

THE

# HISTORIAN

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OF HANCOCK COUNTY

Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi

Mississippi's Bicentennial  
1817—2017

April 2017

## COMING EVENTS AT LOBRANO HOUSE

The monthly luncheon meeting will be held on Thursday, April 20, 2017, at noon at the Kate Lobrano House. Guest speaker for the program will be Walter Gex, III, Federal Judge of the Southern District of Mississippi. **Reservations are required** and may be made by calling 467-4090. **Respectfully we must request that you please call by noon on Wednesday, April 19,** 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.



Benjamin Leonard Covington Wailes  
August 1, 1797—November 16, 1862

He was the son of Levin and Eleanor Davis Wailes and the husband of Rebecca Susan Magruder Covington.

## The Journal of Benjamin L. C. Wailes (Part 1)

Edited by  
Eddie Coleman

*(Editor's note: I have transcribed the passages from the journal in first person to convey the voice of Mr. Wailes.)*

Benjamin L. C. Wailes was an assistant professor of

geology at the University of Mississippi who made an overland journey through the Piney Woods and Gulf Coast regions of Mississippi in 1852. During his travels Wailes recorded his observations of the flora and fauna of the areas through which he traveled as well as the means of livelihood of the people who lived there. He discovered that what had once been the main means of support of the residents—cattle raising—had



For information on this publication and to obtain a copy, see p. 4.

THE

**HISTORIAN**

OF HANCOCK COUNTY

Eddie Coleman, Editor  
James Keating, PublisherPublished monthly by the  
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Marianne Plum, Webmaster**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.”

begun to decline in the 1840s because of overgrazing and forest fires and was being replaced by a newer industry—lumber, tar, and turpentine—which would be the dominate industry in the latter 19th and early 20th centuries. After visiting areas in southwest Mississippi, Wailes entered the northwestern part of Hancock County in the area of Picayune. What follows is a synopsis of his observations of Hancock County, which at the time included the southern half of present-day Pearl River County as well as present-day Hancock County.

*Friday 13 August 1852.*

I left the home of John Ford (Ford's Fort), which is located near the Pearl River in southern Marion County and almost on the border between Mississippi and Louisiana. I traveled eastward to the home of Leonard Kimball in Hancock County, noting the land between the two residences was sparsely settled. I did observe several tar kilns as I neared the Kimball home and preparations for building others. Later I learned these kilns produced enough tar so that a thousand barrels had been shipped out the previous year....

*Saturday 14 August*

1852. Today I visited some of the tar kilns and learned the process of rendering the tar. The kilns are made in the form of a parallelogram on sloping ground, the earth being scooped out so the tar could be drawn off at the lower end. The split lightwood, or pine knots, are arranged lengthwise and covered with a thick coating of pine

straw over which earth is thrown and beat down closely to prevent the admission of any air. The kilns contain from twenty-five to one hundred cords of pine and yield on an average two barrels of tar to the cord. Four or five days and nights are required to burn one of the smaller size, and a great watchfulness is required to prevent the admission of air. Tar sells from \$1.50 to \$2.00 on the ground and is generally worth from \$2.50 to \$3.00 per barrel in New Orleans....

Traveling south along the river, I stopped at Gainesville for dinner. I called at the clerk's office, and because the clerk was absent and there was no manuscript map in the county, I could not get much information. I met with Mr. S.B. Pearce, who represented Hancock County in the state legislature (1852) and had a considerable conversation with him and others as to the character and resources of the county.

I proceeded in the afternoon to Dr. Robert Montgomery's, three miles via Napoleon....I spent the night at his home.

*Sunday 15 August 1852.*

I walked with Dr. Montgomery to the River Bluff, the site of the village of Napoleon, within the same section on which the doctor resides. Several attempts have been made in the last thirty years to build up a town here, first under the name of Pearl-town and more recently under the former name. The last attempt at first promised success, and several families settled there, some buildings were erected, and a distillery of spirits of

turpentine and camphene was established. This has, however, been abandoned and dismantled, the stills being removed to Florida, most of the families moving, and the unoccupied buildings fast going to decay. There are traces of extensive brick yards, the brick for the construction of Fort Pike, many years since, having been made here. The site, like that of Gainesville, is a very handsome one, being a perfectly level one on a bluff bank of East Pearl River with a number of handsome live oaks. At Gainesville, the county seat, there is a large steam saw mill. The small court house is a very poor frame building, and the site of the town is not as handsome as that at Napoleon, three miles below. It is about the head of tidewater.... (*Ed. note: I wonder why Wailes seems to contradict himself about the beauty of the site of Gainesville.*)

I stopped a short time at Pearlinton, a scattering and dingy French-looking village on another bluff within eight miles of the mouth of the river with the salt marsh on the opposite side, & extending down to the lake [*Lake Borgne*]. This is said to be the best and most accessible harbor in the state with a fair depth of water.

