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HISTORIAN

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OF HANCOCK COUNTY

Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi

August 2014

COMING EVENTS AT LOBRANO HOUSE

The monthly luncheon meeting will be held on Thursday, August 21, 2014, at noon at the Kate Lobrano House. Guest speakers for the program will be Else Martin, historian

of the Mississippi Maritime Museum in Pascagoula, and Pat Keene, president of the museum. *Reservations are required* and may be made by calling 467-4090. **Respectfully we must insist that you please call by noon on Wednesday, August 20, 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 a couple of months away, it's time to begin finalizing plans for the Hancock County Historical Society's 21st Annual Cemetery Tour. It will be held on Halloween night, Friday, October 31, 2014, from 5:30 P. M. until 8:00 P. M. 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.



A relaxed
Richmond Barthé in the 1930's

RICHMOND BARTHÉ, HANCOCK COUNTY'S AMERICAN SCULPTOR

by
Eddie Coleman

"All my life I have been interested in trying to capture the spiritual quality I see in people, and I feel that the human figure as God made it, is the best means of expressing this spirit in man."—Richmond Barthé

Barthé's art reached the height of its popularity during the 1930's-1940's and became less popular in succeeding years mainly because taste in art changed from a traditional, more realistic presentation in sculpture to a less traditional abstract form. Nevertheless, according to Romare Bearden and Harry Henderson in their book, *A History of African-American Artists*, "Barthé must be considered one of the most distinguished contributors to American sculpture."

A key figure in the Harlem Renaissance during the 1930's, Richmond Barthé (1901—1989) was a man who endured and triumphed as he followed his own star, a star that led him to many parts of the world in search of opportunities to express the creative vision that marked his presence in this life and, according to Barthé, preceding lives.

Barthé often referred to himself as an "Old Soul" who had been here before. In discussing his belief in reincarnation, he insisted that during an earlier life he was an artist who lived in Egypt.

THE

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OF HANCOCK COUNTY

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“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.”

He believed that he was an artist in each earlier life and that he would always be an artist. He often wondered how else he could have accumulated the experiences and skills that he displayed in his more recently completed life.

Born in Bay Saint Louis, MS, Barthé is a native son whose statues in marble, bronze, and stone are in museums and private collections in France, England, Germany, India, and a half-dozen other foreign countries. His works are permanently displayed in the Metropolitan Museum and the Whitney Museum in New York as well as many other major museums in the United States. His

great American eagle is used at the entrance of the Social Security Building in Washington, D. C.

Barthé won two Julius Rosenwald Fellowships and two Guggenheim Fellowships on merit alone. He holds the Audubon Artist Medal of Honor and numerous awards and citations from the American and National Academy of Arts and Letters. In addition he received awards for interracial justice and honorary degrees from Xavier and St. Francis Universities. He also received the Audubon Artists Gold Medal in 1950.

With two honorary art degrees, he once said that he didn't get to high school because his mother was a widow and he



Richmond Barthé at
work in his studio

was taken out of the seventh grade to help support the family. Mrs. Marie Raboteau Barthé, his mother, was a seamstress, and when her son was small, she often put him on the floor with pencil and paper while she was at her tasks.

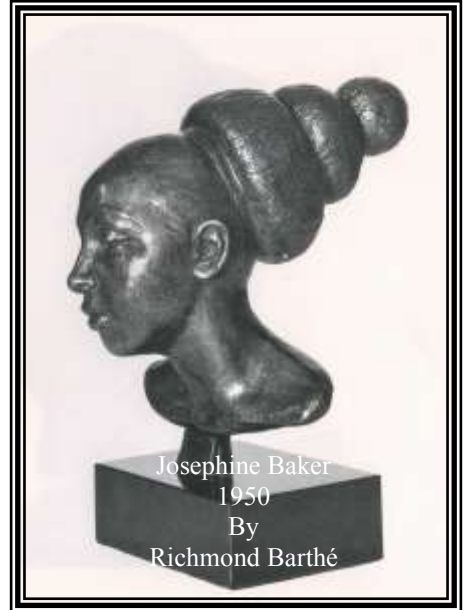
As he grew, beauty and form always attracted him. His pockets held pretty bits of broken glass, sea shells, or a dried leaf of unusual shape, and his one ambition was to be a painter, not a sculptor.

