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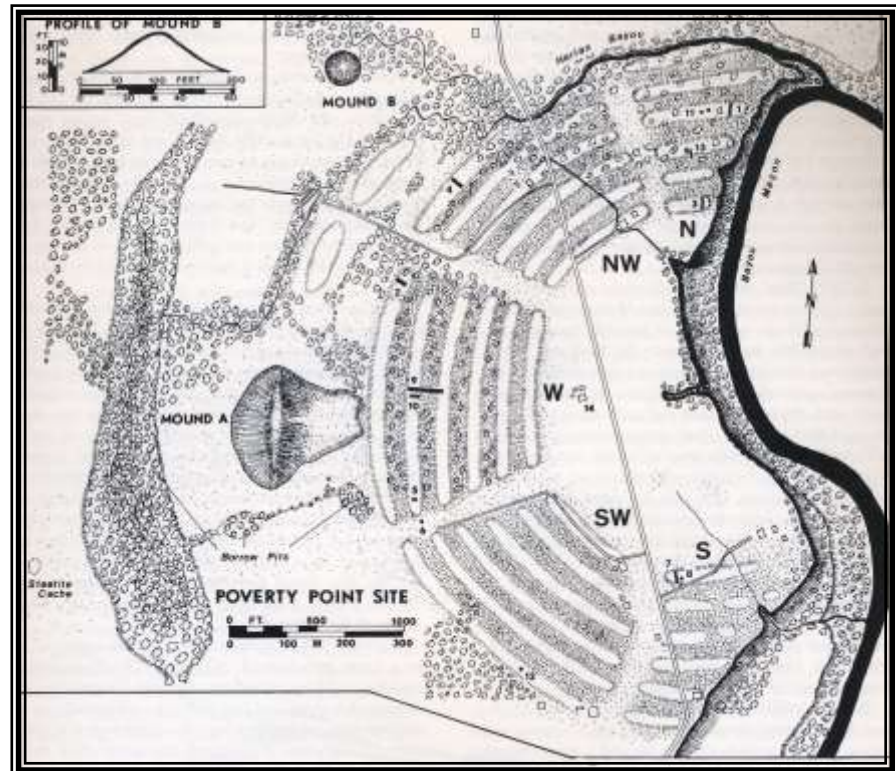
OF HANCOCK COUNTY

Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi

September 2014

## COMING EVENTS AT LOBRANO HOUSE

The monthly luncheon meeting will be held on Thursday, September 18, 2014, at noon at the Kate Lobrano House. Guest speaker for the program will be Mary Labat. Her topic will be "Searching for Your Roots—a Personal Journey." Her initial quest began at the Historical Society but, as is often the case, has gone in multiple directions. **Reservations are required** and may be made by calling 467-4090. **Respectfully we must insist that you please call by noon on Wednesday, September 17, 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.



Map of the Poverty Point site in northeastern Louisiana on Bayou Maçon  
(To get a better frame of reference of the site's location, please see the map, p. 6)

## CEMETERY TOUR

October looms, so it's time to begin final plans for the Hancock County Historical Society 21st Annual Cemetery Tour. It will be held on Halloween night Friday, **October 31, 2014**, at Cedar Rest Cemetery on Second Street. 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. We also seek donations of cookies, candy, cupcakes, etc. To volunteer, please call the Society at 467-4090.

## Poverty Point and Claiborne

By  
Russell B. Guerin

A wonderful event has taken place which will greatly enhance tourism in our next-door neighbor, Louisiana. That happening has been the long-awaited recognition by the rest of the world of the cultural history of the prehistoric area called Poverty Point.

Already a state park in northeast Louisiana, Poverty Point

was declared a World Heritage Site by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Committee on June 22, 2014. Louisiana's lieutenant governor, Jay Dardenne, stated, "It creates a whole new dimension for marketing northeastern Louisiana and consequently the entire state." Almost immediately, the National Geographic Society said that it has been one of the world's best kept secrets.

There are 962 World Heritage Sites in 157 countries, including such wonders as the pyramids of Giza and Machu Picchu. In the United States, there are only twenty-one sites, and only eight are "cultural"

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sites, including the Statue of Liberty, Jefferson’s Monticello, and Independence Hall in Philadelphia. Others are Puerto Rico’s San Juan National Historic site, Mesa Verde, Taos Pueblo, Chaco Culture, and Cahokia. As one might say, the designation indeed puts Poverty Point in “high cotton.”

Louisiana’s Office of Cultural Development describes the park as having five massive earthworks with unique geographical design. Dated to approximately thirty-five hundred years ago, it would have been a major trading and ceremonial center.

