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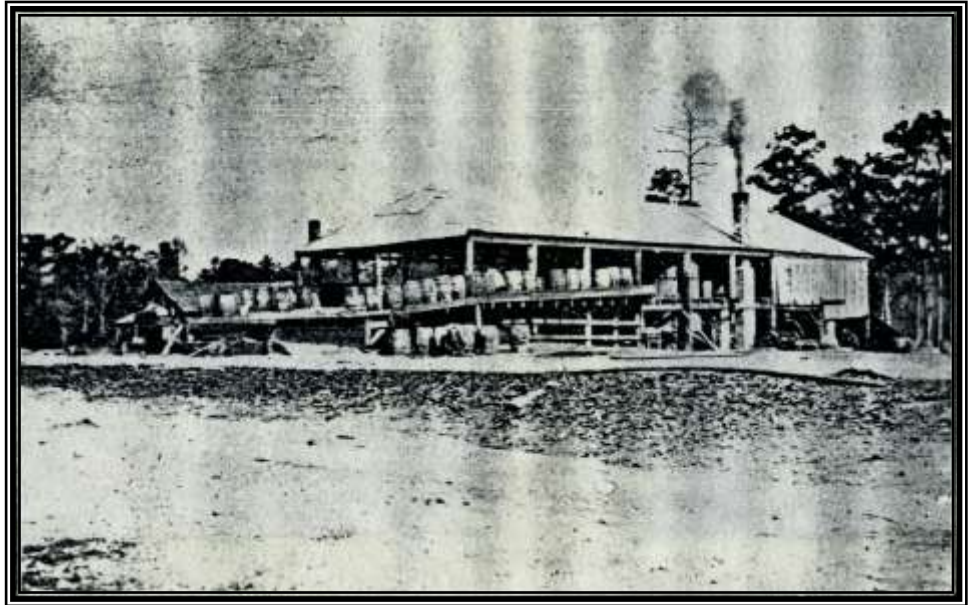
OF HANCOCK COUNTY

Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi

April 2016

COMING EVENTS AT LOBRANO HOUSE

The monthly luncheon meeting will be held on Thursday, April 21, 2016, at noon at the Kate Lobrano House. Guest speaker for the program will be Dr. Andrew J. Martinolich who will speak on the history of the hospital system in Hancock County. **Reservations are required** and may be made by calling 467-4090. **Respectfully we must request that you please call by noon on Wednesday, April 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. The price of lunch is \$12.00.



The Fenton Still's output is 2,500 barrels of spirits and 10,000 barrels of rosin, c. 1910.

The Turpentine Industry in Hancock County

By
James Keating, MD

Turpentine production was at one time an important chapter in the economic history of Hancock County. It is estimated that in the early twentieth century approximately 50% of workers in the county were employed in the timber industry and another 15% of workers were used for the production of naval stores or turpentine. Annual production in Mississippi in 1882 was approximately 15,000 casks or 750,000 gallons of turpentine. By 1905 annual production had increased to 63,207 casks

or 3,150,000 gallons. The piney forests of the South in that era provided a plentiful natural resource which small plants with kilns tapped or chemically converted by distillation into a much needed oil or extract. For a few decades the local industry enjoyed cheap labor, adequate outside financing, and an attractive supply and demand curve in the global market. This spirit of turpentine had many different uses, one as a paint and varnish solvent. It was in great demand at that time, and much of the product was exported to Europe. Hancock County played an important role in the story of the rise and decline of the turpentine industry in the United States.

Defined by the *Columbia Encyclopedia*, naval stores is a "term



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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.”

initially applied to cordage, mask, resin, tar, and timber used in the building of wooden sailing ships; but it now designates the products obtained from the pine tree, *e.g.* pine oil, pitch, resin, tar, and turpentine.” During the colonial period the naval stores industry was developed on the eastern seacoast. In the early nineteenth century the distillation process of the gum of pine trees was improved, and this enhancement made the process attractive to Southern plantation owners who lived in the pine forests. Next to cotton, timber, and rice, turpentine became one of the South’s greatest exports. Over time, the production of turpentine and the timber industry caused the destruction of the piney forests of the Carolinas and Georgia. This destruction led to the movement of these industries to Florida and Mississippi by the end of the nineteenth century.

