

THE

HISTORIAN

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OF HANCOCK COUNTY

Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi

April 2018

COMING EVENTS AT LOBRANO HOUSE

The monthly luncheon meeting will be held on Thursday, April 19, 2018, at noon at the Kate Lobrano House. The guest speaker will be Dr. Lanny Acosta, the retired superintendent of the Diocese of Biloxi Catholic school. **Reservations are required** and may be made by calling 467-4090. **Respectfully we must request that you please call by noon on Wednesday, April 18,** to make your reservation in order to help us plan seating which is limited to forty-eight people and to apprise us of the number of lunches to order. Lunch is \$12.00, payable at the door, and it is catered by Almost Home Catering, Michelle Nichols, chef.



This photo gives a view of the Bayou Caddy area with the mouth of the bayou at the bottom of the photo flowing south into Lake Borgne. The Bayou Caddy Fisheries Inc. can be seen at the bottom of the photo.



Happy
SPRING



The Seafood Industry in Hancock County

(1960-2017)

By
James Keating M.D.

The seafood industry in Hancock County during the 20th century shifted from Bay St. Louis on the eastern side of the county to Bayou Caddy on the western side. Bayou Caddy is the nickname of the stream formally known as Bayou Cadet on charts and maps located on the Gulf Coast in Lakeshore,

just west of Waveland and Clermont Harbor. Bayou Cadet is named after Jean Cadet La Fontaine (1795-1854) who was the first permanent French resident that docked his schooner in this local safe harbor. Over the last sixty years, commercial fishermen in Hancock County have concentrated their fishing efforts on oysters rather than shrimp, crabs, and finfish. A fleet of oyster luggers currently docks in Bayou Caddy. The history of the seafood industry in Hancock County over the last 150 years is about hard-working families that built busi-

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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.”

nesses large and small with names such as Bordage, Pincher, Ortte, Strong, Ladner, and Cure. The economy of this sector of our local marketplace is subject from time to time to the capricious whims of Mother Nature. The biology and anatomy of oyster farming and harvest is an important part of this history.

Our story begins in 1959 and is about a local shrimper and his wife, Joseph “Joe” Eloi Cure (1928-2010) and Sylvia Ross Bertel Cure (b. 1938). They purchased a small fishing camp on Bayou Caddy. The Bayou Caddy fishing camp sold beer, bait, and ice to recreational fishermen. Joe would shrimp during the day while Sylvia ran the business on shore.

Sylvia and Joe are the parents of four children: Cindy, Joey, Michael, and Susie. Joe Cure’s father, Joe Sr., was a skilled boat builder who worked at the Halter (Higgins) Shipyards in New Orleans. Over the years, Joe and his father built additional oyster boats for the family business. Each new boat launched was named after each new child, and then later, after each new grandchild. As the Cure family grew, so did the fleet of oyster luggers. The family business, now named the Bayou Caddy Fisheries Inc. (BCFI), evolved into the major wholesale or “middleman” in Hancock County providing fresh oysters to markets in Alabama and Florida.

After school the children would help out and work on the waterfront accomplishing tasks such as unloading the sacks of

oysters. The family business now has ten luggers. The business is owned jointly by the four siblings. The enterprise has prospered because these owners understood the seafood business, worked well together, and shared a common work ethic. Son Michael possess innate entrepreneurial skills and manages the whole operation from their offices at the plant on the docks of Bayou Caddy.

A modern day oyster lugger such as the Cindy C is a large fifty-five foot motorized vessel specially designed for dredging oysters in the shallow waters of Lake Borgne in Louisiana. The engines, fuel tank, and propellers are embedded in the shallow bottom, lugger-style steel hull. The deck is flat so as to load the accumulated sacks of harvested oysters or mounds of discarded oyster shells carried to cultivate the leased oyster reefs. The cabin has a control panel, toilet, and a bed and is equipped with a steering wheel, radar, 2-



Sylvia Ross Bertel Cure High school graduation



The "Cindy C" is a modern day oyster lugger, designed for the shallow waters of Lake Borgne.

way radio, and weather monitoring instruments. At the front of the boat are motorized winches used to haul in the two oyster dredges. Metal teeth on the dredges are dragged by the boat over the oysters in the reef. The oysters collect in a chain and rope bag. When full the catch is hauled up to the culling table on the deck for sorting. The large oysters (greater than three inches) are deposited in a sack and tagged by regulation for location and date.