Our Own Pride: Claiborne

We in Hancock County have every reason to be excited about our neighbor’s good fortune as we too have our own Poverty Point cultural history site. It occupies an area that for many years has been known simply as “Claiborne.” Located on Mulatto Bayou, a tributary of Pearl River near the old J.F.H. Claiborne plantation, it is dated similar to Poverty Point and shares some of its characteristics. Instead of a massive earthwork, however, Claiborne was built of a massive collection of sand and clam

shells. It does indeed have a unique geographical design, being horse-shoe shaped.

The Hancock County Historical Society’s own collection of artifacts from Claiborne, the Monte Walden Collection, testifies to the site’s having been a major trading area. In addition, we share in particular with the Louisiana site an abundance of baked clay balls called Poverty Point Objects or PPOs. They are commonly thought of as cooking balls, but some are more specialized and are called mulberries.

It is this last consideration that excites us even more. Sometime in 2010, we received an inquiry from an anthropology professor at the University of Wisconsin-Washington County about the clay balls in our collection, and eventually we sent several of our mulberries to him for detailed research. His study was done by way of “thin sectioning,” producing slices to be examined for their content of sand, silt, and clay.

Comparing mulberries from the Claiborne site to the ones he had previously studied from the Poverty Point site, the archaeologist found similarities. In his words these similarities “lent considerable support



Poverty Point Objects (PPOs) or mulberries from the Claiborne site

to our previous conclusion that the mulberries found at Poverty Point most likely came from the Gulf Coast since their sandy compositions were similar to the coarse sandy PPOs found at Claiborne and very dissimilar to the silty PPOs typical of Poverty Point....”

The obvious suggestion is that some mulberries found at Poverty Point originated in Claiborne. Does this mean that Claiborne came first or that it had some higher rank than Poverty Point? We do not know yet, but....

**My Own Sense of Awe:  
Poverty Point and Claiborne**

Because I have been fortunate to tour Poverty Park in Louisiana several times, one may understand my utter thrill to learn a few years ago about Claiborne’s significance. Today, few of our friends and acquaintances know about Claiborne.

That was once true about Poverty Point too. My introduction to Poverty Point occurred aboard a plane to Mexico, sometime in the early 1980s. I was on my way to experience some of the joys of seeing the ruins of ancient civilizations, specifically those of the Maya in Yucatan.

In a chance conversation with another passenger, I was asked a question which might have embarrassed me for my ignorance except that the question held so much promise. I do not remember the exact words, but essentially he asked why I was going to Mexico while in Louisiana we have one of the most important prehistoric sites in the United States.

The inquirer turned out to be an archaeologist. He was friendly and did not mean to challenge me. He meant simply to inform me

of something I knew nothing about, even though I had been born and reared in Louisiana. His description was brief but impressive. I made a mental note of Poverty Point and resolved to see it sometime in the future.

Now, years later, I have been there on several occasions, but I remain aware of how few people know anything about it. That will likely change in great numbers because of its being named a World Heritage Site, and I hope that we in Hancock County might learn from our neighbors to the west. No one anticipates that our local site will soon be overrun by tourists and scientists from around the world. After all, it is located in a wilderness area of the industrial park at Port Bienville. Since 9/11, it is not possible to enter the gates without a pass.

Such drawbacks can be pre-supposed to discourage tourists. On the other hand, Poverty Point in Louisiana was not always a lovely state park. It was in fact farm land, and to some degree the mounds had been plowed over for years. I recall stories about locals putting intact ancient pots on fence posts for target practice.

Nonetheless, things can—and do—change.

**POVERTY POINT,  
A PLACE AND  
A CULTURE**

By  
Charles H. Gray

Poverty Point culture was a Native American civilization in the Lower Mississippi Valley. The economy was based largely on hunting, fishing, fowling, and gathering. It is also possible that horti-

**EXCITING NEWS**

—Update—

*Last week, a young lady with the University of Colorado who serves as the liaison with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, brought me some exciting information. She has been following my website and is acquainted with the Claiborne connection to Poverty Point. She installed on my computer an hour-long lecture she had attended. It was given by Kenneth Sassaman, Ph.D., a renowned anthropologist from the University of Florida. His talk included the relationship of Claiborne to Poverty Point.*

*A clear hypothesis emerges from the lecture indicating that Claiborne came first. In the words of Dr. Sassaman, “I would argue that the people of Claiborne had a direct hand in the orientation and engineering calculus of Poverty Point.”*

*There is no other way to interpret his remarks without wondering that our site, though smaller, not only preceded Louisiana’s, but may have been instrumental in the design of the larger one.*