About 1900 there was considerable speculation in timber in southern Mississippi, and many thousands of acres exchanged hands at fifty to seventy-five cents an acre. Approximately ten turpentine plants opened at various locations in Hancock County often adjacent to lumber mills. Cheap and plentiful raw material was an essential ingredient for the success of a business producing a commodity in this

early economy. A key figure in the local naval stores/turpentine industry was R.R. Perkins who came to Hancock County from South Carolina and Georgia. He initially moved to Caesar, MS, in 1904 and launched a turpentine business. Building the Imperial Naval Stores Co., Ltd, he became the largest single producer of naval stores in Mississippi. With headquarters in Bay St. Louis, his company was one of the largest business enterprises in the state, capitalized at \$500,000. In addition, he was also president of the Hancock Naval Stores Co. in Dillville, MS, and he owned turpentine plants in Caesar, Vidalia, Sellars, Fenton, Standard, and Catahoula. Later, he and his family moved from Caesar to Bay St. Louis, where he became a leading citizen of the town and where he served as president of the Merchants Bank. In addition to Perkins, there were other navel store operators in Hancock County such as W.B. Gillican of Standard Turpentine Co. and Dewitt Bacon of Bay Naval Stores Co.

Turpentine collection was initially accomplished by cutting a large “box” defect in the lower bark of the tree trunk to serve as a receptacle for the sap. This process or technique injured the tree, and lumbermen began to refuse to allow



One of the many ox teams used in transporting the crude products from the woods to the stills.



Known as “cupping the gum, this process damages a healthy tree by stripping away the bark so that resin could be caught in the “cups” at the base of the pine.

small turpentine operators the use of their pine forests. These small operators began to disappear, and the naval stores industry became increasingly concentrated in the hands of fewer people. Development of an improved method of the “slit and cup” technique allowed the timber and turpentine industries to coexist. Originally, the lumber companies looked upon the turpentine (naval stores) business as a nuisance, but once the new cup system demonstrated little damage to their pine trees, the big lumber companies such as Poitevaut and Favre absorbed the turpentine companies. They did limit turpentine sapping to three years only before harvesting the trees for timber.

The turpentine industry was extremely labor intensive. The migrating operators from the Carolinas and Georgia brought with them hundreds of black laborers who for generations had been naval store workers, forming a unique socio-economic group commonly known as turpentine workers. These capable and hard working men made an essential contribution to the economic evolution in the piney woods of Hancock County. Nollie Hickman, the dean of the piney woods historians, has written that “naval stores was, in fact, a black industry, and without the black man, could not

have existed.” Cheap labor was crucial to the economic formula for success of this industry in this time frame. The economic formula of cheap forests, railroad expansion, cheap black labor, and outside “timber carpetbaggers” providing necessary financing benefited both the lumber and turpentine industries in that era.

Unfortunately, there was rapid decline of the Mississippi naval stores industry after 1910. By then nearly half of the available pines had been tapped, and by the late 1930’s the little turpentine production that remained could be found only on small, usually scattered tracts. The successful economic formula did not last. The piney forests in Mississippi became depleted, and federal labor laws required increased compensation and benefits. Improved technology such as conversion from the gum naval stores technique using live pine trees to the wood naval stores technique using dead pine tree stumps did not deter the decline of the turpentine industry. A similar phenomenon occurred in the lumber industry in Hancock County which is now mostly pulp or pulpwood production for paper. In addition,

there was decreased demand for turpentine because of substitution for different kinds of paint and petroleum products. There was virtual extinction of the gum turpentine industry in Hancock County after World War II. Brazil, Portugal, China, and Indonesia gradually became the major world producers of naval stores.