I continued on my route to Major Samuel White's, an old colleague of mine in the Legislature in 1825. I was hospitably received and derived much valuable information from him.... Mr. Asa Russ, I learn, is making some experiments in reclaiming and cultivating the sea marsh.... The roads are very hard and dry

in this region at this time, and the weather is moderate and pleasant. I found the musquitoes [*sic*] a little troublesome to the horses in travelling through some of the wet flat places today....

*Monday 16 August 1852.*

Accompanied by Major White, I revisited Pearlinton and was shown all the capabilities of the place. We found two large steam [saw] mills in progress of erection and an academy for boys and girls....

We proceeded to Judge Louis Daniels house. The judge being absent at Shieldsborough, we visited an ancient fortification and group of mounds and a shell bank in his field on Bois-doré's, or Mulatto, Bayou and compared it with a rough sketch made of it about the year 1826, when it was all covered by heavy forest and undergrowth. [*Ed. Here Wailes is referring to the mound which later became known as the Claiborne midden.*] I found [the sketch] as accurate as could be expected under the circumstances. The parapet, or wall, represented in the sketch as straight (or in a right angle), I found to be angular, or in a crescent shape, and the remains of a deep, wide fosse (moat) now dry (having been drained) not noticed in the sketch. The shell bank at the landing, on which a house is now standing and occupied by a family, has been dug away and considerable quantity of shells taken to New Orleans for sale or to be used on the streets. The digging into it exposed human bones, fragments of pottery and

charcoal and ashes, showing conclusively that it was a work of art and not thrown up by the action of the sea. The summit is about 15 feet above the highest tide. Another triangular mound is formed of a considerable number of shells. The wall, or parapet, which is in some places fifteen feet high and 120 feet wide on the top (with a bar [?]) of at least 60 feet) contains many shells in some sections of it. The remains of three old wells were very apparent in the interior, and four small tumuli (*small Indian burial mounds*) —nearly obliterated by the plow—can be observed on the outside.

An earthen [*sic*] vase was found buried in the principal shell bank, containing sixteen of the French coins of copper of the size of a cent, coined in 1721 & 1722 (struck by the similarity of those in my possession, said to have been found near Fort Rosalie at Natchez) and found an iron bridle bit, which I saw. And I learned from Judge Daniels, who returned home in the evening and who states further that iron hoes of the French pattern (narrow blades and heavy massive eyes), gun barrels & some stone axes & arrow points, & pipes (of which he presented me with one) are frequently dug up.

Judge Daniels also states that one iron hoop riveted together with projecting prongs had been dug out of the parapet (which contained human bones) and which to all appearances had been placed around the body of a supposed criminal.

The judge does not doubt as to the mounds of shell being

the work of art, and he attributed them to the early French colonists about the period of the settlement of Baluxi [sic]. There are, however, on the top of the wall, at this time, growing two live oaks at least three feet through and a magnolia grandiflora of at least four on the side of it, which would indicate a greater antiquity. In reference to the other shell banks on the coast and the islands (some of which are more considerable in dimension), he has the authority of many fishermen & others that they have the same structure & contain the human bones, pottery, charcoale [sic] &c. as in this....

(Part 2 will appear in the May 2017 issue of the newsletter.)

## ATTENTION!

Many of you have noticed the fresh paint on the Lobrano House and the "sprucing up" of areas around the house each year in the spring. We have two members who spend January and February in Bay St. Louis to escape the snow of their Minnesota home. The Hancock County Historical Society Board of Directors and membership would like to thank **Arden and Susan Erickson** for the hard work they do each year.

### NEW MEMBERS

Anne S. Anderson  
*Gulfport, MS*

Johnnie Faye Hâte  
*Cary, NC*

Myrna Ingham  
*Houston, TX*

Fulvio and Cindy Donze Manto  
*Metairie, LA*

### SURVEY DATA PUBLICATION

FREE copies of the *Survey Data Publication* compiled by FEMA after Hurricane Katrina are available at the Lobrano House. Supplies are limited, so pick up your copy soon.

