

THE

# HISTORIAN

OF HANCOCK COUNTY

www.hancockcountyhistoricalsociety.com

Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi

February 2019

## COMING EVENTS AT LOBRANO HOUSE

The monthly luncheon meeting will be held on Thursday, February 21, 2019, at noon at the Kate Lobrano House. The speaker will be Jimmy Ladner, Hancock County Tax Assessor. Mr. Ladner will speak on how Hurricane Katrina impacted property taxes in Hancock County and how the county has recovered in that area in the past thirteen plus years. In addition he will discuss historic properties now in restoration. **Reservations are required** and may be made by calling 467-4090. **Respectfully we must request that you please call by noon on Wednesday, February 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.



This is a photo of the *Ouida Sue* oak at 526 Citizen Street in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi. It is the oldest oak tree registered in Hancock County.

## LIVE OAK TREES

By  
Shawn Prychitko,  
Anita Warner, and  
James Keating, M.D.

In Hancock County the southern live oak tree (*quercus virginiana*) is a symbol of history, struggle, survival, and romance. Some of these ancient trees festooned with garlands of Spanish moss and resurrection fern are over three hundred years old. Legends about our live oak trees go back to the heady days of the Indians and the Spanish/French

colonial period. Some of these old oak trees, which are named for a person or event, are embedded as witness to our history. A Live Oak Registry protects these natural treasures from destruction. Unfortunately a plague of Formosan termites has recently infested a significant portion of our oak trees.

One interesting tale is the popular "Legend of Pitcher's Oak," a story about an infamous pirate king named Captain Cletus Pitcher, who operated out of Bear Creek (present day Long Beach, MS). Pitcher plundered the active shipping lanes between Mobile and New Orleans in the Mississippi Sound between 1780

## 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.

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HOURS**

MONDAY — FRIDAY  
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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.”

and 1811, possibly a comrade in arms allied with Jean Lafitte (*also spelled Laffite*). According to oral tradition, he maintained a tree house or shack in a large, very old live oak tree near Bear Creek as a defense against unpredictable severe storms that plague the Gulf Coast. It also served as a safe haven from attack at night from potential enemies within his crew who might betray him. As the story goes, one night he argued with some of his cohorts about the division of treasure from a recent raid. Words led to violence, and Captain Pitcher shot a colleague right between the eyes. The rest of the crew, whom he was notorious for treating badly, turned on him. Pitcher escaped to the tree house and lifted the ladder to prevent pursuit. As a result one pirate lighted one of the stilts supporting the tree house. Subsequently, the treehouse and the giant oak became consumed in flames. With his dying breath, Captain Pitcher levied a curse on his pirate crew promising to return from the dead and haunt them. Over the years there have been several sightings of the ghost of the pirate king.

Another story, which may be found among the vertical files of the Hancock County Historical Society, is the local legend of “Chaffi and Tuculo and the Doorway in the Oak.” Chaffi was a brave Choctaw warrior who pursued an enemy raiding party, but died in battle at the site of a large oak tree. His lover, the comely Tuculo, waited anxiously in their village for his safe return. Finally, she could wait no longer, and she searched for him along the Old Black Wolf Indian Trail that wound through what is present day Hancock County. Tuculo came to the spot where Chaffi died and heard his voice calling for her from within the aforementioned large oak tree. Its trunk leaned across the trail and formed a doorway in the same shape as one in the high chief’s teepee back in her vil-

lage. She followed his voice and passed through this opening into the Happy Hunting Ground and into the arms of her beloved Chaffi. From that day forward Indian lovers have traditionally paid homage to this legendary tree by leaving gifts to the gods at this opening in the oak tree, hoping that they too will also be reunited after death for eternity in the Happy Hunting Ground. Fact or fiction, nonetheless an old oak tree bearing this description stands in front of the Bay-Waveland Post Office on Highway 90.

Southern live oaks were landmarks at many of our important historic locations in Hancock County. The Gainesville Oaks were the site of the second county seat of Hancock County from 1837-1858. Prominent lawyers and citizens discussed the affairs of the day and conducted business under their canopies. On the Claiborne Plantation along Mulatto Bayou, a large group of oaks and pine trees surround the tomb of Philip Saucier, a pioneer settler in the county. Saucier acquired a land grant in 1781 and was a Hancock County Justice of the Peace. At the Jackson Landing, also on Mulatto Bayou, there is a grove of beautiful oak trees. It is believed that Andrew Jackson’s troops transported heavy equipment such as cannon in schooners from here to New Orleans in preparation for the Battle of New Orleans, hence the name.

Another historic live oak in the county is the Dueling Oak located near the Lakeshore railroad depot. A duel occurred there between two gentlemen fighting over a local belle of Bay St. Louis. Old oaks in Cedar Point mark the site of the Cowen-Fields cotton plantation, established in 1803. The house was named Elmwood Plantation because Cowen planted an avenue of elm trees to line the carriage drive leading to the house. In addition he planted several live oaks to adorn the main house. Unfortunately, the elm trees did not survive a later epidemic of Dutch elm disease, and the



The *Necaise Oak*  
stands at 338 Main Street  
Bay St. Louis, Mississippi.

house was lost in Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Only the mighty oaks that graced the manor house survive.

The beautiful *Necaise Oak* at 338 Main Street in the Bay is approximately 137 years old. According to its owner, Beth Weidlich, the tree was named for the family who built the house circa 1840 at that address. At that time Necaise built three other nearly identical houses, one for each of his daughters. One is located next door to 338 Main, and the other two are across the street. Only at the house at 338 does the original kitchen remain adjacent to its rear yard vegetable garden.

