

THE

# HISTORIAN

www.hancockcountyhistoricalsociety.com

OF HANCOCK COUNTY

Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi

July 2015

## COMING EVENTS AT LOBRANO HOUSE

The monthly luncheon meeting will be held on Thursday, July 16, 2015, at noon at the Kate Lobrano House. Guest speaker for the program will be Congressman Gene Taylor, who will speak on glimpses of life in Hancock County the day before, the day of, and the days following Hurricane Katrina. **Reservations are required** and may be made by calling 467-4090. **Respectfully we must insist that you please call by noon on Wednesday, July 15, 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.



Crossing the  
Bay of Saint Louis

## ANNUAL CEMETERY TOUR

Even though October is still a few months away, it's not too early to begin thinking about and planning the Cemetery Tour. The 22nd Annual Cemetery Tour will be held on Halloween night, Saturday, October 31, 2015, at Cedar Rest Cemetery on Second Street in Bay Saint Louis. Needed are volunteers to prepare the cemetery for the tour, to portray citizens buried there, to act as guides, and to serve at the Lobrano House. To volunteer, please call 228-467-4090. All actors and guides must be members of the Historical Society.

## Memories of the L&N

By  
Irving Cuevas

Before automobiles, the interstate highway system, and airline travel changed the transportation scene, L&N passenger and freight trains were the primary modes of travel for many people traveling for work and pleasure between New Orleans and Mobile. Not all modern day residents of Hancock County remember the glory days of rail

transportation when the Louisville and Nashville Railroad (L&N) was woven into the fabric of the communities on the rail line through the county.

I wish to take you back to the 1940s through the turn of the century to the present to remember a time when there were numerous stops in Hancock County—at Bay Saint Louis, Nicholson and Waveland Avenues in Waveland, Clermont Harbor, Lakeshore, Ansley, and Claiborne. I also wish to inspire anyone who grew up along the

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**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.”

tracks and others to preserve their memories of this legacy in writings of their own. My specific intent is to focus on one extended family who for many years “lived alongside the tracks” and had close and personal relationships with the L&N, the Dixie Line as it was known to many.

The railroaders revisited in this article toiled at numerous jobs throughout their L&N careers. They served as bridge tenders, on paint and bridge gangs, on right-of-way maintenance crews, as depot grounds and maintenance men, as crossing guards, and in other jobs as needed. The L&N workers who make this story possible are Monroe and Robert Cuevas (father and son), Charles and Milton Bernard (father and son) and James, Dave, and Donald Harvill (father and sons). In addition all of these men are related as cousins and in-laws. Of the members of this extended family, only Donald Harvill carries on the railroad tradition as a bridge tender at the Rigolets for what is now the CSX Railroad.

The Cuevas and Bernard families actually lived trackside

before becoming L&N employees. They operated fishing and hunting camps on Lake Catherine primarily for folks from New Orleans looking for outdoor recreation and adventure. In addition during World War II, Charles Bernard and Robert Cuevas worked as government guards on the Rigolets Bridge. Donald said it was indeed a “family business” for the family line, adding his “immediate family members combined for more than 200 years of railroad toil and labor.” Unlike his predecessors, nowadays Donald commutes daily via a company high rail truck, not on a hand-pumped velocipede or a small motorcar. He says his bridge tender shift suits him fine, “cherishing the solitude” it affords him.

Needless to say, railroad-ing was and still is a “24/7” endeavor, requiring employees to staff shifts around the clock, coming and going at odd hours day and night. I distinctly remember my father returning to our Bay Saint Louis home in the early morning hours from his overnight shift as a crossing guard attendant in New Orleans at Elysian Fields and South Rob-



Ansley Train Station (above),  
Bay Saint Louis Depot (upper r.),  
Waveland Depot (lower r.)

ertson. Of course he commuted to and from work on the L&N. Many mornings as he entered our large yard on Railroad Avenue, he'd be whistling the tune "Peace in the Red River Valley." I'll always remember that homecoming sound. In earlier years with the railroad, my dad spent time on "track gangs," operating small motorcars and right-of-way weed-cutting machines. And there are many other memories—various sights and sounds.

It was just a way of life living as we did in houses that vibrated to the trains rumbling by. There was the booming noise of huge machines pounding creosote pilings into the bottom of the Bay of Saint Louis to make railroad bridge repairs. Not to be forgotten was the thick black smoke that came belching from coal-powered locomotives. This was at a time when indoor washing machines were uncommon for many families. My mother, (Margaret Oakley Fayard Cuevas) was quite adept at her Monday ritual of washing our clothing in outdoor tubs and hanging them out to dry, timing it, at least hopefully, to miss the soot and cinders from passing locomotives just a hundred or so feet from the clothesline. Sometimes, the day's chores would be interrupted by railroad hobos, who hopped off and on freight cars, often at our house on Railroad Avenue. Sure enough, my mother fixed sandwiches and coffee for them. I've always wondered if some secret sign marked our dwelling as a charitable stop for food for the hungry.

Speaking of my now-



Pictured at right is Donald Harvill, the only member of the extended family who still works for the railroad. He is the son of Doris Harvill.