This document

- summarizes the history of Hancock County and representative surviving archaeological sites and structures;
- outlines the findings of FEMA's cultural property surveys in Hancock County;
- provides information that owners of historic resources can use to maintain their properties' historic qualities and integrity; and
- provides information for preparing and protecting cultural properties prior to a disaster and for managing response, recovery, and mitigation activities after a disaster.

*Although copies are free, for mail orders please send checks for \$5.00 per book to cover packaging and shipping. Our mailing address is Hancock County Historical Society, P. O. Box 3356, Bay St. Louis, MS 39521*

### BOOKS FOR SALE AT LOBRANO HOUSE

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

*Blueberry Peaches,  
Red Robin Pie*  
By Stella LaViolette  
and Paul Estronza La Violette (\$25.00)

*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)

*The Forever Saints Club*  
By Leona Lipari Lee (\$9.95)

*Holly*  
By Paul La Violette (\$20.00)

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

*A Mississippi First Family  
The Sauciers from 1603 to 1865*  
By Giulia L. Saucier

*Requiem for the Lily: A Novel of Gulf Coast  
History*  
By Placide D. Nicaise (\$20.00)

*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)

**PLEASE ADD \$5.00 SHIPPING FOR THE FIRST BOOK (\$2.00 EACH ADDITIONAL BOOK) ON MAIL ORDERS.**





## The Bricks at Tercentenary Park

By  
James Keating, M.D.  
and  
Eddie Coleman

Hancock County Historical Society is pleased to announce the completion of an important restoration project in Tercentenary Park in downtown Bay Saint Louis—the replacement of memorial bricks lost in Hurricane Katrina. With a life-size bronze statue of Jean Baptiste, Sieur de Bienville, Tercentenary Park was dedicated on August 25, 1999 to celebrate the arrival of the French explorers to this location three hundred years earlier in 1699.

Hurricane Katrina damaged or destroyed so many landmarks throughout Hancock County, but one which was damaged, but unbowed, is Tercentenary Park on South Beach Blvd. Even though debris from only God knows where filled the park, clean up began, and it was discovered that many of the memorial bricks had been lost because of the thirty-foot storm surge which devastated so much of the city. Bricks that could be found were stored in Hancock Bank next door, and Leo Seal, Jr., gifted the Historical Society with the money to replace any bricks which had been lost.

Initial clean up and restoration was completed in March 2007 with Nancy Bergere of Doylestown, PA, serving as the chairwoman of

the Tercentenary Park restoration committee and Eric Fleischer and Normandy Gack assisting in this project of the Bucks-Mont restoration group. Mike Kline of Delaware College and his fellow students spent their vacation time doing the major clean-up and replanting work in the park. To commemorate their work, he placed an imprinted brick in the walkway. Hancock County gratefully thanks the many volunteers for their tireless work and dedication in restoring the park.

However, one project could not be completed until March 23, 2017. Society member Scott Bagley stepped up and worked tirelessly and diligently to see this project, the replacement of the lost bricks, completed.



Photos above top: Eric Fleischer,  
Normandy Gack, Nancy Bergere  
Bottom: Mike Kline  
March 13, 2007

Photos above:  
Leslie Levine and his crew from  
Louisiana Memorials

Mississippi officially entered the United States as the 20th state of the Union on December 10, 1817. To commemorate its 200th anniversary in 2017 numerous events have been planned throughout the year. The three major events are Bicentennial South held in Gulfport on March 31-April 1, Bicentennial North to be held in Oxford on June 24, and Bicentennial Central to be held in Jackson on December 9. In addition to these, other celebrations in various cities and counties are being organized.

