

THE

HISTORIAN

OF HANCOCK COUNTY

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Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi

January 2019

COMING EVENTS AT LOBRANO HOUSE

The monthly luncheon meeting will be held on Thursday, January 17, 2019, at noon at the Kate Lobrano House. The guest speaker will be Ed Wycoff who will focus on architectural changes since Hurricane Katrina that will affect historical structures. In addition, he will offer guidance concerning protection from future storms. **Reservations are required** and may be made by calling 467-4090. **Respectfully we must request that you please call by noon on Wednesday, January 16,** 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 shows the August Keller store at the corner of Washington and Front Streets in the early 1890's. Later the building had various lives. Among them the home of the Bay-Waveland Yacht club, a movie theater, and a grocery store.

—from *Along the Gulf*, c. 1894

The Merchants of Hancock County

By
James Keating, M.D.

The first merchants of Hancock County opened general merchandise stores in the several commercial centers in the nineteenth century. John Toulme was an example of the first generation of such merchants, and August Keller was an example of the second generation of merchants in the second half of the 19th century. A survey of the most notable well-known merchants of the 19th cen-

ture will be presented. Many local merchants, too numerous to count, operated more specialized businesses in the 20th century marketplace of Hancock County. One such merchant, W. A. McDonald, serves as a metaphor/symbol for the consummate history of the merchants of Hancock County and America in that century.

John Toulme was a French immigrant whose family were coffee planters from Santo Domingo. Toulme came to Bay St. Louis and in 1812 established the first general mercantile store with \$26,000 of capital. He married Emelie Wetherite Saucier, and they purchased a house on the corner of Union and Front Street (Beach Blvd.). Toulme was

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.

THE
HISTORIAN

OF HANCOCK COUNTY

Eddie Coleman, Editor
James Keating, Publisher

Published monthly by the
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HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

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P. O. Box 3356
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108 Cue Street

Telephone [228] 467-4090

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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.”

very successful at business. He also invested in a sawmill and amassed a fortune over his lifetime. He bought large tracts of land in Bay St. Louis, New Orleans, and Mobile. As a result his success attracted other merchants to Bay St. Louis. Toulme set an example for future generations of merchants expressing the philosophy that “courtesy goes a long way” and “the customer is always right.”

August Keller owned the popular “Blue Store” in the Bay located on Front and Washington Streets. He had been in the general merchandise business since 1874. Patrons came from as far as Waveland, Ulmanville, Pass Christian, and the interior towns of Hancock County to shop at the Blue Store. He had an enormous business especially on Saturdays when country folk would come to town. He had seven employees and maintained three wagons to deliver goods to customers. Because there were no banks in Hancock County in the 19th century, it was customary for merchants like Keller to provide a safe place for his regular customers to store their money. Keller kept a vault in the back of his store for this purpose. There were no banks in Hancock County in the 19th century. John Osoinach, who worked for Keller for several years, later owned his own store. He acquired the unofficial title of the county’s first banker because he cashed and issued checks for his own customers.

Pearlington had been a port for general trade and cotton on the Pearl River before Captain John Poitevent organized the Poitevent and Favre Lumber Company after the Civil War. This lumber mill had a large commissary—two hundred feet long crammed with goods. Other large stores in Pearlington in that time frame were the Cash Store, Orr Brothers, and CK Russ serving a population of 1,700 in 1900. The L&N Railroad and the local mail boat/steamboat were em-