In conclusion, turpentine was an important chemical industry that developed in Hancock County in the late nineteenth century. Later, a cluster of polymer and chemical companies would develop in the county in Port Bienville in the late twentieth century. The story of turpentine demonstrates the significance of a successful economic formula that includes cheap, plentiful raw materials, cheap skilled labor, adequate outside financing, and a convenient means of transportation of freight by railroad and/or river. The story predated the eventual transformation of the economy of Hancock County from early agrarian/timber to a more diverse, modern industrial/agricultural/resort profile. The glorious, dense forests of giant, virgin pine trees provided oil of turpentine and in turn gave employment to many workers and

<u>1882</u>	750,000	<u>1910</u>	1,750,000	<u>1941</u>	393,500
<u>1899</u>	3,213,850	<u>1914</u>	2,385,000	<u>1950</u>	113,500
<u>1904</u>	3,160,371	<u>1919</u>	1,749,800	<u>1951</u>	60,500
<u>1905</u>	3,150,000	<u>1922</u>	2,880,839		
<u>1907</u>	2,282,500	<u>1923</u>	2,015,865		
<u>1908</u>	2,277,850	<u>1930</u>	1,267,776		
<u>1909</u>	1,588,768	<u>1939</u>	832,600		

made a few men wealthy for several decades in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

SOURCES:

Gamble, Thomas, ed. *Naval Stores: History, Production, Distribution, and Consumption*. Savannah: Review Publishing and Printing Co., 1921.

Hickman, Nollie. "Black Labor in Forest Industries of the Piney Woods," in *Mississippi Piney Woods: A Human Perspective*. Ed. Noel Polk. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1956.

Hickman, Nollie. *Mississippi Harvest*. Montgomery, AL: The Paragon Press, 1962.

Outland, Robert, III. *Tapping the Pines: The Naval Stores Industry in the American South*. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2004.

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

graph collection. Gray was named Citizen of the Year for Hancock County by the local Chamber of Commerce in 1999, and as a result of his leadership, HCHS received the Mississippi Historical Society's Frank E. Everett Award in 2010 for its outstanding contributions to the preservation and interpretation of local history.

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Charles Gray Receives the Prestigious Dunbar Rowland Award from the Mississippi Historical Society

On March 5, 2016, Charles Gray of Bay St. Louis received the Dunbar Rowland Award for his life-long contributions to the preservation, study, and interpretation of Mississippi history. Gray is the long time executive director of the Hancock County Historical Society (HCHS) and has been a member of the society since the early 1980s. He has also served on the Hancock County Historic Preservation Board and the Mississippi Historical Society's board of directors. Gray was instrumental in the acquisition of the Loblano House, the documentation of local cemeteries and historic properties in Hancock County, and the digitization of the HCHS photo-



Charles Gray, Executive Director of the Hancock County Historical Society, proudly shows his Dunbar Rowland Award to Dr. Marco Giardino, president of the HCHS Board of Directors.

Books for Sale at Loblano House

Bay Saint Louis: Celebrating the First 300 Years
By the HCHS (\$15.00)

Early Hancock County: A Few of Her People and Some of Their Stories
By Russell B. Guerin (\$29.95)

Eyes of an Eagle: An Illustrated History of Early Houma-Terrebonne
By Christopher Everette Cenac, Sr., M.D. (\$50.00)

Livestock Brands & Marks: An Unexpected Bayou Country History
By Christopher Everette Cenac, Sr., M.D. (\$70.00)

Requiem for the Lily: A Novel of Gulf Coast History
By Placide D. Nicaise

Scrapbook of Treasured Memories
By Connie Heitzmann and Betty Stechmann (\$20.00)

West Side Stories Before, During, and After on Mississippi's West Coast
Photographs and Commentary by Vicki Niolet and Betty Stechmann (\$28.00)

Wilderness Families of the Gulf Coast
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Please see the AD on p. 6 for available books by Paul and Stella LaViolette.

