

THE

# HISTORIAN

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OF HANCOCK COUNTY

Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi

February 2015

## COMING EVENTS AT LOBRANO HOUSE

The monthly luncheon meeting will be held on Thursday, February 19, 2015, at noon at the Kate Lobrano House. Guest speaker for the program will be Larry Ladner, who will speak on the Kiln School District, athletics, and related topics. **Reservations are required** and may be made by calling 467-4090. **Respectfully we must insist that you please call by noon on Wednesday, February 18, 2015,** 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.

## MEMBERSHIP FEES

The 2015 Membership Drive is on! It's time for current members to renew their membership in the Historical Society and to encourage family and friends to join us too. The price of membership is twenty-five (\$25) per year. If your membership is due, your address label will read "Time to renew your membership." Please mail your renewal checks to Hancock County Historical Society, P. O. Box 3356, Bay St. Louis, MS 39521.



Aaron Academy school at Santa Rosa, 1907  
(The students are identified on p. 8.)

## PUBLIC EDUCATION IN HANCOCK COUNTY

By  
Eddie Coleman

The system of public education which we enjoy today began in 1848 with the passage of a special act of the Mississippi Legislature. However, this act was limited to only four counties—Hinds, Jefferson, Wilkinson, and Amite. A later law established a superintendent of education for *each* county in the state. The first county superintendent of education in Hancock County was appointed in 1870 for a set term of two years. In 1890

this term was extended to four years. Even though early records of Shieldsborough show a school fund dating back to 1858, there is no record of free schools at that time. Of course, St. Stanislaus College and St. Joseph's Academy existed in the mid-1800's in Bay St. Louis as well as a secular private school operated by a Mrs. Hawthorne in Pearlinton.

By the 1890's there were more than forty one-teacher schools, white and black, in the rural areas of the county. Evidence of some of these schools such as Dilville and Taylor now exists only in the memories of the elder citizens in the county, in the stories recounted to grandchildren, or in faded photographs lying in abandoned albums in the attic. Many of these schools were

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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.”

poorly maintained with meager facilities according to an interview with Mr. W. W. Stockstill conducted in March 1937 as part of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) program. Mr. Stockstill served as Hancock County Superintendent of Education from 1900-1908.

In the early years of education in Hancock County, small schools were established in the various communities throughout the county. Some people remember Gainesville, Turtle Skin, Dead Tiger, Gravel Pit, Catahoula, and Bagget schools. There was also a provision made for an Indian school in 1884 near the Indian settlement at Bayou LaCroix. This school operated as late as 1895.

In February 1937 Mr. John Craft, who served as Hancock County Superintendent of Education from 1908-1920, was interviewed by Edmond J. Giering, who worked on the WPA. Project. The following information has been gleaned from that interview.

Mr. Craft considered the most outstanding achievement of his administration to be the consoli-

dation of the county schools. Prior to 1908 there were no definite district lines for the various schools in the county, so the school board authorized that a new map be drawn and new districting be made of the schools. Pearl River and Harrison Counties had already reorganized and consolidated many of their schools along these lines, and to keep pace with the rapidly developing educational activity in the state, Hancock County followed suit. At that time, the county school board was composed of Asa S. Weston of Logtown, Beat 1; Wiley Smith, Picayune, Beat 2; Price W. Lee, Caesar, Beat 3; W. A. Cuevas, Fenton, Beat 4; and George Hicks Edwards, Bay St. Louis, Beat 5. In addition to joining in the educational progress of the state, the most notable advantages of this reorganization were better health conditions, improved rural life activity, and more professionally trained rural teachers.

Consolidation brought better health conditions in the form of more comfortable school furniture and improved sanitary facilities with the installation of water cool-



Dil- School Children (1920) ville
Hancock County, Mississippi

ers, individual drinking cups, and better toilet facilities. Improved rural life activity came in the form of a better knowledge of beautifying the school grounds as well as the introduction of conveniences in the home to make life in rural school communities more attractive. More professionally trained teachers came in the form of placing *some* educational requirements on teachers such as more professional education.

