

THE

# HISTORIAN

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OF HANCOCK COUNTY

Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi

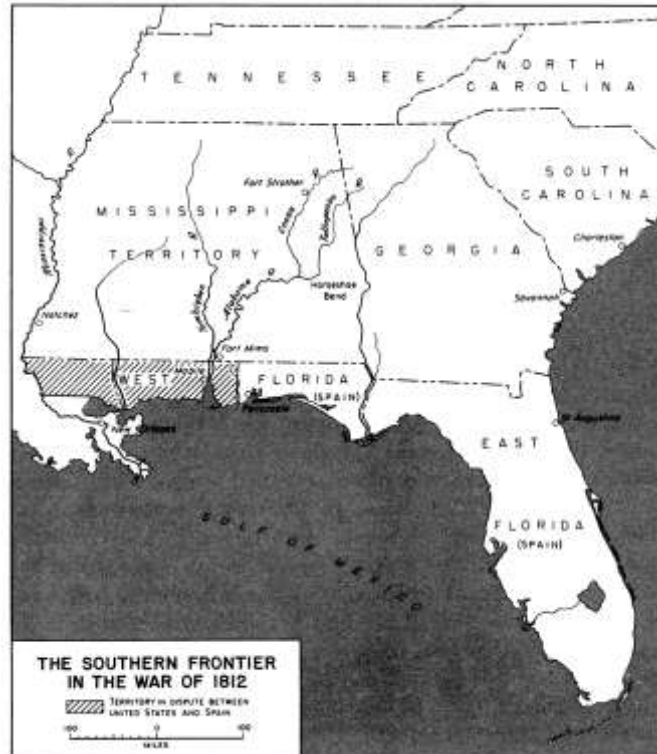
June 2018

## COMING EVENTS AT LOBRANO HOUSE

The monthly luncheon meeting will be held on Thursday, June 21, 2018, at noon at the Kate Lobrano House. The guest speaker will be “Doc” Rhodes, who will discuss Judge Nelius Rhodes, former Justice of the Peace in Hancock County. **Reservations are required** and may be made by calling 467-4090. **Respectfully we must request that you please call by noon on Wednesday, June 20,** 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.

## ANNUAL CEMETERY TOUR

Even though October is still a few months away, it’s not too early to begin thinking about and planning the Cemetery Tour. The 24th Annual Cemetery Tour will be held on Halloween night, Wednesday, October 31, 2018, at Cedar Rest Cemetery on Second Street in Bay Saint Louis. Needed are volunteers to prepare the cemetery for the tour, to portray citizens buried there, and to act as guides. To volunteer, please call 228-467-4090. All actors and guides must be members of the Historical Society.



## The Republic of West Florida

By  
Eddie Coleman

With the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, it was assumed that the area known as West Florida was a part of the United States. However, Spain claimed the lands as her own. Ultimately in 1810, citizens of West Florida revolted from Spain and set up their own country known as the Republic of West Florida. From most

accounts the land was claimed by the United States, governed by the Spanish, and inhabited by the French and English with a sprinkling of other European settlers.

The treaty at the conclusion of the Seven Years’ War (French and Indian War) in 1763 gave Britain the Spanish colony of Florida and other former French colonial lands of Louisiana and the Mississippi and Alabama Gulf Coasts. These were reorganized into the provinces of East Florida and West Florida. Essentially West Florida included the Florida Panhandle, the lower

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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.”

“heels” of Alabama and Mississippi, and the eastern portion of Louisiana roughly from Baton Rouge south to the mouth of the Mississippi River.

The new British lands brought many new settlers into the area who proved to be Loyalists during the American Revolution. The Treaty of Paris at the end of the war returned the lands of West Florida to Spain and reset the northern boundary to its original 31st parallel. But Spain wanted the northern boundary to be at 32 degrees 22 minutes north latitude instead, roughly halfway between present day Natchez and Vicksburg. It was not until 1795 with the Treaty of Lorenzo that Spain recognized the border as the 31st parallel.

Another chapter in the story is that in 1800 Spain returned its Louisiana Colony to France with the secret Treaty of San Ildefonso. The transaction “muddied the waters” because

with the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 the United States considered West Florida its property. Yet Spain also claimed it.