During the summer months and on weekends, he worked for the Harry S. Pond family who had a summer home on the corner of South Beach Boulevard and Ballentine Street in Bay Saint Louis. In 1917 when

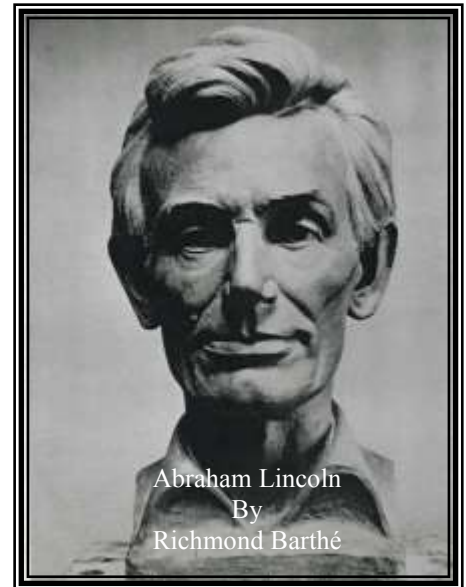
he was sixteen years old, he went to New Orleans with them as a butler, and the family gave him his first oil paints for a Christmas gift.

“I had never seen an artist at work,” Barthé remarked, “and didn’t even know how to apply oils to canvas.” He learned composition by copying old masters from a volume of reproductions which cost him a hard-earned \$25.00.

Lyle Saxon, author of *Fabulous New Orleans*, discovered his work and encouraged him by posing and then criticizing the result. Occasionally Saxon sent him to the Delgado Art Museum [now the New Orleans Museum of Art] with a note, and



Josephine Baker
1950
By
Richmond Barthé



Abraham Lincoln
By
Richmond Barthé



American Eagle
by Richmond Barthé
Social Security Building
Washington, DC

these few occasions gave Barthé his first opportunity to see good original pictures.

Barthé’s first exhibit was at a church festival in New Orleans. His life-size painting of the Head of Christ so impressed Father Harry Kane of Blessed Sacrament Parish that he helped Barthé study at the Chicago Art Institute.

His first attempt at sculpture was in 1928 when he modeled the heads of two friends just as an experiment. He was re-



Christ
By
Richmond Barthé

quested to exhibit these in a Chicago art exhibit called "The Negro in Art." These were reproduced on a New York magazine cover, and Barthé was on his road to fame as a sculptor

In February 1929, following his graduation from The Art Institute of Chicago, Barthé moved to New York, where he began to rise to stardom as a sculptor. During the next two decades, he would build a reputation that would prove to be the envy of many of his peers. The 1930's and '40's would see him rise to great prominence. No other sculptor in the United States during this period received higher praise for his work by critics and more visibility in the New York press.

In New York, Barthé established his first studio in Har-

lem. He began to fraternize with writers, dancers, and theater personalities soon after he arrived in New York. His reputation as a sculptor was generally known in Harlem and was acclaimed by philosopher/art critic Alain Locke, who praised his sculpture and regarded it as fresh and vibrant.

The theater had long interested Barthé, and some of his best known works were in this field. As his commissions of theater personalities increased, he decided to move his studio from Harlem to a larger, more comfortable space downtown. One New York critic said that Barthé had the entire New York theater to himself as a sculptor. His model of Katherine Cornell as "Juliet" is in a private collection in Argentina, and he modeled Sir Lawrence Olivier, Dame Judith Anderson, Sir John Gielgud, Maurice Evans, and Gypsy Rose Lee among others.