The chief objection to consolidation was, as usual, increased taxation, but the objection was overcome through the diligent efforts of the county superintendent and other interested citizens. The Sellers School was formed out of the Crane Creek, the Cap Ladnier, and parts of the Standard schools in the fall of 1914 and officially became the Sellers Consolidated School. In 1915, the Dedeaux Line School was formed out of Dedeaux, Sand Hill, Orphan Creek, and part of Standard. The Kiln Consolidated School, which embraced a large



Napoleon School,  
Hancock County, MS, 1920  
*(The students are identified on p. 8.)*

taxing unit, was formed from the Necaize, Fenton, McLeod, Silver Hill, and Bayou Talla schools in 1916. With over four hundred students the first year, it was one of the largest consolidated schools in the state and was proclaimed by the state superintendent of education to be one of the outstanding units of consolidation. Two years later in 1918, the Lakeshore School was formed out of the Clermont Harbor, Ansley, and Lakeshore areas. By the end of 1919, the number of one-teacher schools in the county had been reduced by more than one-half.

In 1937 when the WPA Research Project was written, there were fifteen elementary schools in the county for the education of both black and white students. There were also four consolidated high schools in Hancock County. At this time the practice of "Separate, but Equal" was prevalent throughout the state, and the high schools appear to have been limited to white students only. The schools located in Beat 1 were the Logtown School

and the Gainesville School for white children and "The Point" in Pearlinton and the Gainesville Colored School for black children. All of these schools offered instruction through the eighth grade.

Aaron Academy is the only school listed in the WPA report as being in Beat 2 in 1937. It was a grammar school located at the intersection of Highways 11 and 90.

In Beat 3 there were two grammar schools, Leetown and Catahoula, and two high schools—Caesar High School and Kiln Vocational High School. Caesar, a line school located partially in Pearl River County and partially in Hancock County, offered classes from primary through twelfth grades. The Kiln Vocational High School was a senior high school with a curriculum offering home science, music, and athletics. Since it was a vocational high school, agriculture students had an outside project such as raising a bale of cotton, an acre of corn, etc., in addition to regular class work.

Beat 4 boasted two high



John Craft,  
Hancock County Superintendent of  
Education, 1908-1920



schools and four grammar schools for black children. The high schools were Sellers Vocational High School, located on the northern line between Harrison and Hancock Counties, and Dedeaux School, another consolidated vocational senior high school also situated on the Harrison and Hancock County line several miles south of the Sellers School. The schools for black children were the Fenton, Catahoula, Jourdan River, and Bagget Schools.

Edwardsville School, Gulfview School, and Clermont Harbor School were all found in Beat 5. Edwardsville School was situated on Bayou Choctaw; Gulfview School was located at Lakeshore one mile north of the seawall; and Clermont Harbor School sat halfway between the seawall and the railroad in Clermont Harbor.

Because of the changing demographics of Hancock County, later consolidation of schools in the decades following the 1910's has caused many of these schools to be closed and others opened. Even though they currently exist only in the old stories and legends handed down from parent to child, they have played a very important part in developing the character, vision, and aspirations of

the citizens of Hancock County.

#### SOURCE:

Giering, Edmond J. "Schools of Hancock County, MS," *Works Progress Administration*. Washington, DC: US Printing Office, 1937.

## THE RINGING OF SCHOOL BELLS

Edited by  
Eddie Coleman

In 1976 Jeanne Doby Williams, a retired teacher of the Hancock County School System, handwrote an account detailing her experiences of teaching in the county schools from 1912 until her retirement in 1958. The following article is excerpted from her narrative.

"In the fall of 1912, I began teaching in the public school of my hometown, Pearlinton. I was principal and teacher. My pupils numbered thirty-two from primer through eighth grade. I had had two years of helping my mother in her private school in Pearlinton. Then [I] attended the Tri-County Normal

School in Wiggins, Mississippi, for nine or ten weeks, then took [the] teachers' examination in the Bay St. Louis Court House, and got [a] license to teach. [Because of] the Poitevent and Favre mill preparing to close, people commenced moving from Pearlinton. Before this, Pearlinton Public School had had two teachers; now, with a decreasing population only one would be needed. I applied and received the appointment.

"When cool weather came, we used pot-bellied stoves that burned wood. We had no janitor; the trustees saw that wood was put in the schoolyard. The larger boys kept the wood boxes indoors filled with wood. The older girls were assigned days to sweep and dust. I lit the fires and saw they were out before we left. I also helped with sweeping and cleaning. We had no play equipment [except] marbles, balls, bats, etc., that the pupils brought. In groups we would play 'Drop the Handkerchief' and singing games. There were no free books. Our books were bought or handed down...or given by someone that could use them no longer.

