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HISTORIAN

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OF HANCOCK COUNTY

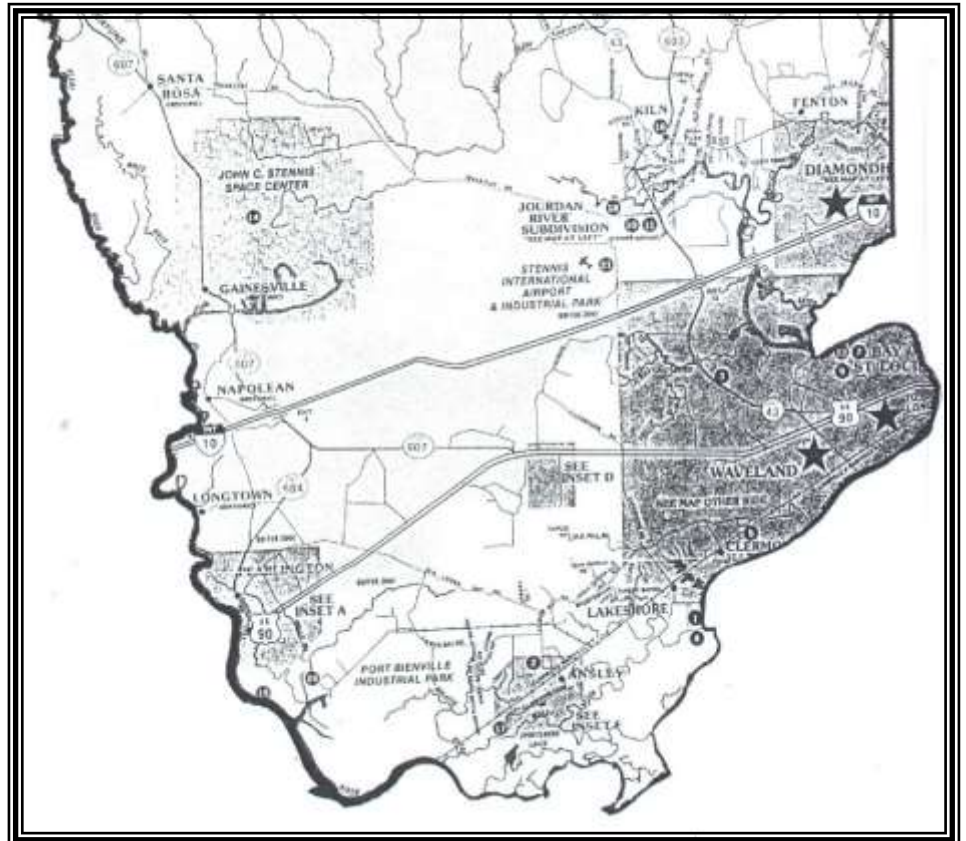
Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi

Mississippi's Bicentennial
1817—2017

March 2017

COMING EVENTS AT LOBRANO HOUSE

The monthly luncheon meeting will be held on Thursday, March 16, 2017, at noon at the Kate Lobrano House. Guest speaker for the program will be Jim Matthews who will speak on barbeque and smoker cooking. **Reservations are required** and may be made by calling 467-4090. **Respectfully we must request that you please call by noon on Wednesday, March 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, catering by Almost Home Catering, Michelle Nichols, chef.



Map of lower Hancock County
showing Gainesville, Logtown, and Pearlington, the commercial river towns

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.

Profile of a Young Hancock County (1811—1820)

By
James Keating, M.D.

The Pearl River played a dominant role in the exciting story of a young Hancock County in the post-War of 1812 era. Formed by the confluence of Nanih Waiya and Tallahaga

creeks in Neshoba County, this major river flows 445 miles from modern day Philadelphia, Mississippi, through Jackson, Columbia, Gainesville, and Pearlington. It was the only significant route into the wilderness of Hancock County for settlers and supplies. Flatboats floated downstream, transporting crops and timber. This freight was transferred to schooners at Gainesville and Pearlington and shipped to New Orleans.

THE
HISTORIAN
OF HANCOCK COUNTY

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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.”

There were no roads or bridges for overland travel. At the mouth of all of the Gulf Coast rivers, small ports such as Gainesville and Pearlinton evolved supporting sawmills, shipyards, cotton gins, and kilns producing naval stores (pitch, tar, turpentine) and charcoal.

The first three commercial communities in Hancock County were Gainesville, Pearlinton, and Biloxi. Dr. Ambrose Gaines founded the town of Gainesville after receiving confirmation by the U.S. Government of a Spanish land grant issued in 1810. Previously, this was a small port important as a trapping and trading center for there was a profitable market for hides and pelts then. It was also headquarters for a den of thieves, freebooters, pirates, and robbers. Their infamous leader, Pierre Rameau, was known as the King of Honey Island. His ships terrorized the eastern Atlantic seacoast, Tennessee, and Alabama similar to Jean Lafitte in nearby Barataria Bay in Louisiana. Rameau sent his booty and stolen slaves to New Orleans for sale. Ultimately, he was mortally wounded in the Battle of New Orleans fighting for the British. The U.S. Navy brought law and order to the Pearl River and Gulf Coast after 1815. Ambrose Gaines platted the town on a level ridge overlooking a river bluff in a setting of many old handsome live oak trees. Gainesville later became the county seat of Hancock County in 1837.

