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OF HANCOCK COUNTY

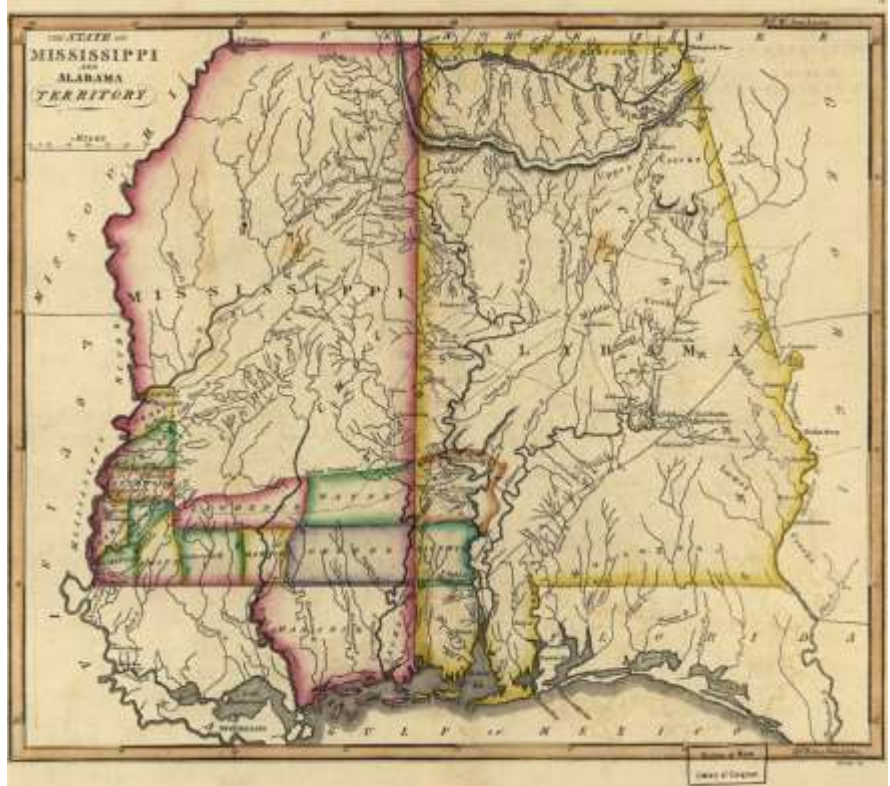
Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi

Mississippi's Bicentennial

February 2017

COMING EVENTS AT LOBRANO HOUSE

The monthly luncheon meeting will be held on Thursday, February 16, 2017, at noon at the Kate Lobrano House. Guest speakers for the program will be Lionel Bradley, Nicky Piernas, and Bro. Bernard Couvillion, who will speak on their experiences at St. Stanislaus College. **Reservations are required** and may be made by calling 467-4090. **Respectfully we must request that you please call by noon on Wednesday, February 15**, 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.



This 1817 map shows the Mississippi Territory divided into the states of Mississippi and Alabama. It also shows that original territorial counties traversed the later boundary line between the two states. (Map 1)

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 is **\$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.

Birth of Hancock County (1811—1820)

By
James Keating, MD

The European colonization of the Mississippi Gulf Coast ended with the annexation of the newly formed Republic of West Florida by U. S. President James Madison in 1811. The United States recognized a compelling geopolitical

opportunity/obligation to extend the newly formed (1798) Mississippi Territory to the Gulf of Mexico. This territory included the present states of Mississippi and Alabama (See map 1.) The impending Great Migration of settlers into this area required establishment of a state of law and order. This frame of mind might compare to the concept of "manifest destiny" which became popular later in the 19th century. Competing land titles from France, England, and Spain over

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HOURS

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 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.”

the 18th century required arbitration/adjudication for an orderly society. The Indian nations did not coexist peacefully with the newcomers. This chapter of our history will describe the details of the birth and early history of Hancock County from 1811—1820. A profile of the young county during these early years will follow this article in a future publication that describes the importance of the Pearl River, the emergence of the three largest communities in that era, the economy or commerce of the region, and the sad story of the exodus of the original Choctaw Indian tribe.

By an act of the U.S. Congress on May 14, 1812, the Gulf Coast, known recently as Mobile County, was formally admitted into the Mississippi Territory under the administration of Governor David Holmes and the Territorial Legislature. The governor then ordered the election of representatives to the territorial legislature from the Pearl River, Biloxi, and Pascagoula areas.

Subsequently, the settlers on the Pearl River then held a meeting in the fall of 1812 at the Burnt Meeting House, which was located about nine miles NW of present-day Picayune, MS. This edifice was the first public building in the county and was originally called Meeting House. This log structure had served as a church, school, and a place to hold meetings. The first building burned down and was promptly rebuilt with the amended title of Burnt Meeting House. These settlers wanted a county

government established that would bring lawlessness under control and help to confirm land titles. A delegation was elected to the Mississippi Territorial Legislature, which was authorized to request the formation of a new county to be named Hancock within the newly acquired Gulf Coast. They proposed that this new Hancock County should encompass boundaries that would include what constitute present-day Hancock, Harrison, Stone, and much of Pearl River counties (See map 1, p. 1.)

