

THE

HISTORIAN

www.hancockcountyhistoricalsociety.com

OF HANCOCK COUNTY

Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi

May 2016

COMING EVENTS AT LOBRANO HOUSE

The monthly luncheon meeting will be held on Thursday, May 19, 2016, at noon at the Kate Lobrano House. Guest speaker for the program will be Tim Kellar, Hancock County Chancery Clerk. **Reservations are required** and may be made by calling 467-4090. **Respectfully we must request that you please call by noon on Wednesday, May 18, 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.



**Memorial Day
Monday, May 30, 2016**



Life on the Coast (1938)

By Louis F. Raynaud

Federal Arts Project of the Works Progress Administration
New Deal

The Mural Project

By
Eddie Coleman

After the crash of the Stock Market in October 1929, the United States faced what has become known as the Great Depression. With millions of people out of work, U.S. citizens were ready for a change, and with the inauguration of Franklin D. Roosevelt on March 4, 1933, the future of the U.S. looked promising and hopeful. Within the first one hundred days of being in office, President Roosevelt implemented his vision for economic rebirth in the form of his “New Deal” policies. This program was “the domestic

program of the administration of U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt between 1933 and 1939 which took action to bring about immediate economic relief as well as reforms in industry, agriculture, finance, water-power, labour, and housing, vastly increasing the scope of the federal government’s activities (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*).

One of the most familiar of the New Deal projects was the Works Progress Administration (WPA)—later named Works Projects Administration. This division was responsible for carrying out public works projects such as the construction of public buildings—schools, government buildings, hospitals, libraries— and roadways—highways, bridges, and such. Although lesser known, other divisions

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Scott Bagley, Publisher

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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.”

of the New Deal were also important in providing jobs for American citizens. Some of these divisions dealt with the arts—the Federal Writers’ Project, the Federal Theatre Project, and the Federal Arts Project.

The aim of the Federal Arts Project (FAP) was to provide jobs for American artists—painters and sculptors—by “arranging to have competent representatives of the profession embellish public buildings.” The FAP created over 5,000 jobs and produced over 225,000 art works including murals and sculptures, exhibited predominately in post offices to give these works the greatest exposure to the American public. Each mural was approximately a 12’ x 5’ oil on canvas rendering of a local scene. Yet, the size of the sculpture was not specific. To pay for the artwork one per cent of the total cost of the government building was budgeted for the project.

To be considered to paint one of the post office murals, an artist could enter a sample work in various open competitions or submit it to local authorities. Once an artist was chosen, he was given cer-

tain guidelines to follow so that his mural would reflect the culture of the local community in whose post office the work would hang rather than give an abstract representation of his subject. Because many artists were not natives of the towns where their works would be displayed, they were encouraged to visit the localities to get an idea or flavor of local interests, culture, and traditions. Unfortunately, this experience was not always possible. Nevertheless, uppermost in the artists’ minds was that the towns were their patrons and it was necessary to please and uplift the townspeople. To this end, scenes depicting the hardships of the Depression were avoided.

As part of its plan for Hancock County, the WPA authorized the building of a New Deal post office on Main Street in Bay St. Louis in 1935. Located on an interior wall was the mural *Life on the Coast*, commissioned by the Federal Arts Project. Painted by artist Louis Raynaud, the 1938 mural depicts work and recreation on the Bay of Saint Louis. This building remained in use as a post office for about fifty years. In the 1980s, a



The United States Post Office at 137 Main St., Bay St. Louis, MS
Built as part of the New Deal’s Works Progress Administration in 1935

new, larger post office was built on Highway 90. The WPA structure was considered “excess” and was ultimately sold to a private citizen. However, before such a sale could take place, a decision needed to be made concerning the FAP mural. Overwhelmingly, citizens of Bay St. Louis wanted the mural to remain in the town at the very least and preferably moved into the new building. Subsequently, the citizens prevailed, and the mural now hangs in the business area of the post office on Hwy 90.

Inasmuch as most people are aware of many of the projects of the WPA such as bridges, highways, state parks, and federal buildings, only a few are aware of the ways in which the arts—visual, written, and performing—were encouraged and enhanced by divisions of the WPA. Some of these artworks, the post office murals in particular, have been lost, damaged, or stolen in the years since their creation. These works are a part of

Louis Raynaud

A native of New Orleans, Louis Raynaud was a painter and teacher who also lived for many years in Chicago where he was active in the Society for Sanity in Art. Furthermore, he also held membership in the New Orleans Art Association, the Southern States Art League, and the New Orleans Arts and Crafts Club. His paintings were displayed for exhibition and competition in the San Antonio Edgar B. Davis Competition, the Society of Independent Artists, the New Orleans Art Association, and the New Orleans Art League. In addition to the Federal Arts Project mural for Bay St. Louis, Raynaud created a mural for the post office in Abbeville, LA.