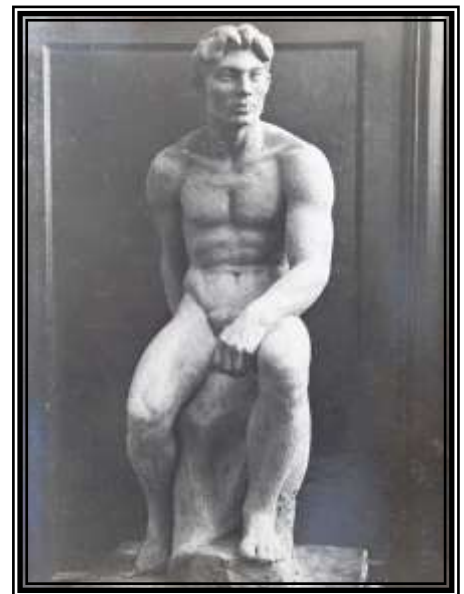
Although his stated reason for moving downtown was motivated by his need to be accessible to his clients, another reason was that he loved the theater and wanted to be in the company of the stars of the "legitimate" theater. Living downtown also made Barthé more available for invitations and free tickets to theater and dance performances.

Barthé once remarked, "My work is finished mentally before I ever go to the material." He had a photographic memory and rarely asked an actor to pose. He preferred to study his subjects night after night from a chair in the orchestra during the perfor-

mance. He believed an actor lived on the stage, but in the studio he was likely to become wooden.

In New York, Barthé experienced success after success. He was considered by writers and critics as one of the leading "moderns" of this time. However, the busy, tense environment in which he found himself took its toll, and he decided to abandon his life of fame at the peak of his career and move to Jamaica. Here he remained for twenty productive years. Away from the limelight, he was in a place that, although distant from his beloved Bay Saint Louis, reminded him of the place of his childhood. There he could commune with nature and experience the beauty of the land.

In the mid-1960's he left Jamaica and spent the next five years of his life in Switzerland, Spain, and Italy before settling in Pasadena, California. During his last years he thought of returning to painting but instead worked on