The formal creation of Hancock County occurred on December 14, 1812, by an act of the Mississippi Territorial legislature. Mobile County was portioned into Hancock and Jackson counties. As requested by the meeting at the Burnt Meeting House, the county seat of Hancock County was designated to be in the settlement named Center which is near present day Caesar. By that time Center had become the largest center of population in the area. Its name is a translation of its Indian name meaning “center” or “coming together” or “where everybody meets up.” It was the home of the largest Indian settlement with more than three hundred wigwams suggesting fifteen hundred Choctaw. European colonists settled here also because the only byways in that period were Indian trails which all converged in Center, some wide enough for a wagon to travel over. William Hunt was appointed clerk of the superior and county court; Duncan McCall, sheriff; Thomas Hunt,

assessor and collector; and Roger Heron, justice of the peace.

Land titles constituted a major problem for orderly settlement in the new county. Lawyers flocked to Hancock County to try to settle land claims. Over the 18th century, land titles on the Gulf Coast had been issued by twenty-two different jurisdictions. Accordingly, numerous tracts of land were claimed by two or more persons. In Hancock County Sir William Dunbar lived under three foreign governments and personally surveyed most of the important land grants. Thus, a petition, written in French and English, was sent to the US Congress from the citizens of Mobile, Jackson, and Hancock counties on February 1, 1816, to the Committee on Public Lands requesting help in this matter. On April 18, 1816, the US Congress established a Board of Commission to arbitrate disputes of overlapping or contested land titles, causing Simon Favre, for one, to receive final confir-

mation of his title in Favreport. By 1828 most of the settlers' land claims had been successfully resolved by the US government. A great migration of settlers into the Mississippi Territory occurred between 1813 and 1816 of an estimated thirty-three hundred families who came from Virginia, Georgia, the Carolinas, and Tennessee. They were mostly Anglo-Saxon Protestants who spoke only English.

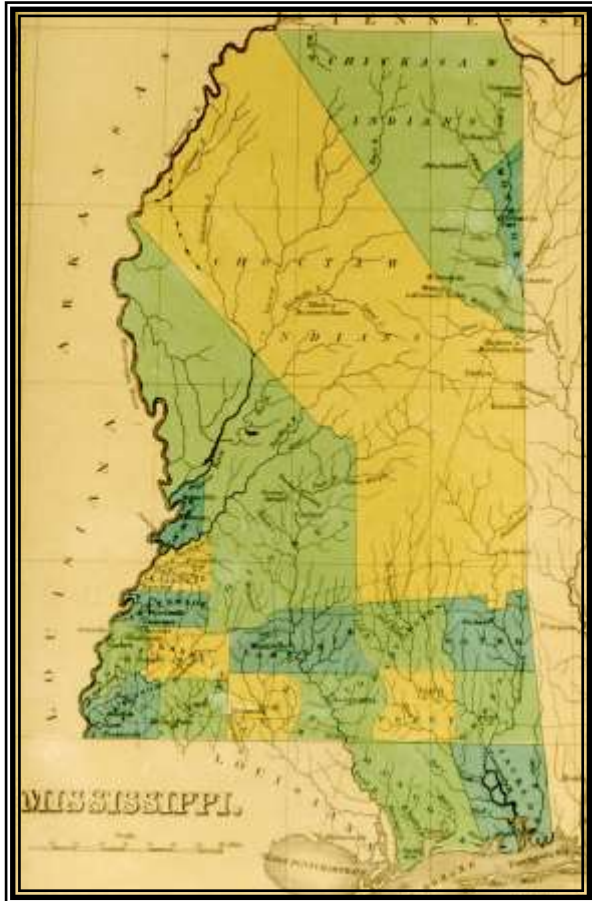
On October 28, 1816, delegates from fifteen counties of the Mississippi Territory assembled in convention at the home of John Ford in Marion County near present day Sandy Hook, MS. The purpose of this assemblage—the Pearl River Convention—was to draft a petition for statehood. This plantation house was called Ford's Fort. John Ford accumulated thousands of acres and owned hundreds of slaves, unlike most settlers in this new land who possessed only a few slaves. It

is of interest that an authorized census of Hancock County at this juncture estimated the population to contain one thousand souls—666 white and 334 black. Thomas Anderson was chosen to be the county representative, and a committee was formed to draft the petition to the US Congress. They requested a “free, sovereign, and independent” state within the territory's present limits, which included the present states of Mississippi and Alabama. President James Monroe signed the US Congress resolution admitting Mississippi to the union on December 10, 1817. Thus, it became the twentieth state. The new state of Mississippi did not include the land which would later become the state of Alabama. One of the first acts of the new state legislature was to approve the incorporation of the town of Shieldsboro (Bay St. Louis.) At that time Shieldsboro was only a sleepy little village composed of just a few houses along the beach. Other Hancock County settlements at this time which would flourish in the coming years were Pearlington, Logtown, and Gainesville. Biloxi would not incorporate until 1838. By 1820 the population in Hancock County grew to 1594.