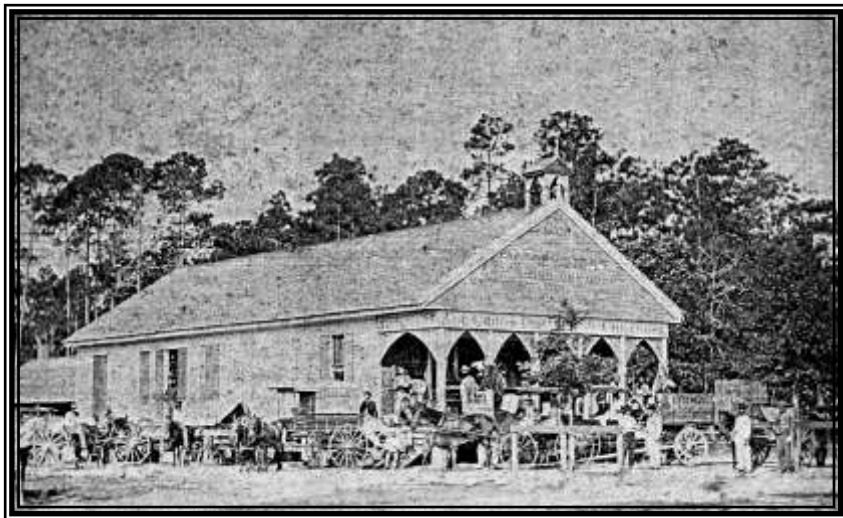
ployed to transport merchandise. Previous to the advent of rail service, all goods in and out of Pearlington were carried by schooners and later steamboats from ports such as New Orleans and Mobile.

In Logtown the Weston Lumber Mill had a large commissary store with annual sales of \$350,000 in its heyday. Employees were expected to shop at the company store. The population of Logtown grew from 350 to 3,000 from 1890 to 1900. The town contained a branch of the Hancock Bank, a post office, a courthouse, a jail, a silent movie theater, and a high school.

Gainesville was an early trading center on the Pearl River which became the county seat from 1830 to 1857. Moreover, it was a logging community and a trapper’s paradise. Bill Whitfield had a store in Gainesville where farmers could shop or trade and sell cash crops and livestock. Whitfield would carry a farmer’s charge account like a bank and give them ample time to pay for their supplies when the crops were harvested. Merchants at that time would accept cattle or crops such as sweet potatoes to trade or pay for items of sale.

In 1857 Bay St. Louis became the county seat of Hancock County. Until 1908 the border between Hancock County and the newly formed Pearl River County had not been adjusted by the Mississippi Legislature. Those farmers living south of Carriere had to go to the Bay to pay taxes, get marriage licenses, attend court, or take care of official business. Over the 19th century the commercial epicenter of Hancock County shifted from the Pearl River communities of Pearlington, Logtown, and Gainesville to Bay St. Louis.

J.B. Ulman owned a successful general merchandise store in Waveland. It was next to the railroad crossing on Nicholson Ave., opposite the Ulman Woolen Mill. Ulman was highly regarded in



This is a photo of J. B. Ulman's general merchandise store, which also served as the commissary for the Ulman woolen mill.

—photo file, HCHS

Waveland and Bay St. Louis and was treasurer of the town of Waveland.

Traveling salesmen, called drummers, who worked for distributors in New Orleans, took the train on Monday northward to Nicholson to begin their weeks work in Hancock County. Here the salesman could hire a horse and buggy with driver to go southwest to Gainesville, Napoleon, Logtown, Pearlington, and Kiln replenishing stores along the way. In addition he sold his wares to farm families along the way ending his workweek Friday in Bay St. Louis. Here he paid his driver who returned the horse and buggy to Nicholson and returned to New Orleans aboard the L&N train in Bay St. Louis.

By 1900, the population of Hancock County was 11,886, which supported many relatively small merchants. With a population of 2857, Bay St. Louis could offer a shopper a variety of stores from which to choose. Baston A. Levy had a large dry goods store at the corner of Main and Front (Beach Blvd.) Streets. He carried a fresh, clean line of dry goods, fancy goods, notions, furnishings, hats, and shoes. Directly across the street, Frank Taconi operated a grocery, which also provided wine and

food for fishing boats. The previously mentioned Kellar store and the Olivari stores sold general merchandise at the "head of the bluff" (foot of Washington Street). Nearby W.H. Yenni owned a dry goods store. His wife was an excellent milliner who produced large and luscious ladies hats, adorned with bows, roses, forget-me-nots, and veils. Lucien M. Gex had a large four thousand square foot general merchandise store at the corner of Hancock and Good Children (Sycamore) Streets. Gex bought fish from the local fishermen and sent it wholesale to New Orleans buyers by train. There were five drugstores, one of which was de Montluzin's Drug Store. In

addition to filling prescriptions, the store also served nectar and cream soda as a popular summertime refreshment.