Pearlinton was another small port at the mouth of the



What Exactly Is a Schooner?

A schooner is a two-masted sailing ship with fore and aft gaff-rigged sails. Historically, schooners were popular in maritime trades requiring speed and windward ability, such as slaving, privateering, blockade running, and off-shore fishing. Mississippi Gulf Coast shipyards designed a unique Biloxi schooner for sailing our shallow waters that incorporated a shallow draft, broad beams, 70—90 feet length, rounded bilges, and high freeboards.

Pearl River downstream from Gainesville. Initially, cotton and other crops were raised to a small extent in the adjacent countryside and brought in by wagons from a distance. Later, the principal cotton supply and other goods came from the large rich plantations more than one hundred miles upriver. Cotton was delivered by flatboat to a historic landing known as “The Gin.” Slaves rode the mules that turned the early mills to gin the cotton. Dry dock shipyards repaired and built the schooners used to ship the goods to New Orleans. Skilled slave labor worked as carpenters and “caulkers.” One of Pearlinton’s earliest settlers, Simon Favre, was a prominent, educated local planter who owned over 5000 acres of land, 57 slaves, 450 cat-



NANIH WAIYA

Although built by American Indians, by the 18th century Nanih Waiya had come to be venerated by the Choctaw tribe. The site plays a central role in the tribe's origin legends. In one version, the mound gave birth to the tribe--the people emerged from the underworld here and rested on the mound's slopes to dry before populating the surrounding region.

tle, 30 horses, 2 oxen and a 30 ton schooner.

In 1811 Hancock County extended from the Pearl River eastward to the Bay of Biloxi. Biloxi was a small community consisting of only about ten local French families, few of whom were literate. It quickly became a summer resort as did Shieldsboro (Bay St. Louis) and Pass Christian.

The interior of Hancock County experienced some of the Great Migration from 1798 to 1819. First came Indian traders and trappers followed by herds-men with cattle and swine. Early farmers pushed the herds-men westward, growing corn, pumpkin, peas, and other vegetables. The somewhat "temporary" farmers were mostly poor, driven by the lure of "the West in their eyes" or some El Dorado of the imagination. These rootless

souls wandered all the way to Texas. Moreover, permanent settlers contained both wealthy, well-financed plantation owners and a substantial poor yeoman class of farmers.

The culture of this period was limited but not non-

existent. Early settlers and slaves in Mississippi sang folk music and simple hymns in the cotton fields or in country churches that were gathering places for rural communities. This early music is called "roots music" because it is the basis of American music which evolved into gospel, blues, jazz, and rock and roll. Planters from Natchez and Creoles from New Orleans rented cottages on the Gulf Coast to avoid yellow fever and feel the sea breezes during the hot summer. Everyone drank whiskey, French brandy, or cheap wine such as anisette, parfait d'amour, and claret. Itinerant priests or clergy brought religion to the countryside, performing an occasional mass, services, and marriages. Almost a third of these settlers were black, most of whom were slaves.

The Indian tribe in Hancock County during this time frame was Choctaw. These natives had dual resources of primitive agriculture and hunting. The meat supply came from large



Pushmataha, or rather "Apushamatahahubi," means "a messenger of death; literally one whose rifle, tomahawk, or bow is alike fatal in war or hunting."

(Ed. note— for more biographical information on Pushmataha, google mshistorynow and search for Pushmataha in the archived features. There are several articles, but "Pushmataha: Choctaw Warrior, Diplomat, and Chief" is the one I used.

game in the forest supplemented by poultry. Agriculture was a predominant occupation with maize, corn, rice, broad beans, pumpkins, and watermelons fortifying the food supply. The first county seat of Hancock County was Center/Caesar which was an important Choctaw village. Relations were good between the white settlers and these Choctaw Indians. In fact, their leader, Chief Pushmataha, supported the United States in the War of 1812. He led his warriors into twenty-four separate battles/conflicts against the British and their allies in Florida. He died in Washington, D.C. and was buried with full military honors in the Congressional Cemetery. The U.S. Government eventually relocated most of the Choctaw nation to the Arkansas and Oklahoma territories. Some Indians remained in Hancock County where they intermarried and/or lived peacefully alongside white and black settlers. A few Indians hid and resettled in Devil's Swamp which is just south/southeast of Gainesville (Stennis Space Center). The Treaty of Doak's Stand on October 18, 1820, opened up vast inland areas along the Pearl River to settlement. The Choctaw Nation was effectively liquidated by 1830 with the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek. Their story is a sad chronicle of decimation caused by disease, intertribal warfare, and mistreatment and deceit by the U.S. Government encouraged by the new white settlers. Eventually twenty thousand Indians would be evacuated from Mississippi by the 1830's, a memory forever brand-

ed in the Indian soul known as the Trail of Tears.

