

THE

HISTORIAN

OF HANCOCK COUNTY

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Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi

January 2016

COMING EVENTS AT LOBRANO HOUSE

The monthly luncheon meeting will be held on Thursday, January 21, 2016, at noon at the Kate Lobrano House. Guest speakers for the program will be Leo and Lee Seal who will speak on the history of the Hancock Bank. **Reservations are required** and may be made by calling 467-4090. **Respectfully we must request that you please call by noon on Wednesday, January 20, 2016**, 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. **Beginning with the January luncheon, the price of lunch will be \$12.00.**

MEMBERSHIP FEES

It's time for current members to renew their memberships in the Historical Society and to encourage family and friends to join us too. The price of membership has risen to **\$30.00** 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.



Planes at Stennis International Airport

The History of the Hancock County Port and Harbor Commission (1979-2015)

By
James Keating, M.D.

The economic history of the Hancock County Port and Harbor Commission (HCPHC) over the last four decades has demonstrated sustained growth and prosperity, the product of remarkable achievement by its commissioners, directors, and employees. They have been an effective team over the years, increasing from 10 to 31 employees. This history will introduce the reader to a few of the

important characters in this story, their accomplishments, and the seminal events of this period such as Hurricane Katrina. The simple version of this financial story is in no small part about the short line railroad and a handful of large industrial factories which increased the Commission's operating budget from approximately \$200,000 in 1979 to \$7.2 million in 2014. Competent business management and shrewd source financing of capital improvements and repairs have been accomplished with a succession of grants, loans, and corporate bonds. The commission including Port Bienville and Stennis International Airport has been self-sufficient since 1992 and does not depend on the county for support

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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.”

through taxes. The physical assets of the two sites are valued at over \$150 million. This economic development has built social as well as economic capital and enhanced the quality of life for the county without stress or pollution to the local environment. The contribution of these industries to the school tax is just one example of the positive impact this growth has had on the quality of life in Hancock County. This history will address the highlights of the period from 1979-2015.

The Michael Baker Engineering Company put together an excellent master plan for the industrial park in 1964 which is still employed to this day fifty years later. A large tract of land (1,200 acres) adjacent to the East Pearl River was selected. Today Port Bienville has expanded to 3600 acres and seventeen industries, offering a medical clinic and a training center. A channel was proposed through Mulatto Bayou to provide a barge canal to reach the tenant factories. The channel is 12 feet deep and 150 feet wide and connects ships and barges to the Gulf Intercoastal Canal via Lake Borgne. Industries are connected via waterway by a long, barge canal that runs through the park. A central rail and road corridor parallels the canal one-half mile away which extends down the peninsula now named Port Bienville. Factory sites are located along the corridor which also contains heavy utilities such as electric power and natural gas pipelines. A well-planned and successful site has been an attraction and critical factor in the inducement and recruitment of future tenant industries.

The first large factory to locate in Port Bienville was Borg-Warner plastic manufacturing plant. Since 1981 the plant has changed ownership and name to GE Plastics and is now owned by SABIC (Saudi Basic Industrial Corporation). SABIC is one of the world's leading manufacturers of chemicals, fertilizer, plastics, and metals. The cost of construction of the original plant was \$30 million. In 1986 a \$30 million expansion was finished, in 1987 a new \$50 million product plant was added, and in 1996 a \$70 million enlargement was completed. This industry has used the railroad services of the port and demonstrated for the first time the potential for the port to become financially self-sufficient. SABIC has about 150 employees.

Borg-Warner (SABIC) produces engineered thermoplastics which are shipped in bulk rail cars to other plants within the company for processing. The plastic is used for hundreds of applications including automobile interior trim, appliances, telecommunication and business machine housing, pipes, and sporting goods. The plant is still present in the industrial park and has added a fiberglass line for products used in the automobile industry. Recruiting and retention of this company has been the cornerstone of a successful strategy HCPHC developed during the presidency of Ronald Artigues, Sr., and his team to build a cluster of polymer and chemical companies in Port Bienville.

The second major company to be recruited to the port was Linear Peninsula Container Shipping Company. This steamship line provided six medium sized container ships which traveled to and from the Yucatan

Peninsula in Mexico. Ships commuted weekly to the Yucatan, offering fast, reliable, fixed-day service transportation of containers not available elsewhere on the Gulf Coast. Water transportation per ton or mile is one-fifth of rail cost and one-twentieth of motor/truck freight cost. Unfortunately because of damage to the port by Hurricane Katrina, the company terminated operations at Port Bienville and moved to Panama City, Florida.

