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OF HANCOCK COUNTY

Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi

July 2014

COMING EVENTS AT LOBRANO HOUSE

The monthly luncheon meeting will be held on Thursday, July 17, 2014, at noon at the Kate Lobrano House. Guest speaker for the program will be Sheila Cork, Librarian at the New Orleans Museum of Art. Ms. Cork will speak on renowned artist Richmond Barthé and his art. **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.

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. The 21st Annual Cemetery Tour 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 Lobrano House. To volunteer, please call 228-467-4090.



The Battle of Lake Borgne

Early maps of the waters off Hancock County and early deed descriptions of the lands adjacent to these waters indicate that Lake Borgne extended eastward to the mouth of the Bay of Saint Louis.

THE BATTLE OF THE BAY OF SAINT LOUIS

By
Eddie Coleman

The War of 1812 is the last time that a foreign army invaded United States soil. British forces arrived in great force along the eastern seaboard, and because of the importance of the port of New Orleans which controlled the Mississippi River, authorities knew it was only a

matter of time until British naval forces tried to take it.

In early December 1814 U. S. Commodore Daniel T. Patterson, commanding the New Orleans station, received a letter from Pensacola that British warships were in the area. As a result, he dispatched "five gunboats, one tender, and a dispatch boat to the passes Mariana and Christiana" to observe British action in the Mississippi Sound. Commander Patterson ordered Thomas A. P. Catesby Jones to place his boats outside the Rigolets and not to remain too long anchored in one place.

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Accordingly, Lt. Jones sent two gunboats, one under command of Lt. Isaac M'Keever and one under the command of Sailing Master George Ulrick, to Dauphin Island to check on things there while he and the other gunboats patrolled the Mississippi Sound. Anchored within Dauphin Island, M'Keever and Ulrick observed a couple of British warships at sea. Deciding to follow the route of the vessels westward, the commanders of the gunboats quite ingeniously sailed within the barrier islands of the Mississippi Sound. Such a stratagem was possible because these gunboats drew less water than the British warships and could, therefore, sail in the shallower water of the Sound. They stayed parallel to and kept an eye on the passage

of the warships in the Gulf, the islands offering cover for the Americans.

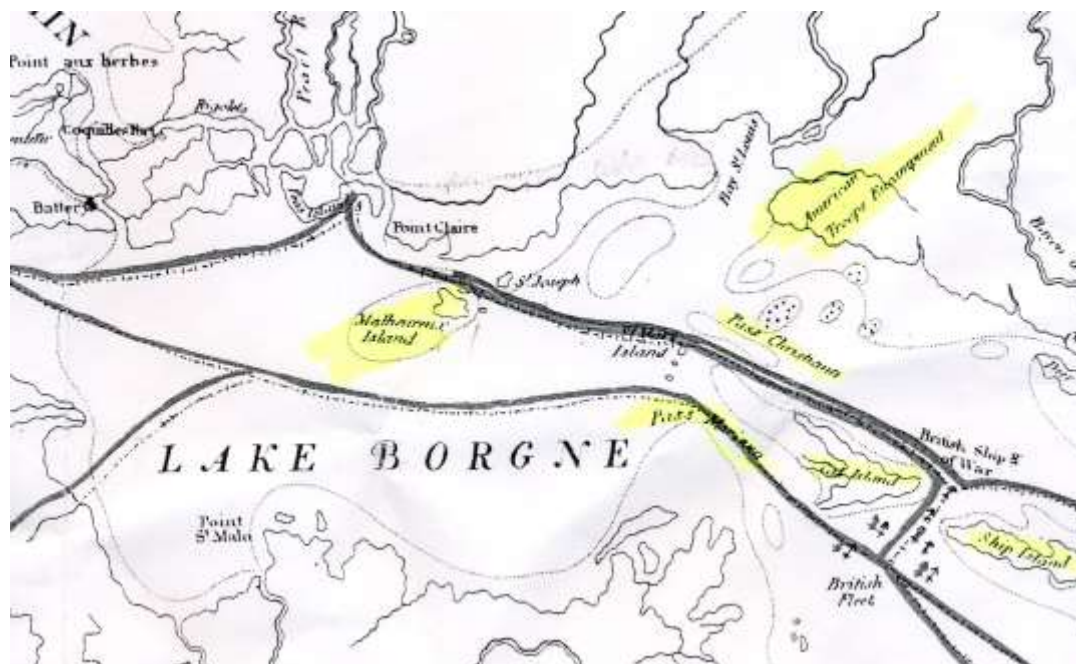
As they passed Biloxi, the two US gunboats joined Lt. Jones and the other three gunboats and continued toward Lake Borgne. As the small American force moved toward the eastern tip of Cat Island, one can imagine their surprise at discovering the British fleet had increased so large as to be insurmountable by their small flotilla of gunboats. This British naval force of more than twelve hundred troops and forty-five launches and barges with forty-three cannon among them was commanded by Captain Nicholas Lockyer. The small American flotilla continued westward to Pass Marianne. Here they anchored and "received provisions from the bay St. Louis." While here, the crew of 182 men with a total of twenty-three cannon readied their gunboats for an attack.

