and hundreds of slaves on a plantation that straddled the 31st parallel demarcating Mississippi and Louisiana. He chose the Mississippi side for his home because he wanted his slaves to learn to read and write, which was contrary to Louisiana law at the time.

The house is indeed an imposing structure even today. To have built it two hundred years ago from available raw materials with slave labor was certainly the stuff of real pioneer courage. It is not without a feeling of awe that one walks those acres in present day.

The house is still sturdy, but beginning to show its age. It has a brick ground floor with a weather-boarded second level above. Giant chimneys flank the sides while a veranda overlooks the field.

The remains of a large dugout rest below. Some of the lower rows of bricks, made from local clay by slave labor, have partial-

ly crumbled into red dust. The bottoms of the chimneys have been cemented over, and some of the weather boards are loose, but still the hand-hewn timbers show their axe marks and invoke a certain reverence.

The appearance is one of strength, and it is evident that care is given to this piece of Mississippi history. It is sometimes open to visitors for a nominal fee, but arrangements should be made in advance. A call to Marion County at 601-444-0202 is suggested.

**THOMAS ANDERSON
HANCOCK COUNTY'S
REPRESENTATIVE TO
THE CONVENTION FOR
STATEHOOD**

From *Louisiana's Loss,
Mississippi's Gain*
by Robert G. Scharff

Edited by
Eddie Coleman

On October 29, 1816, delegates from [fifteen] counties of the Mississippi Territory assembled at John Ford's house on the Pearl River, in Marion County, for the purpose of “conferring on the subject of admission of the Mississippi Territory into the Union, as a free, sovereign and independent state...” (Carter, 1937B). Hancock County's representative, Thomas Anderson, was appointed to serve on a committee to draft and report on a petition to the United States Congress, “praying that the Mississippi Territory be admitted

into the Union as a free, sovereign and independent [s]tate, with her present limits.”

The following morning, after the completed petition was read several times to the assembled Convention, a motion was made to amend the document by changing the request for admission into the Union “without division” to admission [s]ubject to division by a line running up the middle of Mobile Bay and Mobile [R]iver, to the confluence of the Tombigby and Alabama [R]ivers; thence along the dividing ridge between the waters of said rivers on a direction to intersect the southern boundary line of the state of Tennessee,...and for the east and west divisions produced by such line to be respectively erected into states as soon as each division shall contain thirty-five thousand inhabitants.”

Anderson was one of only four delegates who voted for the amendment. The others were also from counties along the Pearl River. Later that afternoon, the convention voted once again, this time for the petition itself, without the amendment. The same four Pearl River counties were the only ones who voted against it. Their delegates received permission to enter the following protest in the Journal of the Convention: “We, the delegates of Lawrence, Pike, Marion, and Hancock counties, conceive it a duty we owe our constituents, to protest against the memorial as received and adopted by the majority of this convention, praying for our admission with our present limits.”

Anderson also voted

against a motion to elect a special delegate from the Mississippi Territory to promote the objectives of the convention. The motion passed, however, [ten] to [five].

He was then appointed to a committee to draft an address to the citizens of those counties not able to send representatives to the convention, sending them a copy of the petition developed by the convention and recommending that each of these counties hold meetings to aid the convention’s purpose.

The Territorial Legislature authorized a census in the fall of 1816 for the purpose of showing that the Territory was eligible for admission into the Union. The Secretary of the Territorial Legislature estimated the population of Hancock County to be 1000, assuming 666 to be white and 334 to be black.

SOURCES:

Carter, Clarence E. and Bloom, John P. (1937B). Territorial papers of

the United States, vol. VI; Mississippi Territory. Washington. GPO.

Scharff, Robert G. *Louisiana’s Loss, Mississippi’s Gain*: Lawrenceville, VA: Brunswick Pub. Co., 1999.