The early years of Hancock County described in this profile witnessed the conversion of the Pearl River Valley fertile bottomlands and adjacent piney forests into a vibrant cluster of small settlements or towns and plantations/farms. This booming economy required a direct link to New Orleans which was accomplished by schooner traffic. More settlers and capital investment from the New Orleans banking sector guaranteed a prosperous future. Future chapters in the economic history of Hancock County will include such subjects as the steamboat era, King Cotton, and the railroad empire.

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SPRING PILGRIMAGE

The Bay-Waveland Garden Club will host its 2017 Spring Pilgrimage Tour on Saturday, March 25, 2017, from 12:00 noon until 4:00 P.M.

Beginning at 11:00 A.M. at the Old Town Presbyterian Church, visitors may pick up maps and brochures and enjoy light refreshments. For more information, please call **228-493-4358**.

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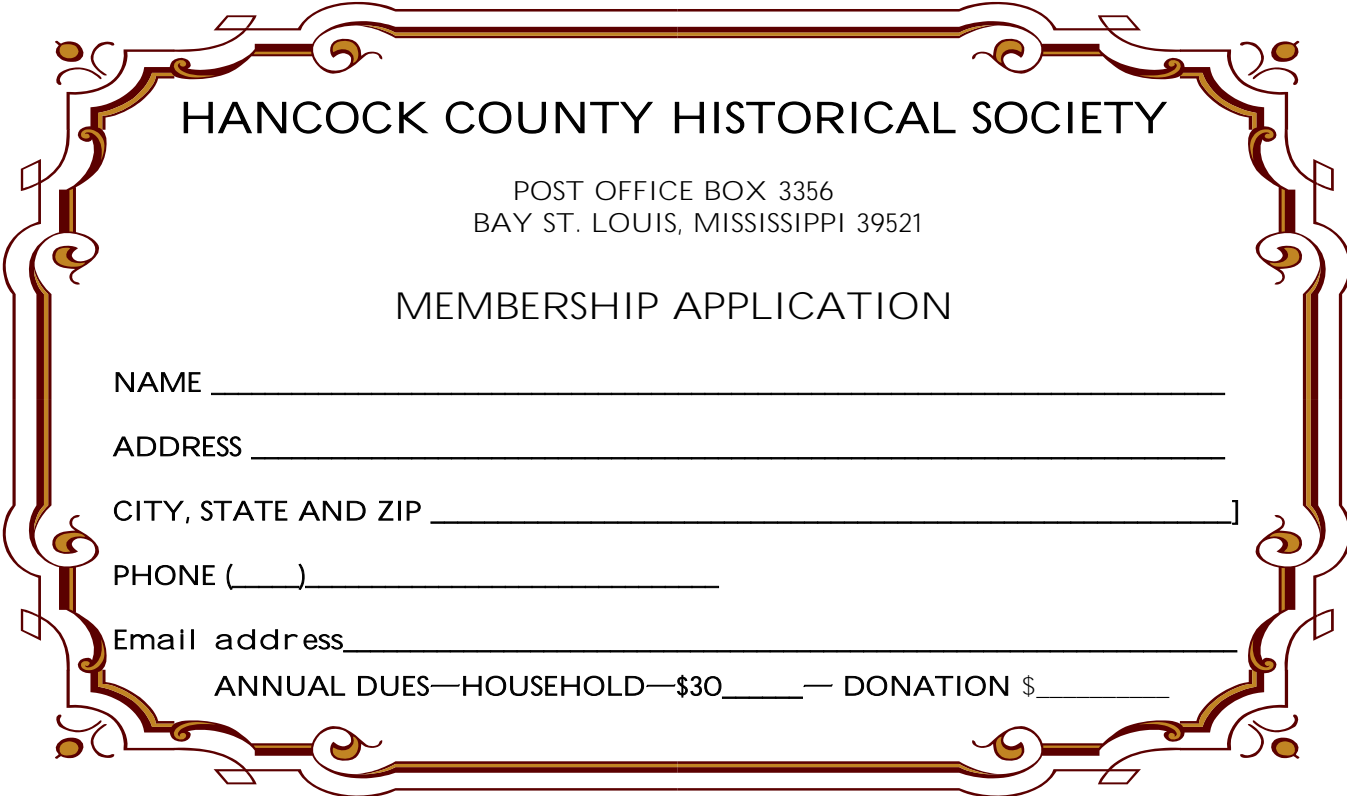
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