This year we celebrate the bicentennial of Mississippi statehood. In less than a decade the people of our county converted their European colony to a territory and then to a state in the United States of America. It is clear that although the region was sparsely settled and the con-



Built in 1800, this is the home of John Ford. It is also known as “Ford’s Fort.”



Map of the state of Mississippi c. 1822

ditions primitive, these settlers had a spirit of optimism and a vision about their future economic prospects. In a forthcoming article, a profile of the county will be presented that will describe the geographic, economic, and cultural character of the young Hancock County in this same time frame.

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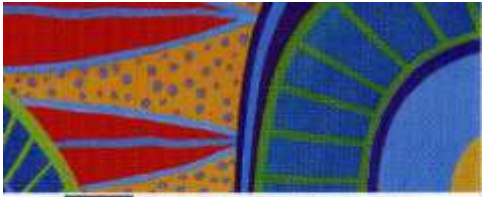
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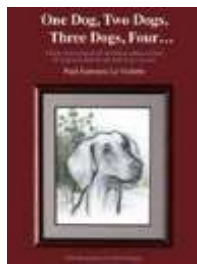
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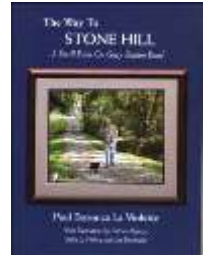
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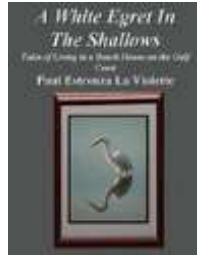
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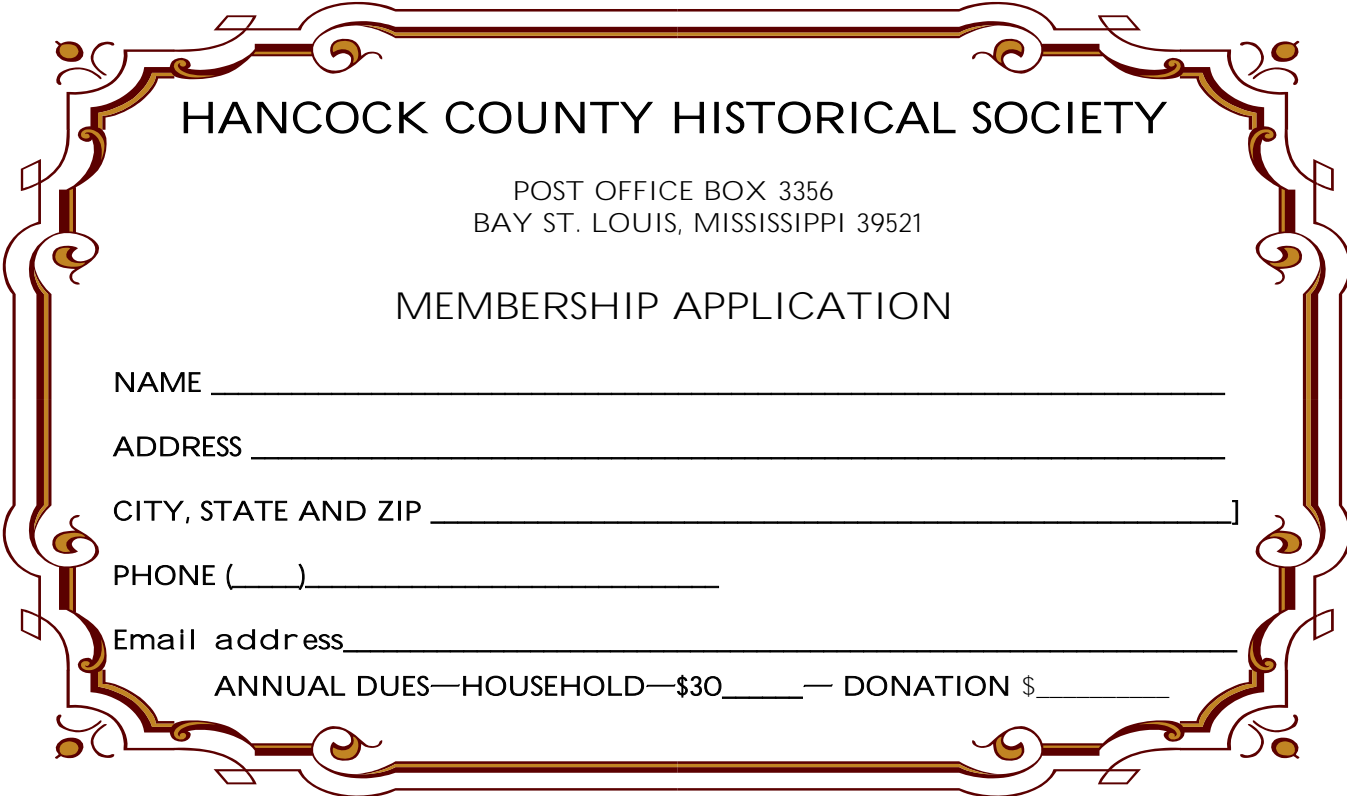
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