The third big plant to build in the industrial park was Wellman in 1996. This company is now owned by DAK Americas. The original plant cost \$300 million and employed 150. Manufacturing PET resins (polyethylene terephthalate) which are primarily used to produce plastic bottles, DAK is a subsidiary of one of Mexico's largest global industrial companies. The recently announced \$30 million expansion with an addition of a polyester staple fiber line will lead to an increase of eighty-six jobs.

A fourth large plant to locate in Port Bienville was Jindal Tubular, formally PSLNA, which began construction in 2007. Jindal manufactures large diameter high pressure steel pipes. The construction cost of this plant was \$104 million, and there are currently two hundred employees. Jindal is part of one of India's largest business conglomerates. The plant is able to produce 375,000 tons of pipe per year with diameters of 18-120 inches and lengths of up to eighty feet. The pipes are used for natural gas, petroleum, water transmission lines and construction pilings. Jindal bought PSLNA through bankruptcy proceedings in 2014. It

distributes its products via trucking, rail, and waterways.

Other plants in the park include Calgon Carbon Corp., SNF Polychemie Inc., and Manufab Inc. Calgon Carbon is an activated carbon manufacturer whose product is used in water filtration systems. SNF Polychemie is a major producer of polymers used for cleaning municipal water supply. Manufab Inc. is a metal fabrication company.

Port Bienville owns and operates its own short line railroad within the industrial park. This connects to the CSX Railroad, a major US rail server, which runs adjacent to the park. The short line railroad provides railcar switching and line-haul to, from, and within the industrial park. There are storage capabilities for 429 cars. Approximately fifteen thousand cars move through the park each year. A multimodal warehouse and trans load facilities allow for bulk transfer and storage. The Anderson's facility at the park provides railcar repair, maintenance, cleaning, and washing. A significant portion of the operating revenue of the HCPHC comes directly from the rail line. The railroad, the backbone or economic engine of this enter-

prise, accounted for an estimated \$4.2 million of the total \$7.2 million budget in 2015. There are about two hundred publicly-owned parks in Mississippi. The few financially self-sufficient ones have a railroad.

The Stennis Airport was originally named *international* because during the planning stages it was thought that local cattle would be shipped to South America. That market did not evolve, however. For decades the airport served small private planes, and there were only a few tenants in the airpark. In the 1970s a small commuter airline shuttled passengers between Stennis Space Center and another one in Huntsville, Alabama. For a few years in the 1990s there was a charter service for casino patrons. David McDonald, a previous president, stated in 1994 that "people think of Stennis as one step above a puddle-jumper pasture airport." Prophetically, Hal Walters, his executive director, stated at the time that the airport was a "sleeping giant."

Today under Airport Director William Cotter, the facility can boast of a long 8500 foot grooved and lighted runway that together with an air traffic control tower, Instrument Landing



Port Bienville Short Line Railroad



Stennis International Airport can accommodate the largest military and commercial aircraft in the world.

System (ILS), and Automated Weather Observation System (AWOS-3) can accommodate the largest commercial and military aircraft in the world. In a recent press release to the *Sun Herald*, Mr. Cotter stated, "What started as support of Keesler Air Force Base's C-130Js and local Navy parachute operations has grown into a hub of military training." As a result, the airport/airpark has attracted an emerging cluster of defense technology firms which include Selex-Galileo, Optech, N Vision Solutions and JALBTCX. Selex-Galileo provides cockpit interrogation of complex computer assisted instrument panels. Maintenance, repair, and overhaul (MRO) facilities and rehab organizations have evolved and prospered in this fertile aeronautic/aerospace sector. Government and U. S. Defense Department activity represent fifty percent of the business of the airport. The facility had an operating budget of over \$2 million last year, and all leasable space in the airpark is currently full. Land adjacent to the runway in the "buffer zone" has been purchased for much needed future expansion. Hal Walters was correct in his prediction that the aerospace sector in Hancock

County should be targeted for future economic development.

Hancock County was ground zero during Katrina. The Linear Peninsula Container Steamship Company had enough damage to its facilities that it decided to relocate its entire operation to Panama City where there is an excellent harbor. The local CSX Railroad was down for months, so rail traffic was curtailed. In addition the Port Bienvenue Short Line Railroad needed much repair, and there was water damage to all plants. To make matters worse, there was hesitancy in the finance/investment sector to support any new projects or those in progress for five years which was a major deterrent for economic development. Bay St. Louis and Waveland were virtually destroyed and did not appear to be appealing places to live. Nevertheless, Hancock County and the HCPHC survived the ordeal. Financed by FEMA grants, short-term low-interest loans, and public improvement bonds, repairs were made. It is noteworthy that the recovery from Katrina is proof of the resiliency of the economy of the county and its industrial parks which continue to expand and surpass pre-Katrina levels.