The Spanish letters of *The Lower Mississippi Data Base* give evidence of “stress” between the United States and Spain from 1805 to 1810. Various incidents and encounters between the two countries reveal that both claimed the area of West Florida and its adjacent waters of the Gulf of Mexico. Local historians Russell Guerin and Marco Giardino, Ph.D., have reviewed many of the letters in detail and made the following observation:

One such letter “dated August 5, 1808, described an action by four American gunboats that came to Cat Island. Their crew killed various cattle and other livestock belonging to [Pedro] Morin. Also, they went to Pass Christian where they killed a cow belonging to Jose



Labat. In addition, the American captain of one vessel demanded that a Spanish schooner submit to an inspection and was very angry when told he had no right in Spanish waters.”

President James Madison followed Thomas Jefferson’s belief that the area would eventually become a part of the United States. Even though the United States and Spain continued negotiations concerning the rightful owner of West Florida, tensions continued to rise with more American settlers moving into the area. The new inhabitants and earlier British settlers resented being under Spanish rule.

As a result of this resentment, the idea of rebellion against Spain began to circulate among the populace. In fact in 1804 there had been an unsuccessful attempt by the Kemper brothers (Nathan, Reuben, and Samuel) of Pinckneyville, Mississippi Territory, to lead such a rebellion. According to Robert Higgs, Ph.D., the uprising failed mostly because “its leaders miscalculated the strength of pro-French, pro-British, and pro-Spanish elements, all of whom felt threatened by the pro-American faction the Kempers represented. Higgs continues by saying the rebellion failed “in part, because many residents recognized that the Kempers were not so much revolutionaries as opportunistic and unscrupulous marauders mouthing political slogans.”

A few years later, the idea of the Republic resurfaced



“ Best known today as the ‘Bonnie Blue Flag’ of Southern Independence, the flag was made by Melissa Johnson, the wife of Major Isaac Johnson of the West Florida Dragoons. Consisting of a rectangular blue field with a single [white] star (representing the new republic), it first flew as the national flag of the Republic of West Florida.” from *“Deep South Republic of 1810”* by Dale Cox

again, this time with better leadership and perhaps less unscrupulousness than before. This time the idea of the Republic of West Florida began on the night of September 22-23, 1810, when a group of “disgruntled settlers” from the Mississippi Territory, led by Philemon Thomas, attacked the Spanish fort at Baton Rouge. In the melee two Spanish soldiers were killed, and five others, wounded. Later William Cooper, a staunch Spanish loyalist in the Baton Rouge area, was summarily murdered by these ruffians. Among those Mississippi settlers were the Kemper brothers once again, who had led the earlier, unsuccessful rebellion in 1804. In fact, Reuben Kemper

led a small force in an abortive attempt to capture Mobile.

Ultimately, this time the Republic of West Florida established a government which included a constitution patterned after the one in the United States as well as a supreme court and Congress similar to the U. S. St. Francisville, LA became the capital. Under the leadership of President Fulwar Skipwith, the little country existed in theory, and to some degree in reality, for seventy-four days from September 23—December 7, 1810. It even created the first lone star flag known as “The Bonnie Blue Flag,” which was later used by the Confederacy in the War Between the States.

Several accounts show that most of the settlers of West Florida supported the Spanish government. Two Spanish letters in the *Lower Mississippi Data Base*—one from Benjamin Howard to Simon Favre and another from Spanish official Cayetano Perez of Mobile to the Spanish Governor General Vincente Folchs—support this idea. It seems that most of the settlers of the area wanted nothing to do with the rebel government.

There is no conclusive evidence that the U. S. government directly supported this rebellion. However, there is *speculation* that there was some “behind the scenes” involvement. In any event the United States profited from the uprising. The Territorial Governor of Orleans, William C.C. Claiborne, and the Territorial Governor of Mississippi, David Holmes, were not in favor of the formation of the new republic. In fact, they sent reports about the actions of the supporters of the revolution to the U. S. President James Madison. Ultimately Claiborne was sent by President Madison to take possession of West Florida, and on December 6, 1810, St. Francisville was taken. On December 10, 1810, Baton Rouge was seized, and the two areas were assimilated into the Orleans Territory.

In 1810 only the portion of West Florida within the present state of Louisiana was seized and later the area between the Mississippi and Pearl Rivers; nonetheless, the lands of the Mississippi Gulf Coast were not included.