"Lunchrooms were unknown. Most of the children [lived within] walking distance from the school and went home for their midday lunch. If it was a rainy day, they did as I did every day—brought their lunch. I enjoyed the sessions. However, so many families were moving or just waiting for Poitevent and Favre to get their sawmill in Mandeville built that I was in doubt about accepting the school for the next session.

"My mother closed her private school in Pearlinton and accepted a position in Logtown Public School. My younger brother attended Logtown School and used to drive my mother back and forth in a horse drawn buggy. A short distance nearer, [in] Gainesville, a one-teacher



Jourdan River Colored School



Jean Doby  
Williams, teacher of 4th and 5th grades  
at Kiln High School, 1918-1919

public school needed a teacher. I accepted the position and rode with my brother and mother. The school was the 'Bennett Special.' It was a small one-room building, not [nearly] as nice as Pearlington School. I only had twenty pupils, all grades. The heater, janitor service, [and] play equipment [were] the same as in Pearlington, only this heater's pipe often smoked and fell down a few times.

"After this session my family moved to Mandeville. I did not go with them. I spent the summer in Hattiesburg at Mississippi Normal College, now USM. I visited my family when I left Hattiesburg, and on the second day I was in Mandeville, I received a telegram from Mr. John Craft, then county superintendent of Hancock, telling me there was a position as primary teacher open for me in Bayou Talla Public School, near Kiln, Miss., and if I accepted he would assist in getting a good place for me to board, and he did. Although Bayou Talla School was about one mile from Kiln, the patrons and pupils did not seem to

mind the distance. Many lived at Bayou Talla; so did I. I boarded a short distance from the school.

"The school was two-story and had three large rooms. The principal, a man, taught sixth, seventh, and eighth grades upstairs. The intermediate teacher and I each had a room downstairs. She taught the fourth, fifth, and part of the third grade. I had the beginners through third grade. We had no heater problems; they were in good condition. The desks were comfortable, and we had tables and chairs for reading purposes. Our play equipment was not very plentiful, but the larger boys and girls had spacious grounds to play outdoor games. The little folks spent recess periods on the school's front porch or playing under shade trees. The book situation was poor. It was either buy new books or use 'hand-me-downs' other members of the family had used. We had to bring our lunch, teachers as well as pupils. My classes sat at tables to eat, and I sat with them. I would spread a tablecloth made from colorful feed sacks on our reading tables.

"[The next September] I...had the same room, same position, but a larger salary. Before long rumors were in circulation about the passage of the Consolidated School Law of 1914. Many wide-awake citizens of Kiln and vicinity listened and visioned what an excellent location Kiln would be for a large, well-equipped school. Finally, in 1916 a petition was circulated at Kiln, Fenton, and elsewhere for a consolidated school district, which was endorsed by over [125] taxpayers and electors of the district. The petitions were presented to the school board in due time, [and] they were acted upon favorably, the result being a magnificent two-story building known as Kiln Consolidated School. It was formed by the following named schools: Necaize, McLeod, Fenton,

Silver Hill, and Bayou Talla, comprising a district of fifty-two square miles. The building, together with the equipment, cost ten thousand dollars.

"[During] the first session large covered vans drawn by horses were used to transport pupils that lived far from the school. Later motor trucks were used; [they] were faster and cheaper in the long run. All the classrooms were spacious; so was the auditorium; each [was] well equipped. Mr. Vernon Asendale was the first principal, and the first graduates in the new school [for the] 1916-17 session were Etha Kergosien and Edgar J. Doby, my youngest brother.

"Our next principal was Prof. S. P. Powell. We were six classroom teachers, a domestic science teacher, and a music instructor. Mr. Powell coached the boys' ball games. One of the classroom teachers taught manual training to her boys that were in the sixth grade. Later when the older girls wanted a basketball team, Mr. Powell was their coach. Kiln pupils took active parts in ballgames [and] field meets in Hancock County [and] also in neighboring counties. Pupils who wished to do so took piano lessons.

"[In the] 1918-19 session 4-H Club work was introduced in the school under the guidance of Miss Sallie Cirlot, County Home Demonstration Agent and Mr. Frank Pittman as [county] agent. The school was carefully watched and cared for by the County Health Doctor, D. M. Shipp, and the nurses who assisted him. They lived in Bay St. Louis, but visited often.