Fearing that military supplies stored in the village of Bay St. Louis would fall into British hands, Lt. Jones sent the U. S. schooner *Seahorse* into the bay on the afternoon of December 13 under the command of Sailing Master William Johnson. His orders were to remove or destroy these supplies. The British command initially sent three vessels to prevent the *Seahorse* from accomplishing its mission.

All of the activity on the water drew concerned and curious citizens of the village to the shores of the bay. A young John Baptiste Toulme, who was later elected mayor of BSL and who



Lt. Thomas A.P. Catesby Jones
(Lt. Jones' name is also found spelled Thomas ap Catesby Jones. The capitalization of "A.P." comes from his signature on his official report of the Battle of Lake Borgne.)



This map (1815) is part of a larger map contained in the book *Historical Memoir of the War in West Florida and Louisiana in 1814-1815*. It's quite easy to see that at one time the eastern boundary of Lake Borgne extended at least to the mouth of the Bay of Saint Louis. One may also see the British ships anchored between Ship and Cat Islands.

was the son of the original J. B. Toulme who had fled from Haiti because of the slave uprising there, had gathered with a group of locals on the bluff at Ulman Ave. to observe the activity. An elderly woman from Natchez who was visiting a local health resort in the city, Mrs. Isabella Hutchins Claiborne, was quoted as saying, "Will no one fire a shot in defense of our country?" At this query the young Mr. Toulme took his cigarette and lighted a nearby cannon. The ball landed close to the approaching British fleet, whose commanders assumed there were

strong American defense forces in the bay. They retaliated by returning fire. Attacked by British fire, Johnson managed to hold out for a short time with support from shore. The volley of grapeshot from the *Seahorse* repelled the three British attack boats which withdrew momentarily only to be joined soon afterward by four others. This force of seven British barges was enough to cause Johnson to make his ultimate decision: to set fire to his ship and provisions to prevent their being captured.

Later, in the afternoon of December 13, Lt. Jones decided

to move his vessels into Lake Borgne headed toward the Rigolets and Fort Petite Coquille located on the side of Lake Pontchartrain. Unfortunately the winds were not with him and the boats, including the *USS Alligator*, were forced to ground in the channel of Malheureux Island about 1:00 A. M. on Dec. 14. The *USS Alligator* was ultimately captured and could not help the United States thwart the British attack.

In his official report to Commandant Daniel Todd Patterson detailing the events of the Battle of Lake Borgne, Jones described the defense mechanism he and his fellow officers devised to face such an intimidating force as the British warships. They decided to lash the boats together across the channel on the western end of Malheureux Island and make their stand there. Initially they were successful in defending their position,

As it turns out, Mrs. Claiborne was the sister-in-law of WCC Claiborne. A letter written by Laura Eugenie Florian, from New Orleans the day after the Battle of New Orleans, to her friend Lydia Latrobe Roosevelt in New Jersey, gives more information about their mutual friend, Mrs. Claiborne. According to Ms. Florian Mrs. Claiborne was quite frail, yet she was able to carry cartridges to soldiers fighting from the shores of the Bay of St. Louis. This account suggests that there was more military activity on the shore of the Bay than mentioned by Jones in his official report.

but unfortunately their gunboats began to drift, and the British were able to defeat the small U. S. command. The entire battle lasted about two and a half hours.

Nonetheless, there were successes by the U. S. Navy. The sailors were able to repel an advance force of the enemy, killing or wounding nearly every officer and sinking two of the three advance boats. Another four British boats tried the same maneuver, but were also repelled by the Americans. Unfortunately, Jones was severely wounded in this second skirmish and had to leave the deck, giving command to Master's-mate George Parker. Although fighting gallantly to defend his boat, Mr. Parker was severely wounded, and the British took command of his gunboat. As a result, the enemy used this gunboat to open fire upon the Americans, who quickly succumbed to the superior force of the British Navy. Ultimately, there were six Americans killed and thirty-five wounded; the British lost seventeen killed and ninety-four wounded.

At first glance the skirmish at the mouth of the Bay of St. Louis might seem to be an unimportant event in the War of 1812. Moreover, the Battle of Lake Borgne may appear to be insignificant. Ultimately the contrary has proven true. The two altercations delayed the British warships on their journey to New Orleans for the Battle of New Orleans and gave Andrew Jackson and his forces time to arrive in and establish fortifications at the Chalmette Battlefield

for the final military action in the War of 1812.