To finalize the take over of West Florida and afraid of European support from Spain, Britain, and others, on April 8, 1812, President James Madison claimed by proclamation that West Florida belonged to the United States because of the conditions of the Louisiana Purchase of 1803. Still, the coastal lands were not included. However, in August 1812 Mississippi Territorial Governor Holmes issued an edict making the entire Mississippi Territorial Gulf Coast, which included present-day states Mississippi and Alabama, one county—Mobile. The area included all of the lands east of the Pearl River, west of the Perdido, and south of the 31st parallel.

In December 1812 Mobile County was divided to form two additional counties, Hancock and Jackson. Finally, the remainder of West Florida was ceded to the United States in 1819 with the Adams-Onis Treaty.

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## Fulwar Skipwith

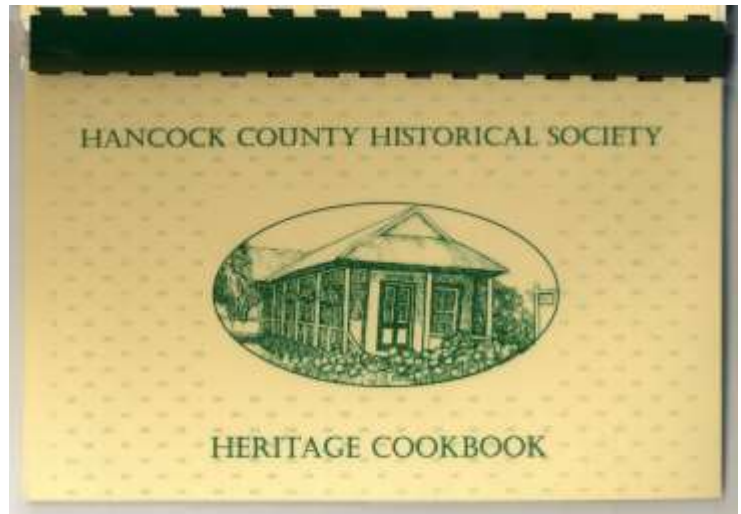
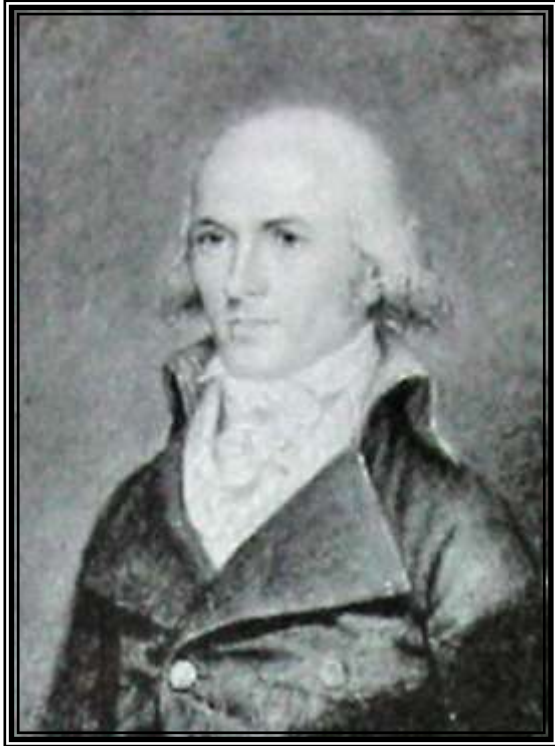
By

Eddie Coleman

Fulwar Skipwith was born in Dinwiddie County, Virginia, on February 21, 1762. A distant cousin of Thomas Jefferson, Skipwith attended the College of William and Mary until he left at age sixteen to join the fight for American Independence.

In 1790 Skipwith was appointed United States Consul to Martinique, a French colony in the Caribbean. In 1795, he moved to France and became Consul-General in Paris under the U. S. Minister to France, James Monroe, later President of the United States. In 1802 he married a Flemish baroness, and in 1809 the family moved to Spanish West Florida.

Ultimately, he became the Governor of the Republic of West Florida which was annexed into



A revised edition of the original 2000 Hancock County Historical Society Cookbook will be available July 1 at a cost of \$20. You may pick up a copy at the Lobrano House. If you would like a copy mailed to you, please send a check for \$27.00 per copy (\$20 + \$7 for mailing for each copy) to HCHS, P. O. Box 3356, Bay St. Louis, MS, 39521.

the United States by President James Madison, who considered it a part of the Louisiana Purchase of 1803.