William Albert McDonald (1866-1944) moved to Bay St. Louis from Holly Springs, MS and purchased the Bay Grain Company near the train depot in 1904. His early business sold groceries, feed, farm supplies, and Owensboro wagons. In 1925 "Mr. W.A." as he was called built a store at the corner of Toulme and Easterbrook Streets. That building still stands. Over time McDonald increased his inventory which later included feed, saddles, harness, farm supplies, building materials, and tobacco. His son John joined the family enterprise in 1927, which was subsequently incorporated as W.A. McDonald and Son. Later the business developed wholesale groceries and tobacco. It was not very long before McDonald was sending his merchandise to other towns in Mississippi and then by rail throughout the South from Atlanta to Fort Worth. A Mississippi State Stamp Tax Law ended his wholesale tobacco business. Nevertheless, the wholesale grocery line evolved as the largest part of the business.

In 1938, the eldest son, C.C. McDonald, joined the family business, and the name of the corporation was amended to W.A. McDonald and Sons. With both



This is a photo of L. Olivari's general merchandise store, located on Front Street at the foot of Washington. In the early years of Bay St. Louis before so many hurricanes attacked the town, there were many businesses located on the beach side of Front Street, now Beach Blvd.

—from *Along the Gulf*,
c. 1894

sons in the business, the family enterprise expanded further now encompassing building materials, hardware, furniture, and appliances. W. A. McDonald died in 1944.

In 1945, John A. McDonald (1907-1979) returned from World War II where he was a Lieutenant Commander in the Navy. A wood product company, Imperial Wood Products, represented continued commercial expansion with retail, wholesale, and manufacturing divisions. By 1952 the company had fifty-two employees. John McDonald was a very hard worker who represented the second generation of capable McDonald merchants who instinctively understood business and marketing. He also had the wisdom just at the right time to branch out and become a real estate developer. He founded the John McDonald Realty Co. which is currently prospering. Under the management of Jim McDonald, the son of C.C. McDonald, the McDonald and Sons hardware store closed in 2017.

The W.A. McDonald and Sons Incorporation represented a local, successful, multigenerational business that prospered from the 20th century into the 21st. The McDonald family were bold, innovative merchants who were able to adjust to ever changing market conditions both positive and negative. Their evolution from retail to wholesale was instructive in analyzing their enormous financial success in the first half of the 20th century. They achieved economies of scale compared to smaller competitors. Nonetheless, large national conglomerate brands such as Lowe's and Home Depot eventually drove local businesses like W.A. McDonald and Sons out of the marketplace.

Another family generated business which began in the 20th century and moved into the 21st is Hubbard's Waveland Hardware. Robert (Manny) G. Hubbard, Jr. (1907-1974) opened a local busi-

ness in 1946 which morphed into the Waveland Lumber Co./Hubbard's Hardware Store on Nicholson Avenue. In addition to his business, Manny Hubbard served as President of the Hancock County Board of Supervisors. He was elected from Beat 5 (Waveland and Bay St. Louis) for sixteen years from 1951-1967. At that time, county affairs were in a sad state of neglect. Under Hubbard's stewardship, the infrastructure of Hancock County was drastically upgraded by shrewd source financing with a succession of grants, loans, and corporate bonds. Roads and bridges were built, and public improvement programs such as the hospital and Port Bienville were accomplished. Previous excessive bonded indebtedness came under more prudent and honest management.

In conclusion, the merchants of Hancock County, the local bankers, the lumber barons, the captains of the seafood industry, newspaper editors, and assorted entrepreneurs evolved in the county as a mercantile elite that were very successful stewards of the local economy. Over the last two hundred years county businesses have adapted to the industrial revolution in the lumber and seafood industries. The transportation revolution brought on by the steamboats and then later by railroads has allowed for much improved supply chain management for merchants. During the 20th century merchants have evolved from retail to wholesale with greatly expanded commercial enterprises. Since 1970 the local economy in Hancock County and other counties in America have witnessed significant expansion and cultural change. Unfortunately, there has been some loss of local control of main street businesses. Nevertheless, the merchants of Hancock County continue to play a vital role in the remarkable success story of our economy and the enviable quality of life enjoyed on this section of the "American Riviera."