"Every room had adjustable steel sanitary desks, charts, maps, blackboards, and other necessary school apparatus. We had electricity throughout the school even to ring the bell. We had a maintenance man and janitor, sanitary drinking fountains, and indoor restrooms. For rec-



Sellers High School  
Hancock County, MS

recreation there were swings, slides, and ball equipment of all kinds.

“In 1918-19 the teachers prepared a little volume *Kiln Consolidated School* and dedicated it to the children of Hancock County. By this time the school’s enrollment had reached [350]. The patrons were proud of their school; so were the teachers and pupils. The 1919 graduates were four in number: Jessie Cuevas, Mae Mauffray, Delia Beech, and Lottie Cuevas.”

### Did You Know This about Hancock County? Cotton

By  
Scott Bagley

Did you know that Hancock County at one time had a fairly sizeable cotton economy supported to a large extent by slave labor? While coastal Mississippi has not traditionally been associated with cotton fields and slaves, for a period of time

prior to, during, and just after the Civil War, cotton was grown in Hancock County and sold both nationally and internationally.

Before 1837 Mississippi’s principal crop had been corn rather than cotton with some rice rather than corn grown in coastal areas such as Hancock County. But cotton was also grown and sold. Some of the early cotton in the county was grown on small farms along the lower Pearl River, but it was most abundant north of the 31st parallel.

Cotton grown along the Pearl River was floated down the river on flatboats when the water was high enough or transported by wagon to the head of navigation, where a small community known as Cottonport developed on a bluff overlooking the river. The cotton was loaded onto boats there and shipped downstream to a gin at Simon Favre’s farm about a mile above Pearlinton. This location was originally known as Favreport, but later came to be called “The Gin.” The gin was built and operated by one of Simon Favre’s sons.

There were plantations in Hancock County during the nineteenth century, and some of them produced cotton. For example, the Cowan-Fields plantation, in the early 1800s at Cedar Point, was the first to grow cotton successfully—specifically Sea Island cotton. *Gossypium barbadense*, the botanical name of this type, was to become the most common species grown in Hancock County. Although the French had first experimented with this tall growing perennial variety elsewhere on the coast as early as 1720, the plants failed to survive frost. Cowan-Fields’ experimentation therewith was successful and the growth of this hearty variety spread throughout Hancock County and was to bring substantially more money at market than other cotton varieties grown



Kiln High School  
Kiln, MS





Elmwood Manor

elsewhere in Mississippi.

Other notable plantations in what was then Hancock County grew Sea Island cotton as well. These included plantations in the Pearl River area owned by the Proctor family, J.F.H. Claiborne, and Major Andrew Jackson, the adopted son of President Andrew Jackson. The latter two large farms were situated specifically on Mulatto Bayou, a tributary of the Pearl. Still others were the Carroll plantation, the Neal Jourdan plantation on the lower Catahoula, the Daniells plantation, and the Saucier plantation of Bayous Phillips and La Croix. Most, if not all, of these plantations relied on slave labor. J.F.H. Claiborne had at least one hundred slaves as did the large Farr plantation located at Lott's Creek about five miles west of the present site of Pica-yune (then a part of Hancock County). The Proctor plantation relied on thirty to forty slaves for their cotton production. While Simon Favre had fifty-seven slaves on a plantation that he had bought sometime before 1813, it cannot be confirmed that he grew cotton.

As a proportion of the population, few whites in the county actually owned slaves while most slaveholders owned no more than five

slaves. Only a handful (the exceptions noted above) owned more than five to eight slaves.

The 1830s and 1840s seem to be the decades during which cotton made its greatest contribution to the Hancock County economy. County population growth of 42%—from 1,962 in 1830 to 3,367 in 1840—would seem to correlate with the growth of the cotton economy on the Pearl River. A smaller 9% growth rate during the following dec-

ade would appear to indicate continuing growth in spite of the loss of population to the newly formed Harrison County. Cotton, however, continued to be grown and sold in Hancock County through and beyond the Civil War. In 1871 it is documented that J.F.H. Claiborne sold his Sea Island cotton for fifty cents a pound and brought "...upon an average of three times as much as the short staple cotton." A short time earlier *The Gainesville Advocate* reported that "Hancock claims the finest specimen of Sea Island cotton exhibited in the Liverpool market last year. It was grown on the plantation of Judge Daniells."