A sack of oysters is defined and regulated by the state wildlife and fisheries department to equal one hundred pounds or a count of 240 to 280. A large lugger might harvest one hundred sacks a day. An average fishing day at the BCFI might bring in six hundred to one thousand sacks. A captain might go out to fish for oysters 150 days of the year. There are approximately twenty-five boats besides BCFI in the municipal harbor of Lakeshore that might sell the

daily catch to the Cure family. Large refrigerated trucks are loaded at the end of the day with the fresh harvest and the temperature is at thirty-seven degrees. The oysters are transported immediately to many markets in the region.

Oyster reefs may be leased from the state and cultivated which increases significantly the productivity of this virtual oyster farm. BCFI leases over twenty-five hundred acres of fertile bottomland. Cultivation may include placing small (less than one-half inch) "seed oysters" in the reefs. When harvesting a reef, the large oysters are culled from the smaller "seed oysters" which are immediately returned to their bed. Successful oystermen will increase the harvest of their leased reefs by depositing particulate matter called "cultch" on the oyster reefs sometime after harvest. That "cultch" material includes discarded, opened oyster shells, ground-up concrete, small rocks, and limestone.



This photo was taken in 1959 with the purchase of the camp and the beginning of a legacy.

The seed oysters spawn in the spring producing millions of sperm cells and eggs. The fertilized eggs or larvae called “spat” will then attach to the cultch. The amount of hard surface material in a reef will determine the number of spat or larvae that survive and grow in three years into mature oysters. If oyster reefs are not cultivated with regular deposits of cultch or particulate matter, the harvest for a particular oyster reef will usually not be bountiful nor profitable.

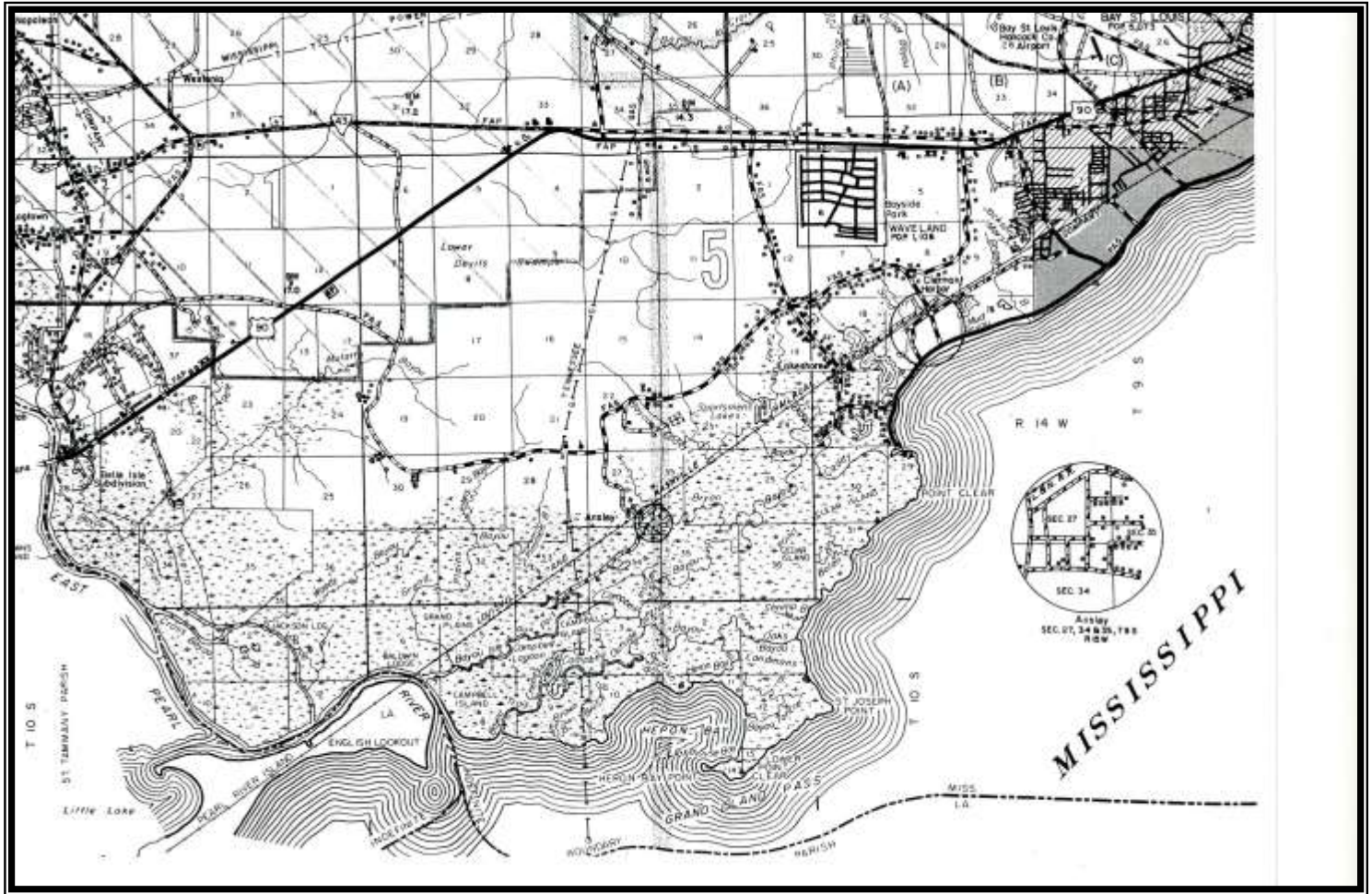
A review of the oyster harvest or production in Mississippi since 1990 (See chart below.) demonstrates the vulnera-