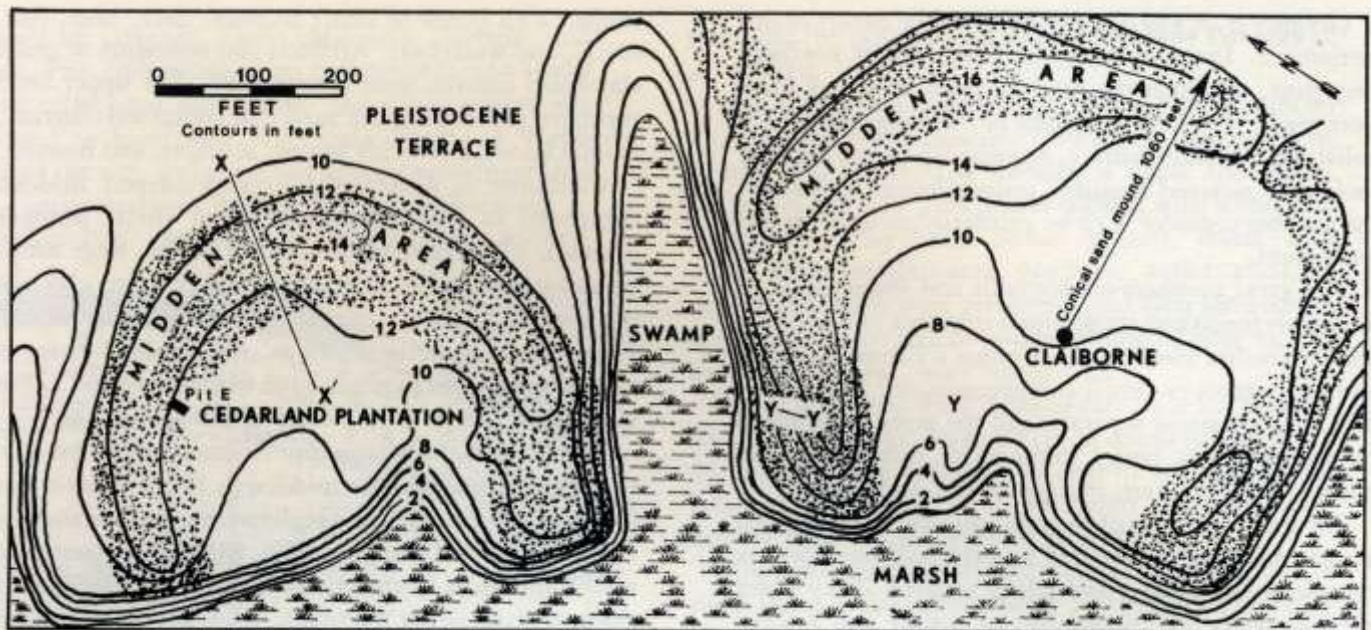
*Russell B. Guerin*

culture was introduced since food supplies were adequate to support stable villages, regional centers, and a great ceremonial center at Poverty Point itself.

Poverty Point, the prime site for this culture, is located in West Carroll Parish, LA, in the northeastern corner of the state between the Mississippi and the Arkansas Rivers. These and other smaller rivers were cardinal factors in the vast trade network that characterized the Poverty Point Culture.

When the Poverty Point site was constructed, it was the largest





The Caliborne-Cedarland midden sites in southwest in Hancock County  
(To get a better frame of reference of the site's location, please see the map, p. 6)

earthwork in North and South America, and its satellite sites extended across Louisiana, Arkansas, Mississippi, Missouri, Tennessee, Alabama, and Florida.

Two prominent Poverty Point sites have been explored in Hancock County: the Claiborne and Cedarland Plantations. [These plantations were located south of present-day Port Bienville on Mulatto Bayou in the extreme southwest corner of Hancock County.] Radiocarbon dating of artifacts taken from the Claiborne site by Charles Satchfield of the Mississippi Archaeological Society has determined the site existed as early as 1500 B. C.

The Claiborne and Cedarland sites are located on the first high ground upstream from the mouth of the Pearl River. They are immediately adjacent to each other with the Claiborne site directly south of the other. Despite the nearness of the two sites, the timber cover and dense undergrowth obscured the larger Claiborne midden, and it remained undiscovered until 1967 when clearing was initiated for

a new port and harbor facility in the area. It is thought that both villages were semicircular at the time of occupation, open-ended toward the estuary.

When the Hancock County Harbor and Port Commission leased the land from the L & N Railroad to build Port Bienville, speedy excavation of the sites became necessary. In addition to professional archaeologists, amateurs active in the area made important collections and cooperated with efforts to salvage as much data as possible before destruction of the site. Monte Walden of Slidell, LA, was one such volunteer.

Claiborne is the largest Poverty Point coastal site and is presumed to be a regional center. It consists of a large, stratified, horse-shoe-shaped midden composed of black earth midden and shells of the brackish water clam *Rangia cuneata* with some oyster shells. It has an outside diameter of approximately 660 feet and an inside diameter of 460 feet. Associated with a semicircle, due east of its center at a dis-

tance of 1,060 feet, was a small conical sand mound. It was about seventy-five feet in diameter at the base and four feet high; unfortunately, it was destroyed before test excavations could be made. A careful search of the area before and after bulldozing disclosed only a few scattered shell fragments.