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Chris Roth—Membership Chairman
Charles Gray—Executive Director
John Gibson—President
Bryan Frater—Second Vice President

(Not pictured)
James Keating—Publicity Chairman
Jim Codling—Historian

The Annual Christmas Tea and Installation of 2019 Board of Directors

The annual Christmas Tea with the installation of the 2019 Board of Directors was held on Thursday afternoon, December 6, from 3:00—5:00 P. M. at the Kate Lobrano House, the home of the Hancock County Historical Society at 108 Cue Street, Bay Saint Louis.

After brief opening remarks by Charles Gray, Executive Director of the Hancock County Historical Society, the 2019 members of the Board of Directors were introduced. President is John Gibson, First Vice President is George Saucier, Second Vice President is Bryan Frater, Treasurer is Georgic Morton, Secretary is Beverly Frater, Publicity Chairman is James Keating, Historian is Jim Codling, and Membership Chairman is Chris Roth.

WE DECKED THE HALLS; WE ATE; WE DRANK;
WE HAD A PARTY!!!





PHOTOS

At left— Chris Roth

Below

Left— Mayor Mike Favre

Right— Dr. James Keating

THE BAY SAINT LOUIS BICENTENNIAL CELEBRATION

Because inclement weather arrived on Saturday, December 8, the Bicentennial Celebration festivities were moved from the old city hall to the Kate Loblano House, home of the Hancock County Historical Society. Chris Roth, Director of the Bay St. Louis Bicentennial Committee, welcomed more than sixty plus guests who braved the torrential rains. He introduced special guests Mayor Mike Favre and former mayors Victor Franckiewicz, Larry Bennett, Eddie Favre, and Les Fillingame, and members of the city council.

Mayor Mike Favre read the Bicentennial Proclamation from the city council, and Dr. Jim Keating gave a brief history of Bay St. Louis and the dedication of the Shieldsborough Historical Marker.

The program continued with Director Chris Roth introducing historical characters and events from the history of Bay Saint Louis. Included were the US Navy and the Battle of New



Orleans, presented by Rear Admiral John V. Okon; **Founding of Shieldsborough**, presented by Ron Thorp as Thomas Shields; **Incorporation of Shieldsborough**, presented by the Rev. Ted Dawson as Governor David Holmes; **Modena Weston-a Civil War Combat Nurse**, presented by Connie Roth; **Louis J. Piernas-Prominent Public Servant**, presented by his great-great-great-great nephew Joe Piernas; **Benjamin Sones-Mayor and Judge**, presented by Dr. James Keating; **Father Matthew Christmann-Founding of Saint Augustine Seminary**, present-

ed by Chris Roth; **Miss Louise Crawford**, presented by Beverly Frater; **Mayor Charles Traub**, presented by Chris Roth; **Renowned Midwife-Carmen E. Moret-Labat**, presented by Connie Roth; and **Leo Seal, Jr.-Civic Leader, Banker, and Philanthropist**, presented by Dr. James Keating.



BICENTENIAL ACTORS

Front row—Connie Roth
 Row two L to R—Rear Admiral John A. Okon, Beverly Frater, Chris Roth, Ron Thorp
 Back Row L to R—Jim Keating, Joe Piernas, Rev. Ted Dawson



Former BSL Mayors
 Larry Bennet
 Eddie Favre
 Les Fillingame
 Mike Favre (current Mayor)



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Bill Morrison & Jeannette Bolton <i>Bay St. Louis, MS</i>	

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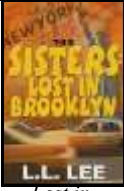
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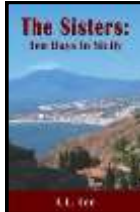
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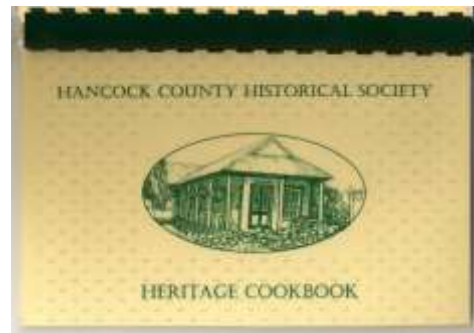
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