Did You Know This about Hancock County

By
Scott Bagley

Did you know that the Hancock County Historical Society has on display a hurricane ball retrieved by a local resident following Hurricane Betsy in 1965? “Hurricane Balls,” as they are called in South Mississippi but also known as *Betsy balls*, *beach balls*, *drift balls*, *grass balls*, *marsh balls*, *sea balls*, *vegetable balls*, *buffalo balls*, and *whale burps*, have been the subject of many conversations on the Gulf Coast for decades. These curious balls have been found all over the



This hurricane ball discovered after Hurricane Betsy in 1965 is on loan to the Historical Society by member Ames Kergosien.

world's coastlines and are composed of plant fibers native to whatever coastline from which they were generated.

Created apparently through continual and strong submerged wave action common to hurricanes, most of the balls found along the Gulf Coast are composed mostly of compacted and woven marsh grass. Some balls, however, have contained material such as fishing line, snail egg casings, pine needles, seaweed, or twigs. The balls come in many sizes. Small balls range in size from 4.0 to 11.0 cm diameter. Large balls can be slightly larger than a standard basketball of 24.8 cm diameter. The one on display at the Historical Society is about the size of two basketballs.

While they are fascinating artifacts, these balls are also symptoms of an unhealthy marsh and a warning sign that our wetlands are in distress. Hurricanes are known to impact and deform marshes, and the recent large hurricanes are certainly no exception. These massive storms strip exposed vegetation and scour the substrate, peeling up marsh strips from which the hurricane balls are formed.

The Historical Society has only the one hurricane ball from Betsy for display purposes. Subsequent hurricanes (including Katrina) created many more balls, and some of these can be viewed at the Gunter Library at the Gulf Coast Research Lab in Ocean Springs. This author hopes that these "curious objects" on display become true relics of what came before and

that conditions rarely present themselves again for their new creation.

SOURCES:

Shaw, Joyce M. *Note on the Natural and Cultural History of Hurricane Balls*. Gulf and Caribbean Research: Vol. 21, 79-81, 2009.

"Wetland Loss/'Betsy Balls.'" *Louisiana Wetlands*. 20 May 2014 <<http://www.wilde-lab.com/courses/wetlands/research/bballs.htm>>.

ANNUAL CEMETERY TOUR

Even though October is still several months away, it's not too early to begin thinking about and planning the Hancock County Historical Society Annual Cemetery Tour. It will be held on Halloween night, Friday, October 31, 2014, at Cedar Rest Cemetery on Second Street in Bay Saint Louis. We will need volunteers to help prepare the cemetery for the tour (mark the path, etc.), to portray citizens buried there, to act as guides, and to serve at the Loblano House.

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*Blueberry Peaches,
Red Robin Pie*

By Stella LaViolette
and Paul Estronza La Violette (\$25.00)
An annotated cookbook of Gulf Coast recipes

*Early Hancock County: A Few of Her People and
Some of Their Stories*
By Russell B. Guerin (\$29.95)

*Gulf Coast Album
A Journey in Historic Photographs 1899-2011
From New Orleans across the Mississippi Gulf
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By Charles Sullivan (\$40.00)

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By Paul La Violette (\$20.00)
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One Dog, Two Dogs, Three Dogs, Four...
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Twice told tales of several dogs living in a beach house on the Gulf Coast