American Eagle
By Bay St. Louis native
Richmond Barthé

This cast stone relief adorns the facade of the Social Security Board Building in Washington, DC. A familiar work, it was commissioned as part of the Federal Arts Project of the New Deal Works Progress Administration.

American history and as such should be treasured and preserved. Fortunately, the citizens of Hancock County recognize and appreciate the treasure they have in the Bay St. Louis Post Office mural and continue to work to preserve it.

SOURCES:

- Bach, Edith. “Bay Post Office Closing Leaves Mural ‘Hanging,’” *Sun Herald* (Biloxi/Gulfport, MS), 1987.
- Bach, Edith. “Postal Service To Save Mural in Former Bay Post Office,” *Sun Herald* (Biloxi/Gulfport, MS), 1987.
- “History of the New Deal Art Projects,” *Art Projects*, 3 March 2016 <www.wpamurals.com>.
- “Louis Raynaud.” 13 Apr. 2016 <www.askart.com>.
- “More about the WPA.” WPA Exhibit Homepage in the Lilly Library’s History Collection. 8 Apr. 2010 <www.indiana.edu>
- Raynor, Patricia. “Off the Wall,” *New Deal Post Office Murals* in

Smithsonian Institution, Oct-Nov. 1997, 6 Apr. 2016 <www.si.edu>.

“United States Post Office Murals.” 31 March 2016 <www.wikipedia.com>.

The Works Progress Administration and the Hancock County Library

Edited by
Eddie Coleman

In addition to the construction of public roads and buildings and its arts programs, the New Deal also attended to the needs of the reading public. Accordingly, the WPA established free public libraries throughout the nation and made them easily accessible to all citizens. One of the rules required that distribution centers be set up in outlying communities as well as in cities and towns if none were present. It was incumbent upon local officials to determine just how these books would be transported to these outlying communities. “In Mississippi, for example, a WPA librarian used a houseboat to distribute books to communities along the Yazoo River that were not connected to state highways.” In another state packhorses were used to transport books into rural communities.

In Hancock County Miss Louise Crawford was hired by the WPA in 1934 to establish and oversee county libraries in Hancock and Pearl River counties. Even though she had no formal training in the field of library science, Miss Crawford gladly undertook the task and was charged with the distribution and collection of books. In addition to a library at Valena C. Jones School in Bay St. Louis, centers were established at Aaron Acade-

my, Ansley, Catahoula, Clermont Harbor, Dedeaux, Edwardsville, Gainesville, Hoda Town, Kiln, Lakeshore, Leetown, Logtown, Ne-caise Crossing, Sellers, and Wave-land. Visiting each of these outposts monthly, she left books at grocery stores, log cabins, and private homes. Fortunately she was able to travel by car.

On one of her trips, "Miss Louise" had a flat tire on a dusty country road. She walked to an unfamiliar store, seeking help. When she arrived, the storekeeper told her, "I'd like to help you, lady, but I'm in a predicament right now." When Miss Crawford offered to watch the store for him, he said, "It ain't that, lady, it's just that I got to kill a man in about five minutes."

Miss Crawford rushed back to her car and soon thereafter hailed the only motorist she had seen for miles. To her delight, it was the sheriff; to her dismay, the storekeeper was with him! While they changed her tire, the sheriff explained that the feud had been settled peacefully and, fortunately, no killing had occurred.

The Sellers "branch library" at that time consisted of two low shelves in the bedroom of Miss Elizabeth Harriel's windowless log cabin. When the library affiliated with the WPA, the agency ruled that no books could be kept in a private home. Miss Harriel would not give up the honor of being in charge of the WPA Library Distribution Center, however, and before Miss Crawford's return the following month, she enlisted the help of a nephew, procured and peeled logs, and built a 10' x 12' log cabin with windows to house the collection of books. When Miss Crawford returned the following month, she was greeted by the smiling assistant who led her to the new cabin with a WPA library sign attached. One



The photo at the left shows Miss Louise Crawford (right) speaking with one of her librarians in a rural part of Hancock County.

(Ed. note—I have no proof, but I wonder if the log building is the "new library" and the woman on the left is Miss Elizabeth Harriel. If anyone can help, please call the Historical Society at 228-467-4090.)

should never underestimate human ingenuity!

SOURCES:

"A History of US Public Libraries." *WPA Library Programs*. 29 Apr. 2016 <www.dp.la>.

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

CEMETERY TOUR

Even though October is five months away, it's time to begin making plans for the Hancock County Historical Society 23rd Annual Cemetery Tour. It will be held on Halloween night, Monday, **October 31, 2016**, at Cedar Rest Cemetery on Second Street. Inclement weather caused the **22nd** tour to be canceled so we are especially excited about this year's program. 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 Loblano House. To volunteer, please call the Society at 467-4090.