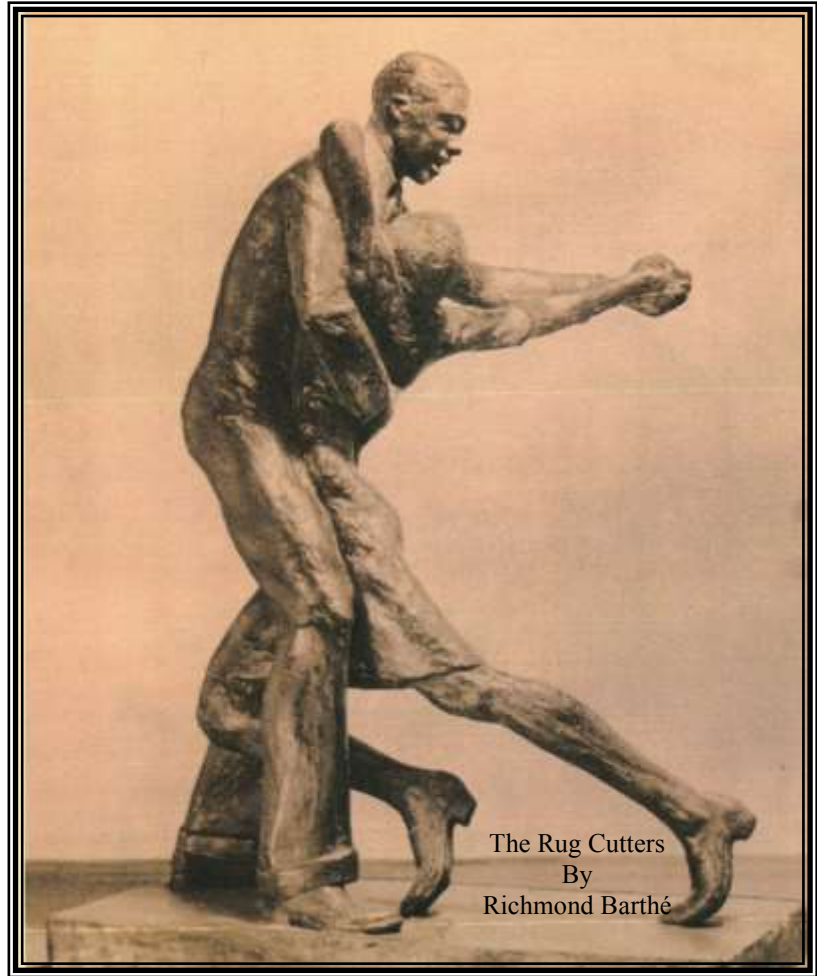


Seated Figure
By
Richmond Barthé

his memoirs and resumed his communication with his friends in nature—the birds, bees, and other living creatures that he could trust.

Unfortunately these last years of Barthé’s life in Pasadena were quite bleak. Art had brought him fame and prominence, but being the fickle mistress it can be, it had brought him little financial security. Nonetheless, his art caught the eye of actor James Garner, who became a close friend of Barthé and a great admirer of his work. Garner helped Barthé financially; to repay the actor’s generosity, Barthé sculpted a bust of Garner, believed to be the artist’s final work.

The significance of the art and life of Richmond Barthé establishes a chapter in the history of art in America. His poise, dignity, intelligence, and esthetic sensibility are all reflected in the timeless monuments that he has left for our enjoyment and appreciation. These monuments, Barthé’s sculptures, are from the



The Rug Cutters
By
Richmond Barthé

heart, mind, and spirit of a man who endured and who triumphed as he followed his own star.

SOURCES:

“Barthé, Richmond.” *Wikipedia*. 29 May 2008 14 pars. 22 May 2008 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richmond_Barth%C3A9>.

Golus, Carrie. “Barthé, Richmond 1901-1989.” *Contemporary Black Biography*. 1977. *Encyclopedia.com*. 17 Jul. 2014<www.encyclopedia.com

Lewis, Samella, Ph.D. *Two Sculptors Two Eras*. Los Angeles: Landau/ Travelling Exhibitions, 1992.

Vertical files. Hancock County Historical Society.



Paul Robeson
1975
By
Richmond Barthé

International Commission

In the late 1940’s the country of Haiti commissioned Richmond Barthé to create two larger-than-life statues of two of its national heroes—François-Dominique Toussaint L’Ouverture and Jean-Jacques Dessalines—and to design currency (coins) for the nation.

L’Ouverture was born a slave but began his military career as a free man of color. He was the leader of the 1791 slave rebellion in the French colony of Saint-Domingue.

Dessalines was a slave, brought to the French colony of Saint-Domingue, where he later



Barthé working on the statue of Toussaint L'Ouverture, 1952



“This mural addresses the life and art of Bay St. Louis native Richmond Barthé who achieved international acclaim during his lifetime. The project was sponsored by the Renaissance Project and funded by a grant from the Mississippi Arts Commission administered by the Gulf Coast Community Foundation.” Having survived the fury of Hurricane Katrina undamaged, it couldn’t survive the wrecking ball.



Statue of General Jean-Jacques Dessalines sculpted by Richmond Barthé. It still stands in Port-Au-Prince, Haiti, having survived the earthquake in 2012.

joined in the slave rebellion led by L'Ouverture. Proving himself a good military leader, he became a lieutenant for L'Ouverture.

As a result of the rebellion, L'Ouverture named himself governor of the colony for life in 1801. However, he was removed by soldiers of Napoleon and sent to France where he died in 1803.

Dessalines assumed control of the colony and as governor-general, later self-proclaimed emperor, declared the entire island of Hispaniola an independent country renaming it “Haiti.” (A later division gave just the western section of the island this name.) Ultimately, Dessalines was killed in a revolt led by Henry Christophe and Alexandre Sabés Pétion, who divided the island between themselves.

SOURCES:

“Dessalines, Jean-Jacques.” *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*, 25 Jul. 2014; 26 Jan. 2014 <www.britannica.com>.

“Toussaint L'Ouverture, François-Dominique.” *Wikipedia* 25 Jul.2014 <www.wikipedia.com>.

Did You Know This about Hancock County?