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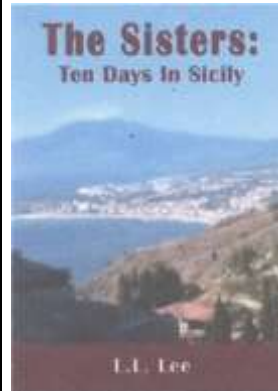
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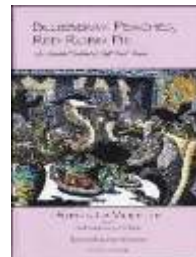
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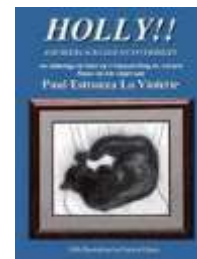
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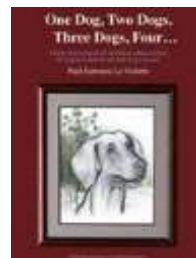
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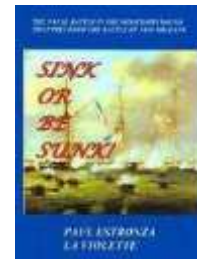
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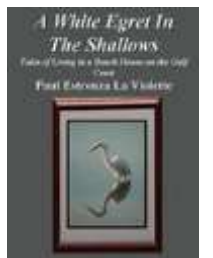
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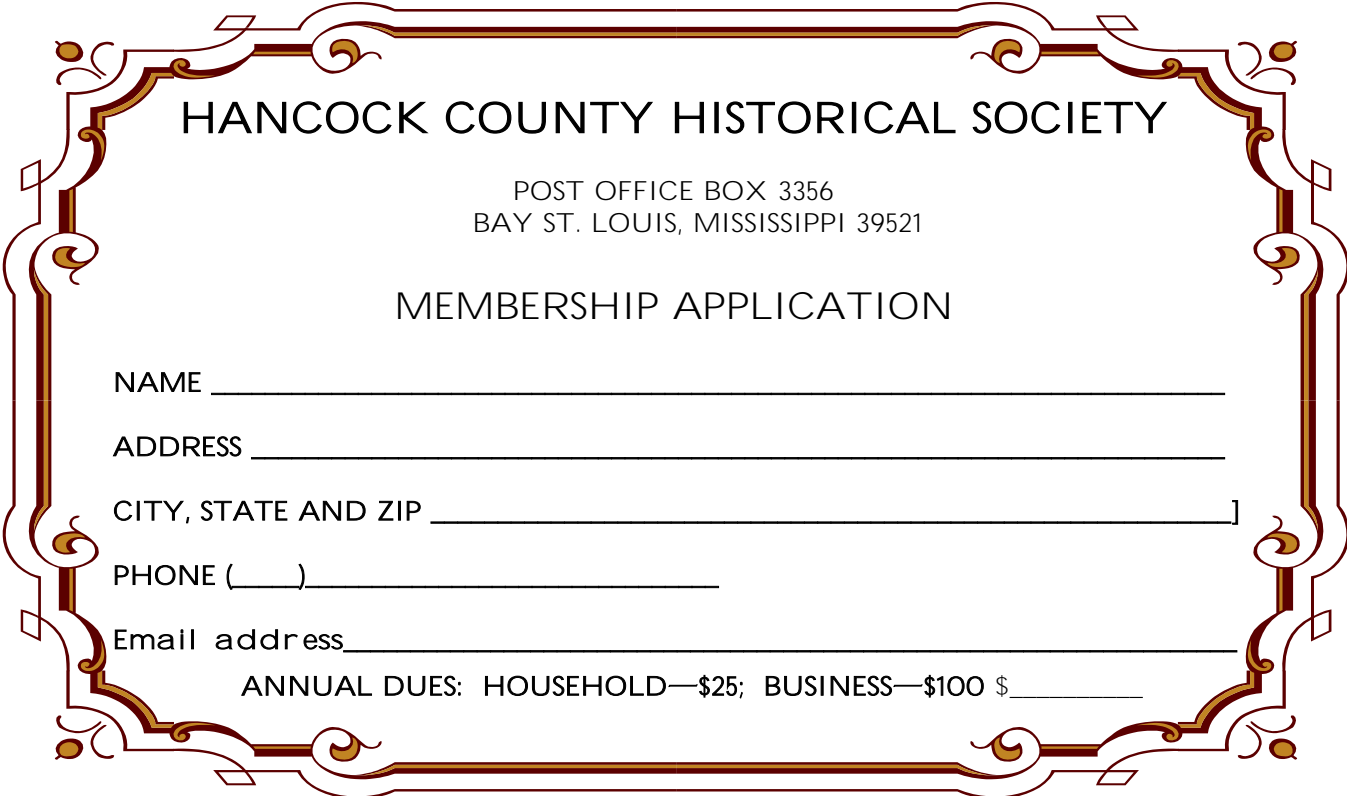
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