Eventually the lower price of cotton grown on the more productive Mississippi delta lands caused the finer, more luxurious Sea Island cotton grown in and around Hancock County to be less profitable. Thus, cotton became less and less a part of the economy. A number of serious local planters moved to the delta area, which likely contributed to the decrease in Hancock County's population, from 3,672 in 1850 to 3,134 in 1860. Another reason that cotton decreased in importance was the



Laurelwood  
Home of J.F.H. Claiborne

emergence of the very profitable timber industry in Hancock County—a subject for another day.

Today only the sites of the old cotton plantations remain, having been replaced by new homes, recreational space, rich archaeological sites, or nothing at all. While cotton was never necessarily king in Hancock County, it was, at least for a time, a prince.

**SOURCES:**

Giardino, Marco, PhD. & Russell Guerin. *Early History of Hancock County, Mississippi, with Emphasis on the Pearl River Area*. Unpublished manuscript, c. 2004.

Scharff, Robert G. *Louisiana's Loss, Mississippi's Gain*. Lawrenceville, VA: Brunswick Publishing Corp., 1999.

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Aaron Academy Students (p. 1)

The students in the picture have been identified as follows: L to R (front row kneeling)—Curtis McCarty, Toxie Craft, Kenneth McCarty, Lorette McQueen;

L to R (on bench—Virgil Craft, Bertha Burks, Mable Kellar, Sedonia Kellar, Louisa Kellar, Ola Miller, Rev. Tom Gordon [teacher] Asa McQueen, Ora McClure Effie McDuffy, Ester Mitchell, Grace McClure, Oakie Frierson

L to R (standing)—Ralph Craft, Morgan Frierson (on horse), George Frierson, John Craft, Wiley Frierson, Jim McDuffey, Albert McQueen, William Burks, Felton Mitchell, Luther Frierson, Lula McQueen, Agnes Kellar, Eugene Craft, Charley Kellar, Geneva Craft, Edwina Burks, Rose Kellar, Geneva Frierson, Ruby Frierson, Leona McQueen, Orna Crusae, Ellis Mitchell (on horse), Olivia Kellar

These identifications were given to the Society with the newspaper article from which the photo was taken.

Dilville School Students (p. 2)

The students in the picture have been identified as follows: L to R (sitting)— Albert “Boy” Lusich, Eldon Moran, Jorday Johnson, Verdie Johnson, Lillian Lusich, and Sarah Favre;

L to R (mid-standing)— Legier Lusich, Velma Zengarling, Herbert Zengarling, Claiborne Ladner, Rufus Lusich, and Corine Lusich;

L to R (back-standing)— Luvinia Moran, Robert Zengarling, Clara Ladner, George Zengarling, and Arnevia Moran.

This information was provided to the society by Luther Ladner.

Napoleon School Students (p. 3)

The students in the picture have been tentatively identified as follows (but in no particular order) as Clifton Murphy, Dorothy Hover, Gladys Miller, Louise Dawsey, Rose Dawsey, Lena Pearl Miller, Edith Hover, Hilary Odom, Ammon Kennedy (kneeling), Prentiss Kennedy (kneeling), Johnnie B. Hover, Charles Miller, F.B. Blackmon, Earl Holden, Irene Eckerds [teacher], Bell Holden, Edna Blackmon, Dora Hover, Eharmon Landrum, Ruby Blackmon, Edd Holden, Mittie Landrum, Myrtle Miller, Malissia Hover, Wilbert Odom, Minnie Dawsen, Ollie Murphy, Ethnal Davis, August Holden Cliff Dawsey