By
Scott Bagley

Did you know that during the middle part of the last century Hancock County was home to a summer camp for Jewish orphans? In 1918, the Jewish Federation of New Orleans purchased what was described as the magnificent J. P. Dart home located at then 984 South Beach Boulevard, the last property in Bay St. Louis before the Waveland boundary line. The home was originally built around 1855 by a sea captain for his wife and commonly referred to as “San

Felipe.” The property was purchased by the Jewish Federation to establish a camp where children from the New Orleans Jewish orphanage could get away from the city during the hot weather and enjoy a vacation with outside and camping activities. The Federation brought groups of orphans over for two week periods during the entire summer. Separate boys’ groups alternated with girls’ groups every two weeks.

As the population of the Jewish orphanage decreased over the years so did the need to bring children over the summer. The Hancock County camp locale gradually became a summer destination for other groups affiliated with the Jewish Federation. With limited space in the original large house on the property, a number of cabins were built behind it. The camp eventually outlived its usefulness, and the property was purchased by Gayle Aiken, Jr.

In the spring of 1955, local residents were amazed that this then century old landmark was suddenly two houses. The owner, Mr. Aiken, had “cleverly and neatly” cut thirty-two feet right out of the original house’s center and had moved this center section a few hundred feet further east and finished it as a third house on the property adding thus two additional addresses—986 and 988 South Beach Boulevard. The two remaining sections, each still with four bedrooms and three baths, survived the splitting well and were “an architectural refutation of the old



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axiom ‘that a house divided against itself cannot stand.’” The Aiken family continued to live in the right side of the old house, and it became known as “Bay Oaks” as it bordered Bay Oaks Drive—which supposedly had its own unique characteristic—thirteen oak trees growing out of the same set of roots. That is a possible subject for another article.

Regretfully, as with so many other landmarks in our unique county, Katrina took away all the structures at 984.

986, and 988 South Beach. Remaining only are some fading memories of yet another property with strong connections to New Orleans. Apart from the others, this singular property was the big house that became a Jewish summer camp that was eventually cut in half.

SOURCES:

- “House That Is Cut in Half, The.” *The Daily Herald*. 29 July 1958: A18.
- Scharff, Robert G. *Louisiana’s Loss, Mississippi’s Gain*. Lawrenceville, VA: Brunswick Pub. Co., 1999.



**Old Waveland School
Receives
Magnolia Marker**

By
Russell Guerin and
Eddie Coleman

The Old Waveland School replaced two older, smaller, wooden buildings. It was built in 1927 and was used as the principal city school from 1930 to 1972. The first year, eight students graduated from the eighth grade. Mrs. W. O. Sylvester was principal.

Many homes and businesses in the old part of town succumbed to Hurricane Katrina in 2005. The old school building was the only historic building to survive the storm. Serving as the Civic Center at the time, this solid edifice was severely damaged, but not destroyed. Currently, in addition to serving as the Waveland Civic Center, the structure now houses the Ground Zero Katrina Museum and the Carousel of the Olympic Sea.

Through the efforts of Russell Guerin and the City of Waveland, the Mississippi Department of Archives and History has approved a historical Magnolia Marker to be placed in front of the old school. This new marker joins other distinctions the Old Waveland Elementary

School has received—being listed on the National Register of Historic Places and being named a Mississippi Landmark building.