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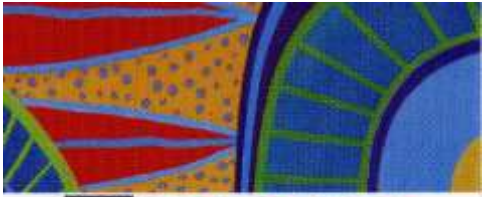
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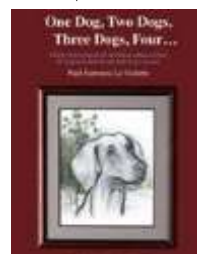
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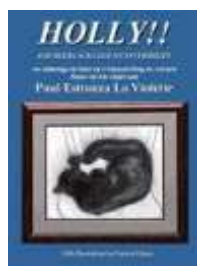
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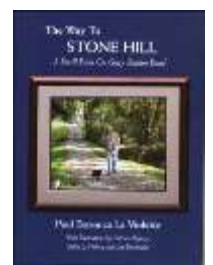
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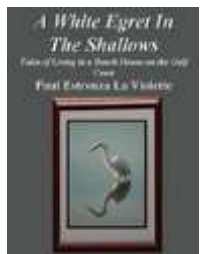
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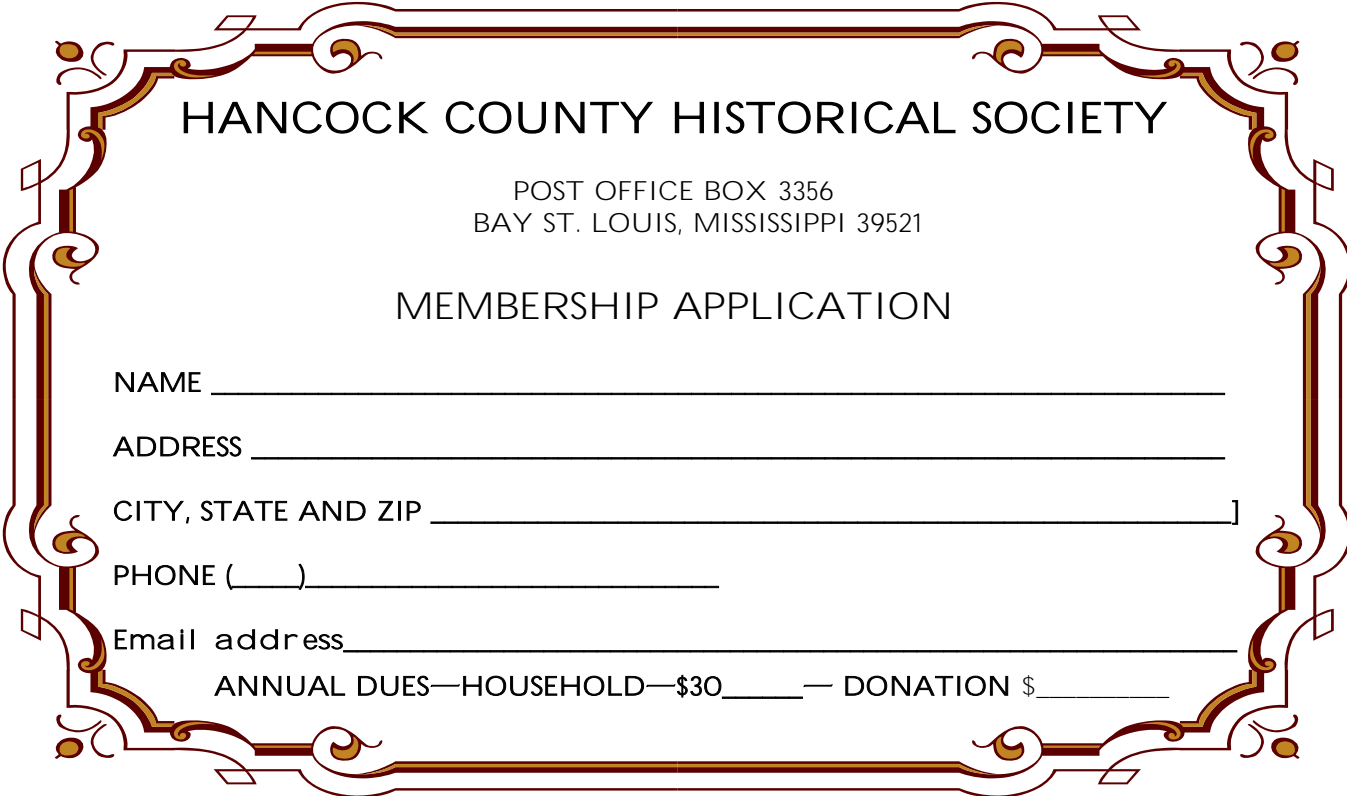
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