Cousin Doris  
Mae Harvill

Even as a child she appeared to be "at home" by the tracks.

deceased mother, she often told the story of her "heart in the throat" fear as a locomotive narrowly missed striking me, who as a two-year-old, oblivious to the danger, was trying to join his older siblings playing across the tracks. One of those siblings was my older brother Milton, whose L&N memories began with the family living along the tracks on Lake Catherine. Our then newly-married mother was quick to catch trains to get to the hospital in Bay Saint Louis for the birth of our oldest brother, Monroe, Jr., and to the Mayo Infirmary in New Orleans for Milton's birth, both in the mid-1930s. They rode to and from New Orleans schools on the L&N. Other family members who had "trackside" births were my brother Lloyd in a section house in Waveland and me in a

rental house along the tracks in Bay Saint Louis, both in the 1940s, with midwives assisting by kerosene lamplight. Later, when our dad became an L&N employee and they were older, Monroe, Jr., and Milton sometimes were allowed to ride along with him on a flatbed rail car that carried a weed cutter and motor car needed for right-of-way maintenance. It also had sleeping/eating quarters.

My first cousin, Doris Mae Bernard Harvill, could very well be labeled a "triple L&Ner" because her father, husband, brothers, and several in-laws were bridge tenders from Chef Menteur in Louisiana to Biloxi to Mobile at various times. Doris Mae has spent a lifetime along the tracks. She still lives within sound of CSX freight trains passing through Waveland. Her first

memories are as a three-year-old with her family operating a fishing camp on Lake Catherine. For her first eleven school years, she, her sister Delores, and other neighboring children rode from Lake Catherine and the Rigolets to and from schools in New Orleans.

“It’s just something I’m used to,” said Doris Mae, “being in a railroad family.” She added, “I just got used to all the noise and smoke of the trains, day and night, and now I hate it that L&N passenger trains no long run” through the area.

First cousin Ellis Cuevas joined in this walk down memory lane. His father, Robert Cuevas, worked on L&N bridge gangs and as a bridge tender on every bridge between New Orleans and Mobile for more than thirty years. As a young woman and prior to her marriage, Ellis’ mother, Magdalena (Lena) Seither, commuted on the L&N between Nicholson Avenue and Canal Street in New Orleans for her job as a seamstress at a suit manufacturing company. Ellis’

brothers, Clemence, Raymond, and Felton, were also “children of the L&N.”

We all remember walking along the tracks and picking up coal that had fallen off coal cars of steam locomotives. We used it as fuel in home heaters. Using large saws, we’d cut discarded crossties into fence posts and firewood for home stoves and fireplaces. Of course, as mischievous children, we also placed pennies on tracks to be flattened by the trains. In addition Cousin Ellis recalled riding commuter trains with his Uncle Charles Bernard and cousin Jimmy Harvill, “bream poles in hand,” between Nicholson Avenue and Ansley depots for “a day of fishing in the Claiborne Canal east of the Pearl River.

At one time or another, our family members rode on company passes usually to New Orleans for big city shopping or to movie theaters, Mardi Gras parades, and other attractions. After high school brother Milton rode L&N commuter trains to and from New Orleans for his

job at Texaco. Many mornings he and our father crossed paths at the huge New Orleans train station at the head of Canal Street at the Mississippi River—he going to work and my father returning home. Milton also fondly recalled that he and fellow commuters “engaged in friendly card games” with his winnings covering his rail fare.”

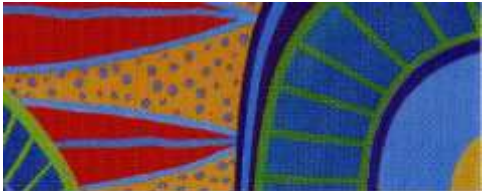
Needless to say, an article such as this cannot detail every memory. Countless other Hancock Countians worked for the L&N or in railroad connected jobs. Many have passed on or moved on just as the Louisville and Nashville Railroad reached the end of its line to be replaced by Amtrak.

When Amtrak inaugurated its train system, the last northbound run of the L&N’s *Pan American* passenger train through Bay Saint Louis occurred on April 30, 1971, with the final southbound *Pan American* on the following day. For a number of years, Bay Saint Louis continued as an Amtrak stop for *The Sunset Limited* and *The Crescent*, and for a while the Bay was part of a commuter line for the 1984 Louisiana World’s Exposition and Fair in New Orleans. Now Amtrak’s closest stops are Picayune, Slidell, and New Orleans on *The Crescent* traveling to and from Birmingham, Atlanta, Charlotte, Washington, and New York City. For true rail fans, that’s still a nearby positive, but far removed from the way things once were during L&N’s glory years for countless citizens of Hancock County.



Article author  
Irving Cuevas’ parents  
and brother Lloyd at  
Lloyd’s Eagle Scout  
ceremony





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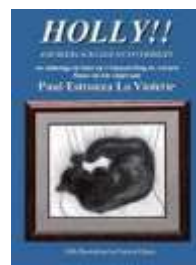
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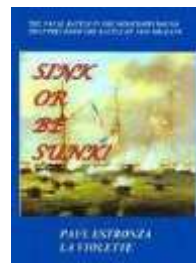
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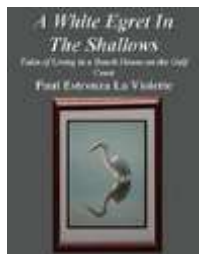
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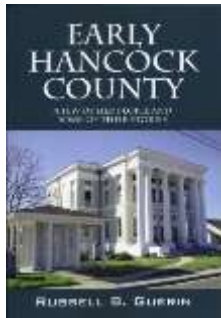


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This book is a collection of stories about Hancock County, MS, and some of its people, including J.F.H. Claiborne, Jean Lafitte, Simon Favre, Andrew Jackson, Jr., Asa Russ, and Christian Koch.

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