In conclusion, the HCPHC has been tasked with leveraging the two big assets, the port and airport, for economic development. Its goal is to develop environmentally responsible commercial, industrial, and manufacturing enterprises for encouragement of employment within the county. This program seeks to diversify the tax base, to create a balanced economy, to increase employment, and to improve the quality of life in Hancock County. These goals require recruitment, retention, and expansion in targeted business sectors. An economic partner with Stennis Space Center and the Hancock Chamber of Commerce, the Commission has benefited from strong leadership and the good teamwork over the years of its many employees, past and present. Thus, from its beginning in 1963, the HCPHC has utilized an excellent master plan by Michael Baker Engineering Co. to benefit the economy of Hancock County and to insure its continued growth, job creation, and general prosperity.

Major Leaders of HCPHC

Ronald Artigues, Sr., served on the HCPHC for sixteen years and was president from 1979-1988. Mr. Artigues owned and operated a construction company during his time on the commission, even though his responsibilities at HCPHC required two to three days of administration each week. The commission was struggling financially in the 1970s because there were no big factories and no large sources of revenue. He reports that the commission had briefly considered selling the short line railroad, but wisely saw the long



Ronald Artigues, Sr.

term potential in keeping it, even though maintaining the infrastructure was expensive. During his long term as president, the Borg-Warner plant was built and began the financial success of this venture. In the 1980s a railway washing and maintenance facility was created. The original administration office was in a trailer in Waveland, but his associate commissioner, Mrs. Nancy Gex, was tasked with building the present headquarters on Highway 90 for about \$350,000, which acquired the nickname *Taj Mahal*. Ms. Gex was the first woman on the commission and was also made chairperson of the Railroad Committee. She remembers shopping for old and used locomotives because the operation was on a tight budget. During this timeframe an old time coal burning locomotive with antique passenger railcars operated for a few years as part of a local business, entertaining children and tourists in Port Bienville on weekends.

David McDonald served on the commission for thirty-two years and was president from 1992-2003. After serving in

World War II, Mr. McDonald established his own building materials company. In 1974 at the request of county supervisor, James Travirca, he was appointed to the commission which wanted more input from local businessmen. Two great achievements of his term as president were finding Executive Director Hal Walters and recruiting the giant chemical manufacturing facility, Wellman, for Port Bienville. Walters called McDonald his “friend, colleague, and mentor.” Mr. McDonald operated the commission as a corporation wherein the commissioners set the policies and had the authority to approve or disapprove any activity the operation engaged in. The president and commissioners report to the Hancock County Board of Supervisors, who leave the day-to-day operation of the office and its various activities to the directors. Dave McDonald as president and Hal Walters as executive director represented dynamic leadership that helped transform the port and airport from relative obscurity to financially sound and pros-



David McDonald



Hal Walters

perous business assets of the county.

Hal Walters joined the commission in 1994 and served as executive director until 2007. He was recruited by David McDonald from the Mississippi Economic Development Authority where he was manager of the international recruitment division. His first major achievement was to put together a master plan in 1995 for the upcoming ten years. The plan recommended the investment in significant additional infrastructure for the port and the airport. Such a plan required a great deal of source funding to prepare for the future. During his stewardship and with the professional and innovative management of Deputy Director Greg Deakle and Port Manager Steve Landry, the mission was accomplished, and the HCPHS was able to attract a cluster of good manufacturing facilities from the global chemical and polymer international marketplace. Linear Peninsula Steamship Container Co. operated more efficiently after changes and repairs to the docks. In addition, Mr. Walters increased rail



HCPHC, 1996, during the Wellman Project
Standing, L to R—Bill Stovall, J. B. McCullough, Jeep Ladner, Robert Genin, Hal Walters; seated, L to R—Louis Brown, Omer DeBever, Harry Frierson, Dave McDonald

assets. There was a shortage of railcars, locomotives, and personnel. Additional track was necessary for access to the factories and additional sidetrack was constructed to the CSX railroad connection. The new Wellman plant represented heavy industry which required replacing the actual rail for Wellman “supercars” called 286 cars because of the 286,000 pound weight limits. These cars could not operate on the original 90 lb. weight rails; thus, heavy duty 115 lb. rails at a cost of \$2 million were installed. A large grant secured from the state of \$40 million was necessary to build the required infrastructure for the Wellman plant. These improvements allowed the port to service nine heavy industries in the future. Thus, Mr. Walters represented a new gener-

ation of experienced money managers who could weave through a complex web of banking and government agencies to source funds for proposed projects.