After the defeat of the rebellion and the inclusion of West Florida as a part of the United States, Skipwith remained in Louisiana and was elected to the Louisiana State Senate. He died on January 7, 1839 at his plantation home near Baton Rouge.

**SOURCE:**

“Fulwar Skipwith” *Wikipedia*. April 12, 2018. Accessed 12 May 2018.

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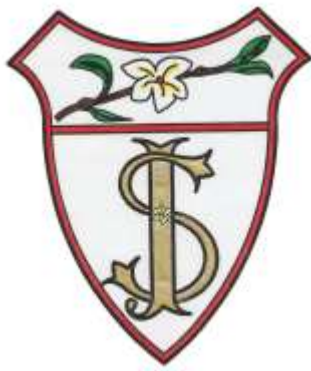


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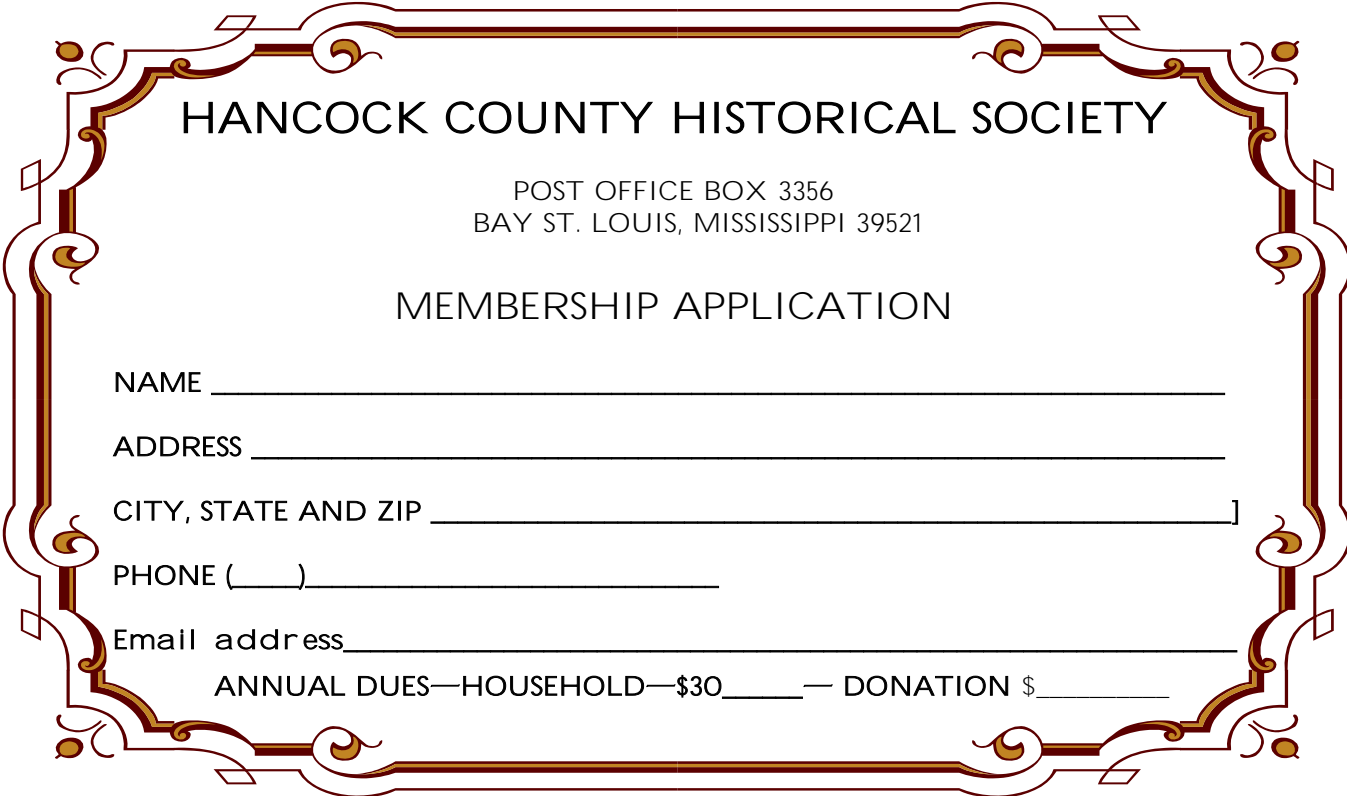
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