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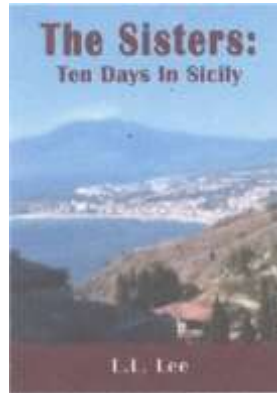
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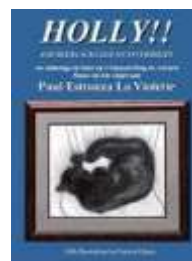
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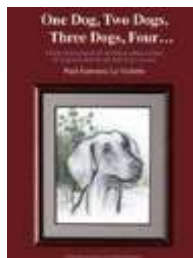
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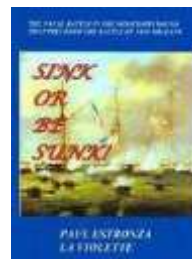
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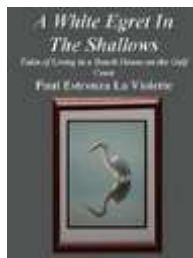
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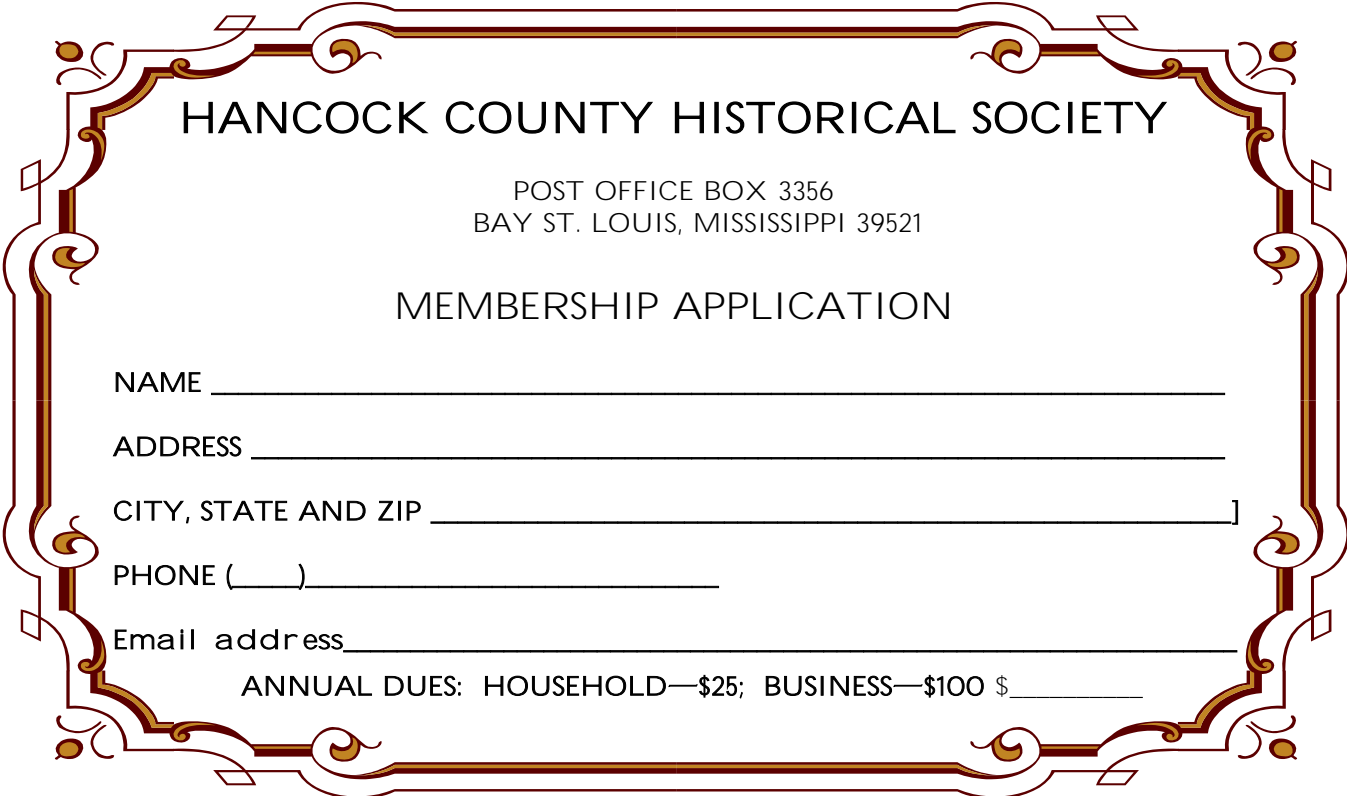
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