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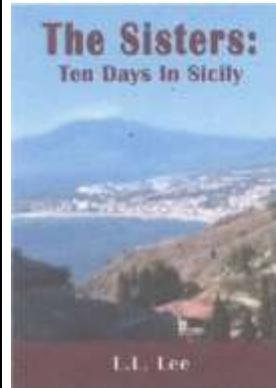
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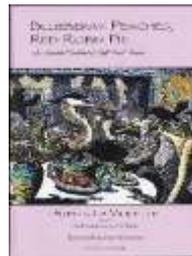
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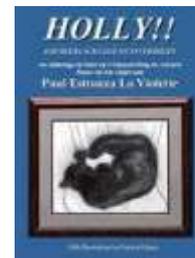
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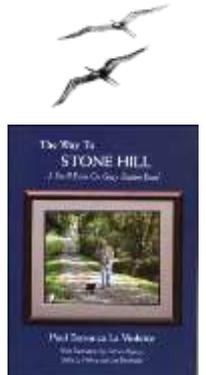
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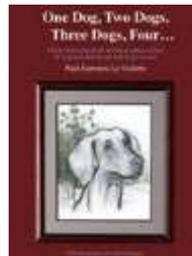
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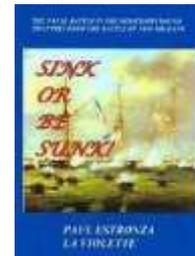
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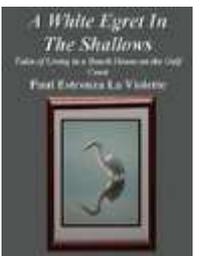
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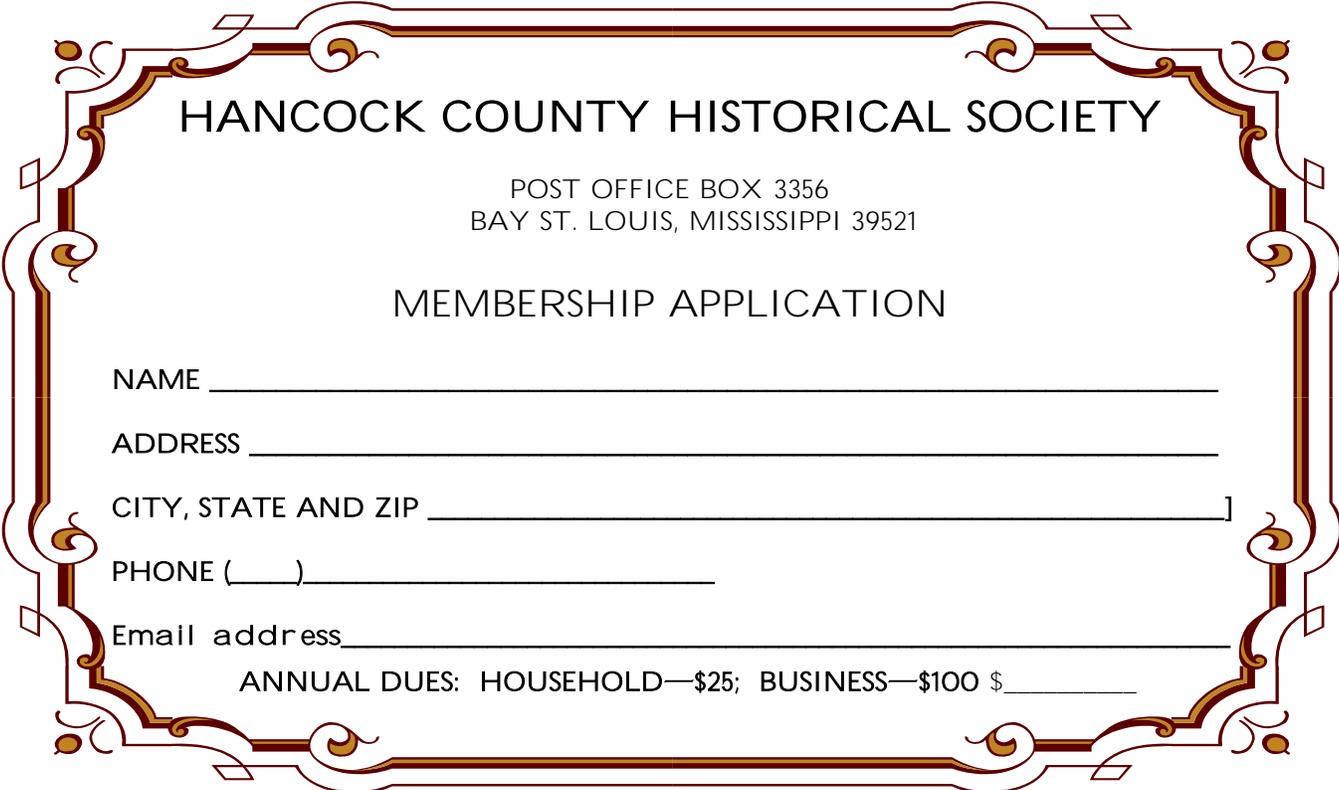
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