bility of the seafood industry to natural and man-made environmental disasters such as hurricanes and oil spills. A storm such as Hurricane Katrina will cover the delicate oyster reefs with mud which causes the living oysters to suffocate and die. There was a 95% destruction of the affected oyster reefs after Katrina as well as severe damage to many of the fishing boats in the area. Businesses selling fuel and ice were lost along with most support services and seafood processors. The harvest before Katrina in Mississippi was 491,050 sacks in 2004, but only 325 sacks in 2007.

By 2010 the oyster industry had picked up to 305,722 sacks per year, but the Deepwater Horizon oil rig explosion occurred. In that same time frame in 2011, water levels reached a historic high on the Mississippi River which threatened South Louisiana. Freshwater from the river was diverted into Lake Pontchartrain and ultimately into the Mississippi Sound. The Mississippi Department of Marine Resources hopes to restore those oyster reefs through aquaculture and incentive programs. The oyster harvest in 2016 in Mississippi was only 40,165 sacks.

In conclusion, the history of the seafood industry over the last sixty years in Hancock County is mostly about oysters. The Bayou Caddy Fisheries Inc., created by Joe and Sylvia Cure in 1959, became the dominate wholesaler of oysters in the county. Shrewd, competent management of the business over the years employing fearless, sound economic principles of vertical integration of the harvest and supply chain management of the oyster commodity explains the success of the enterprise. Joe Cure, Jr., and his father built their own oyster luggers. The family leased and cultivated thousands of acres of oyster reefs which became bountiful oyster farms, rather than fishing the ungoverned reefs in the public domain. A fleet of luggers allow these fishermen to produce significant volume to capture enough profit to cover unavoidable expenses such as boat maintenance, labor, fuel, insurance, finance, boat yards, and cost of cultivation such as mountains of old

OYSTER HARVEST IN MISSISSIPPI AND LAKE BORNE, LOUISIANA REGION		
	MISSISSIPPI	LAKE BORGNE
2004	491,050	138,108
2005	213,035	85,570
2006	0	20,864
2007	325	60,722
2008	116,749	250,833
2009	385,949	222,368
2010	305,722	51,090
2011	43,702	24,957
2012	66	20,830
2013	58,267	95,931
2014	78,019	76,101
2015	40,357	128,102
2016	40,165	175,265



Because of a northern shift in current when the boundary between Louisiana and Mississippi was drawn, Louisiana waters in Lake Borgne are quite close to the South Mississippi coastline.

oyster shells (cultch). Bayou Caddy Fisheries Inc. also owns its own refrigerated trucks that haul the oysters to the marketplace far and near to meet the skyrocketing, phenomenal demand and popularity of fresh oysters in the country.