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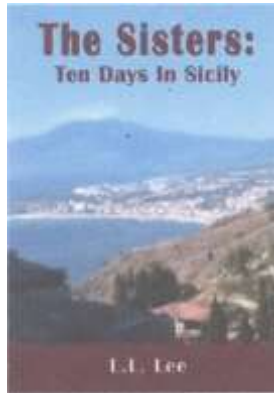
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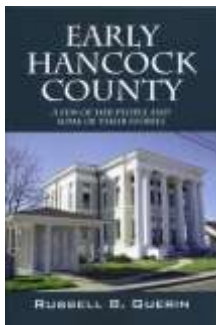
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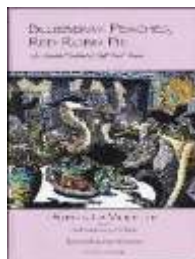
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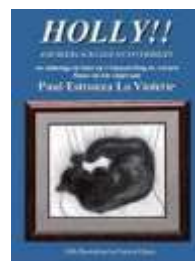
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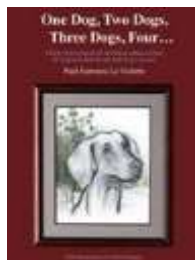
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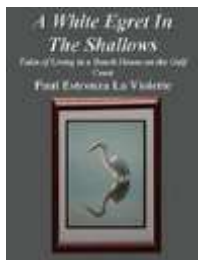
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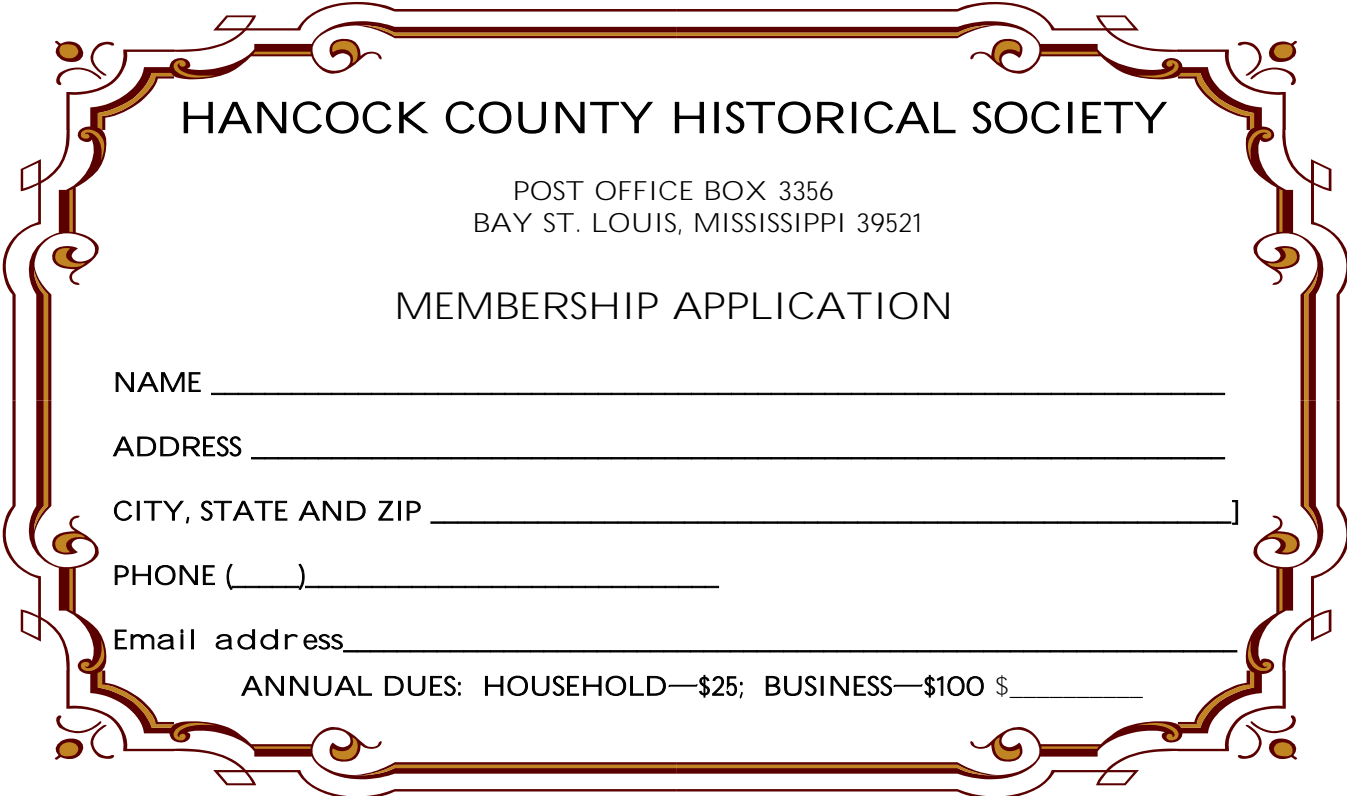
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