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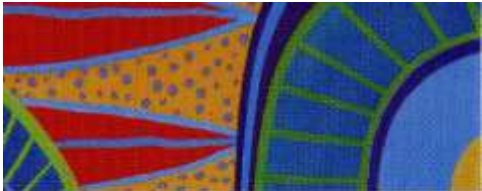
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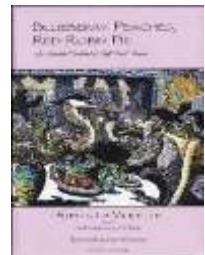
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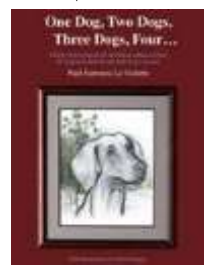
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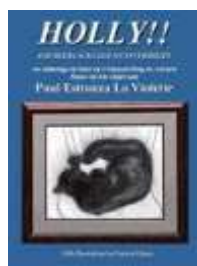
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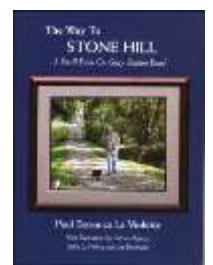
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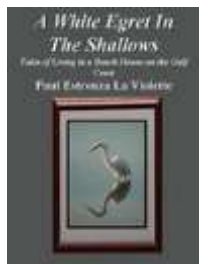
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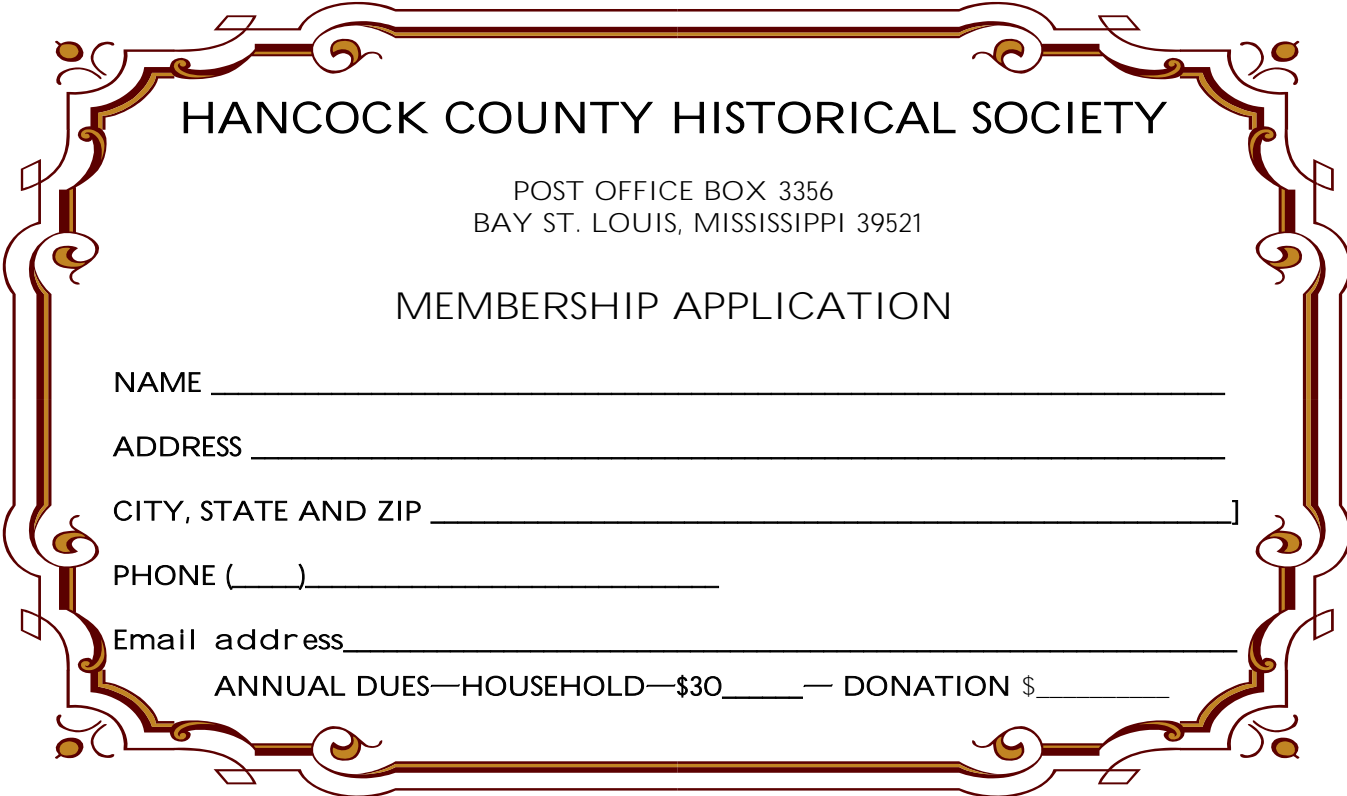
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