The quantity and variety of artifacts eclipse all the other site collections in the coastal area and lead one to conclude that Claiborne was a regional center participating fully in the widespread Poverty Point trade network and cultural organization, both up the Mississippi Valley and along the Gulf Coast. Approximately two hundred shards have been found at the site, of which 119 have been available for study.

The Walden collection came primarily from the excavations at the south end of the Claiborne semicircle. However, an entire fiber-tempered disc base was found by Mr. Walden at the north end of the midden.

Three beautifully made points from the Pensacola Indians were found by Walden in a group at the south end of the Claiborne site, two of gray northern flint and the third of white, almost chalky, flint—all exotic materials. These may be ceremonial objects from the Poverty Point Site where similar caches have been found. Many materials not native to the area were apparently brought to the site, and finished objects were then manufactured there.

Vessel fragments were interspersed throughout the midden. The original collection contained 117 fragments, of which twenty were rim shards. Several large pieces are included in the Historical Society's display cases.

The Cedarland Site is a slightly smaller, stratified oyster shell and earth midden, also semi-circular in plan. The outer diameter of the midden is approximately 540 feet while the inner diameter is about three hundred feet. Unfortunately prior to the discovery of the site, shell had been taken from a borrow pit in the midden for local road construction.

The lower layer of the midden consists primarily of oyster shell with bones of small animals, deer, bear, fish, and waterfowl with charcoal and artifacts intermixed. Remnants of small clay lined hearths are scattered throughout the shell. The upper level is composed of black organic sand with charcoal, animal bones, and other artifacts.

Mr. Walden's collection will be on display at the Lobrano House permanently. The two cases hold approximately half the items presently held by the Society.

#### SOURCE:

Webb, Clarence H. "The Poverty Point Culture." *Geo Science and*



The Monte Walden Collection  
(additional photos of this collection on p. 6)

*Man Series*, Vol. 17. Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1982.

## THE MONTE WALDEN COLLECTION OF NATIVE AMERICAN ARTIFACTS

By  
Charles H. Gray

After Hurricane Katrina we received many visitors at the Lobrano House from throughout the United States. Among them were archeologists who came to study the archeological sites of earlier inhabitants of the area. In almost every case these researchers were drawn to our collection of Native American artifacts which are displayed in the shadowboxes on the north wall of the house, and they were amazed that we possessed such a notable collection. The collection was donated to the society by Mrs. Monique Walden Chaix in memory of her father, William Monte Walden. Mr. Walden, though a man of the future who was employed in designing the space shuttle tanks at

Stennis Space Center, spent many years deeply involved in archeology.

Mr. Walden was born in Olathe, Kansas, in 1918 in a house which had a sod roof for insulation against the elements. His mother was an artist and teacher who taught Native American children, so he grew up with knowledge of their culture. In 1964 he married Pat, a T Sligli Native American whose family heirlooms formed the beginning of the couple's collections. Over the years he did research in Louisiana, Texas, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Florida, Tennessee, and Alabama in addition to numerous Mississippi sites.

Mrs. Chaix reported that her father was so excited after his first day at the Claiborne site in Hancock County that only his obligations at Stennis could drag him away.

Most of the articles in the society collection are from Hancock County although there are a number of ceremonial pieces traded from other locations. Some pieces are thought to have come from as far away as Yosemite National Park.







Notice the detail of the figures of the eagles and buffalo (bear?).



Three large, ceremonial spearheads



Obsidian artifacts



Ax blade

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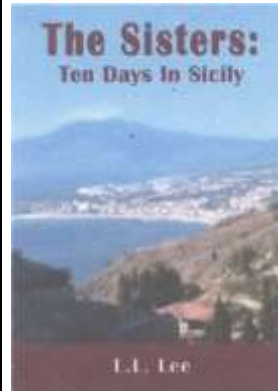
MAP AT THE RIGHT

Shaded area A shows the location of Poverty Point in Louisiana. Shaded area F shows the location of the Claiborne site.



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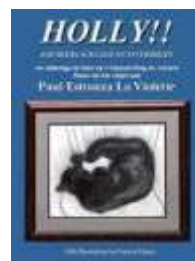
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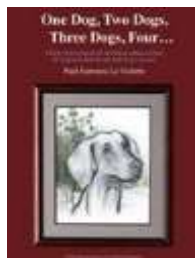
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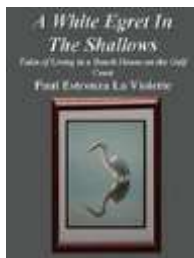
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