Robert Kane has been on the commission for twenty years



Robert Kane

and president for the last twelve years. He brought the HCPHC through Katrina and the necessary recovery/repairs. During his term the Jindal and Amberclear Companies were recruited to the port. The airport/airpark also flourished under the able administration of Airport Director William Cotter, who was hired in 1999. He has played an important role in the relatively recent growth and development of the aerospace industry at the airport. Ashley Edwards has served as executive director of the HCPHC, creating a bold strategic plan for the future. His leadership has brought a broader scope to the economic development mission, designed a better business plan, and created greater efficiency and cost saving for the county. He modernized the market materials through a state of the art website and video site selection data base and monthly newsletters that communicate to prospects and local populace.

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Ashley Edwards

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who will assist her in registering live oak trees in Hancock County. They are Adriana Metcalfe and Anita Warner. Afterwards everyone enjoyed treats, camaraderie, and Christmas cheer. The trees are registered as a joint project of the Historical Society and the Bay/Waveland Garden Club.

Christmas Tea and Installation of 2016 Board of Directors

The annual Christmas Tea with the installation of the 2016 Board of Directors was held on December 3 from 3:00—5:00 P. M. After a few brief remarks by Charles Gray, the Executive Director of the Hancock County Historical Society, the Board of Directors took the oath of office. Serving on the 2016 board are Dr. Marco Giardino, president; Jim Thriffiley, first vice president; Jackie Allain, second vice president; Georgie Morton, treasurer; Lana Noonan, secretary; Scott Bagley, publicity chairman; John Gibson, historian; and Ames Kergosien, member at large.

Following this brief ceremony, Shawn Prychitko, affectionately known as the “tree lady” introduced two members of the Bay/Waveland Garden Club



Back row L to R: Marco Giardino, John Gibson; middle row L to R: Jim Thriffiley, Charles Gray, Jackie Allain, Scott Bagley; front row L to R: Georgie Morton and Lana Noonan. Ames Kergosien (not pictured)



Comments from Your President

It is with great pleasure that I begin my two year stint as your President. I've met with our Board of Directors and am pleased to report that our Society is in good shape financially and substantively. So, thank you to all our previous officers and to our membership for all the volunteering and serving. We will develop a budget next week, update some of our ruling documents (last done in 1978), and possibly develop a few projects that we can undertake together and that can focus the efforts of our many volunteers. I look forward to everyone's input on what our Society will do and how we shall accomplish these goals in the coming year.

—*Marco Giardino*

L to R:
Adriana Metcalfe,
Charles Gray,
Shawn Prychitko, and
Anita Warner



Brenda Brown is drawing for the raffle prizes with Georgie Morton and John Gibson looking on.



HANCOCK COUNTY CHANCERY COURT INDEXES 1853-1950

The Historical Society would like to thank Hancock County Chancery Clerk Tim Kellar for providing us with a copy of the Chancery Court Indexes 1853-1950. The alphabetical name index will prove valuable to our visitors doing historical research.

And we ate a lot too! A very special thanks to everyone who donated such delicious treats!



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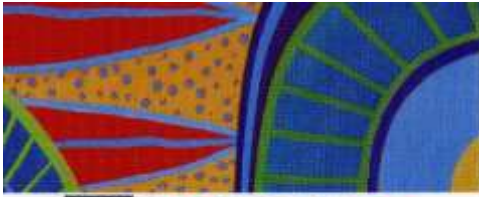
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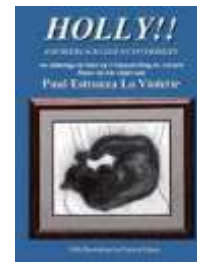
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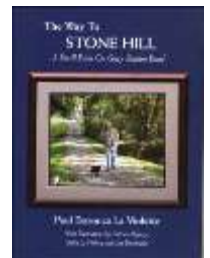
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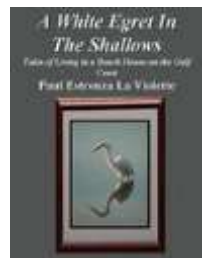
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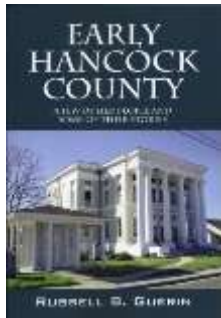


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