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OAK TREE REGISTRATION

Registration of oak trees has resumed after its suspension because of Hurricane Katrina. The Bay/Waveland Garden Club has volunteered to "do the leg work," and the Historical Society will field the calls and pass the requests on to the Garden Club. If you have a tree or trees which you would like to register, please call the Historical Society at 228-467-4090.

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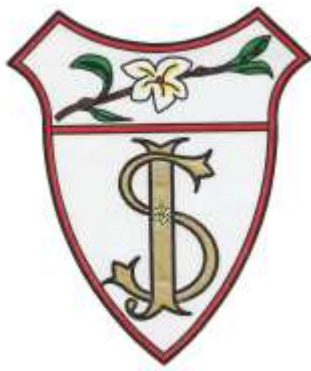
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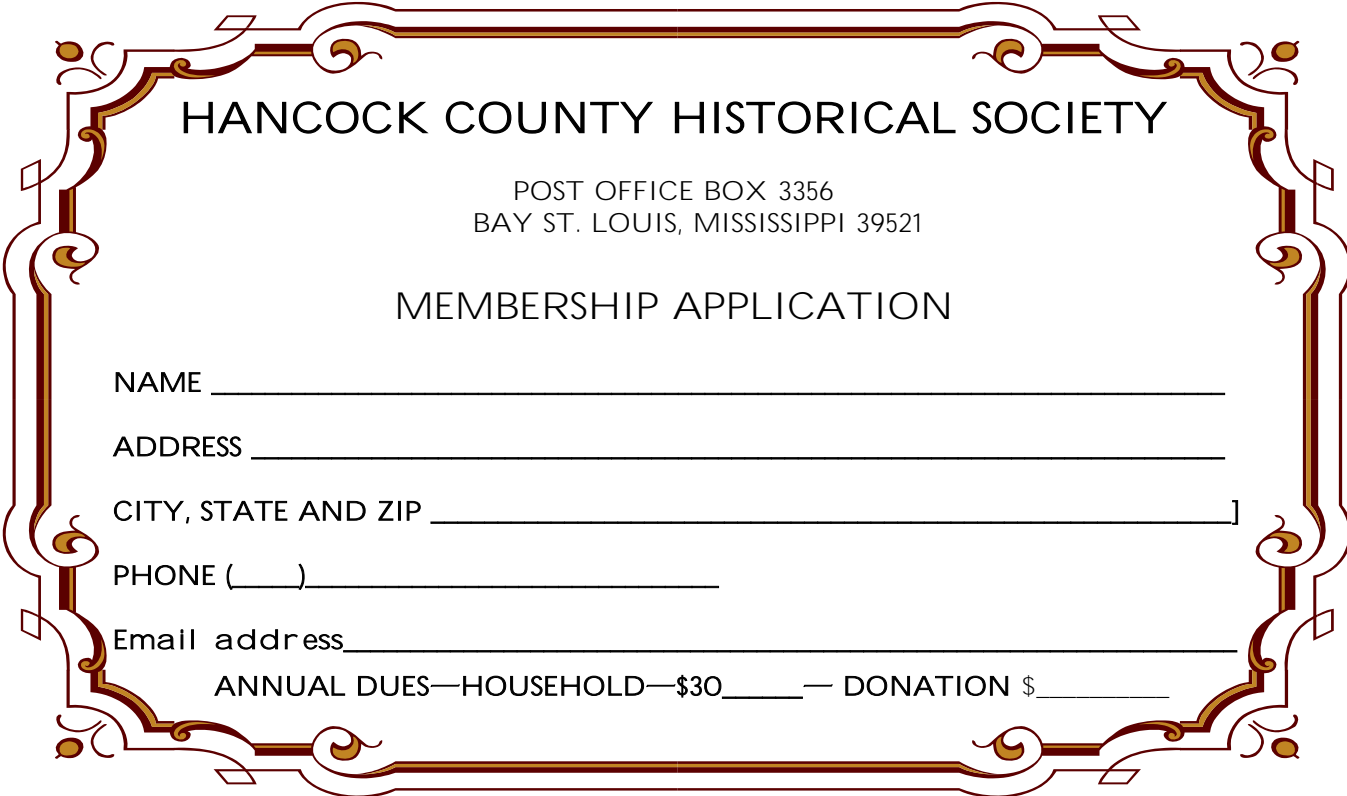
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