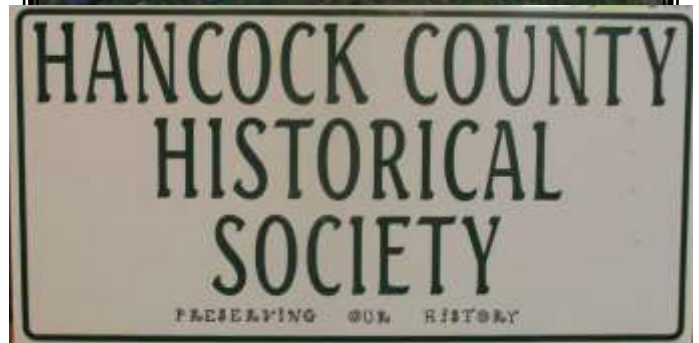
The Hancock County Historical Society was well represented at the Bicentennial South Celebration held at Centennial Plaza, Gulfport, MS, on March 31-April 1. Volunteers who staffed the Society's booth were Jim Thriffiley (First Vice Pres), Connie Rainey, Bettie Lindley-Meek, Jean Ann Thriffiley, Betty Krieger, Bill Stakelum, Barbara Schmitt, Henry Doussan, Ronald Ladner (Second Vice Pres.), and Sherry Swain.



Photo above:  
Bettie Lindley-Meek (L) and  
Connie Rainey (R)



Photo above:  
Jim Thriffiley








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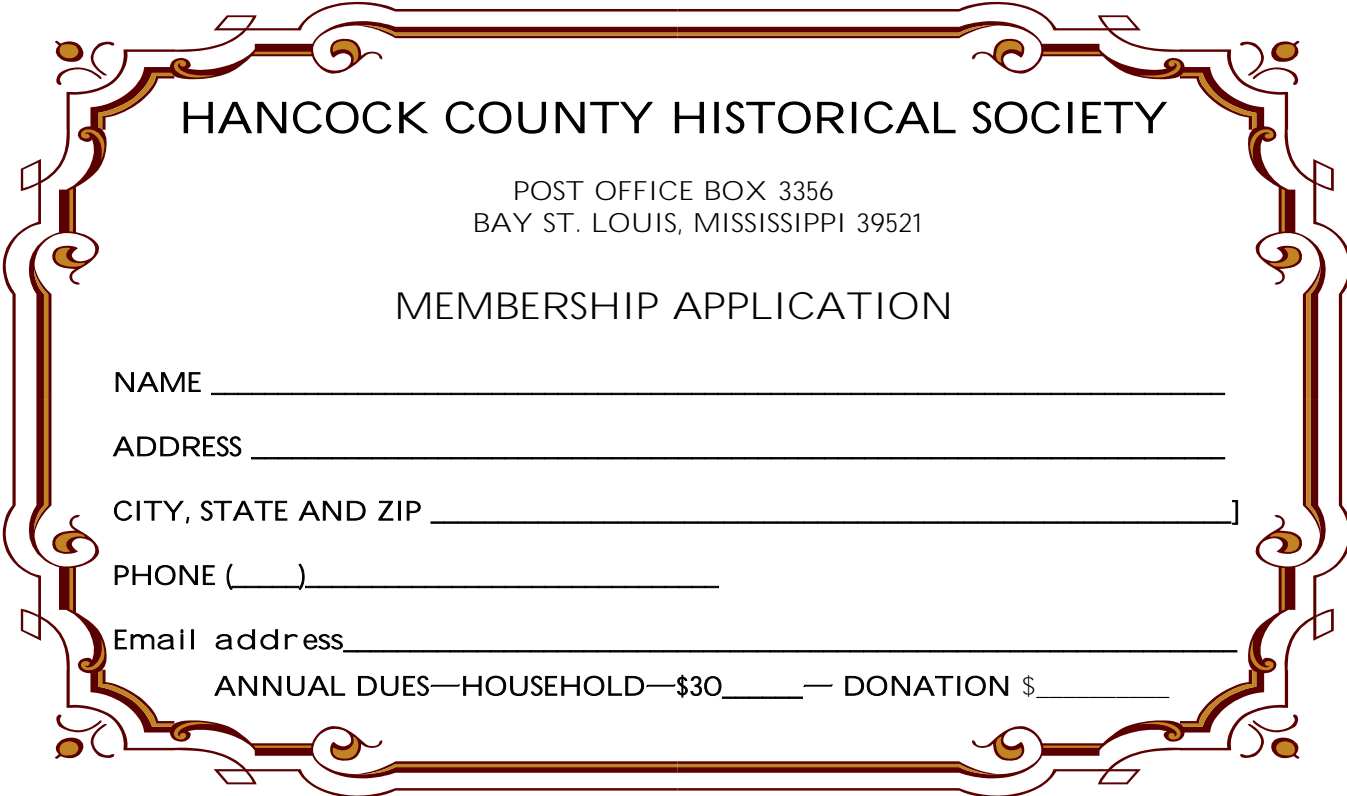
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