The original Indian name for the site of present day Bay St. Louis and its surrounding area is Chicapoula (*A-chou-poulou*) or “bad grass place.” One very old tree in the Carol Vegas Park next to the old city hall was originally named Chicapoula. In 2013 it was renamed *Choufleur* and registered under that name. To represent earlier times, a shoo fly was built encircling the ancient oak, similar to what early settlers built to enjoy the cool gulf breezes during the summer months. The word *shoo-fly* is

an Anglicized version of the French word *chou fleur* (cauliflower).

The oldest oak tree to be registered in Hancock County is located at 526 Citizen St. Originally owned by John and Ouida Sue Parker, the property was passed down to her nephew and his wife, Kevin and Christine Stouder. In honor of his aunt, Kevin named the oak *Ouida Sue*. This tree has withstood hurricanes, draughts, wet years, freezes, and very hot summers, yet it remains a treasure of Hancock County.



Pictured at left is the *Choufleur* oak with its shoo-fly encircling it standing at 300 South Second Street in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi.

The Bay-Waveland Garden Club and the Hancock County Historical Society maintain the Live Oak Tree Registry. Their mission is to register live oak trees that are one hundred years old or older within Hancock County with the intention of protecting and conserving these natural resources that promote historical events, aesthetic value, and environmental significance. The project operates under the auspices of the *Société des Arbres* (tree society). The registration chairs are Shawn Prychitko and Anita Warner who find, measure, and document century-old southern live oaks. All trees registered must measure 9.5 feet in circumference, which is representative of one hundred years of age. The oak may then be named and a plaque put on the tree designating it worthy of area protection. The registry has been in existence since 1972. Over five hundred live oaks are listed in the Hancock County Registry. Mississippi law and local ordinances protect live oaks with a circumference of at least thirty-eight inches. Anita Warner, on behalf of the Live Oak Registry, attends Planning and Zoning meetings to assure protection for the live oak trees.

Unfortunately, Formosan termites have evolved on the Gulf Coast as the dominant insect

infesting trees and houses. Signs of tree infestation are similar to the signs one would see in a house. Entry holes, sawdust collection, visible damage, failure to thrive of part or all of a tree, and tunneling outside the bark are the telltale signs of Formosan colony formation. Cavities in the central trunk are common in old trees. Rotting wood that collects water is an irresistible attraction to a termite looking for a place to nest. Formosan termites could also feed off live trees and plants. It is estimated that over thirty percent of the oak trees are infested with these termites. Large colonies of over one million of these insects consume wood at a faster rate than the native termites and can do serious damage to a tree or house in three months. Dead wood should be removed from these old trees. The area around a tree should be kept free of weeds, debris, leaves, mulch, vines, and large wooden decorative objects. These precautions allow breathing room around the tree trunk where it meets the ground. Preventative measures such as burying chemical reservoirs that are embedded circumferentially in the adjacent ground are being actively promoted by the Live Oak Tree Registry and Mayley's Pest Control. Tree trunks already infected can be injected with these chemicals, the most common being Fipronil, found in Termidor or Turus brand products. Formosan termites represent an existential threat to all the majestic live oak trees in Hancock County.

In conclusion, Spanish moss-draped southern live oak trees possess a certain grandeur that evokes mystic feelings in the hearts of the citizens of Hancock County. Live oaks are an integral part of our cultural heritage in legend and history. These oaks are landmarks of important events of our past. Shawn Prychitko, Anita Warner, and the Live Oak Registry protect our majestic oaks from indiscriminate damage by humans and termites. Affectionate names of regis-

tered oaks include those previously mentioned and "Cat in the Hat," "Choo Choo Vu," "The Money Tree," "The Giving Tree," "The Lazy Fern Oak," and many others. As it turns out, foresters have concluded that these trees are also social beings that have feelings and can communicate chemically with one another. If trees could talk, these living landmarks and witnesses to history would no doubt have fascinating stories to tell.

#### SOURCES:

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### OAK TREE REGISTRATION

The registration of live oak trees in Hancock County is a joint project of the Bay/Waveland Garden Club and the Hancock County Historical Society. The 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. For a \$15 fee the live oak tree is registered in Hancock County, and the owner will receive a green plaque with the name of the tree chosen by the owner. There is an additional fee if you wish to register with the *Soci t  Des Arbes/ Garden Clubs of Mississippi*. For more information check out the Historical Society's website at [hancockcountyhistoricalsociety.com](http://hancockcountyhistoricalsociety.com) and click "Society" on the main menu. You may also send email to [treeregistry@gmail.com](mailto:treeregistry@gmail.com).



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**“UNDER THE OAKS”  
Spring Pilgrimage House Tour**

The Bay Waveland Garden Club Spring Pilgrimage on March 23, 2019, features four houses and Christ Episcopal Church, all of which have significant live oaks on their properties. Two houses are in Waveland, the other two and Christ Church are in the Bay. The tour is from 12:00 noon to 4:00 p.m. and is free and open to the public. If you have enjoyed this issue’s article on live oaks, don’t miss this opportunity to view the oaks up close and personal



You may have your registration plaque mounted on a decorative wooden frame for an additional charge. The tree frame, shown in the photograph above, costs \$30, the smaller two rectangular frames just below it are \$10 each, and the larger rectangular frame at the bottom is \$15. Please place your order for the decorative frame when you place your order for the plaque.



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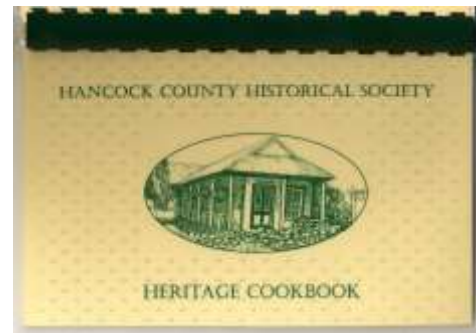
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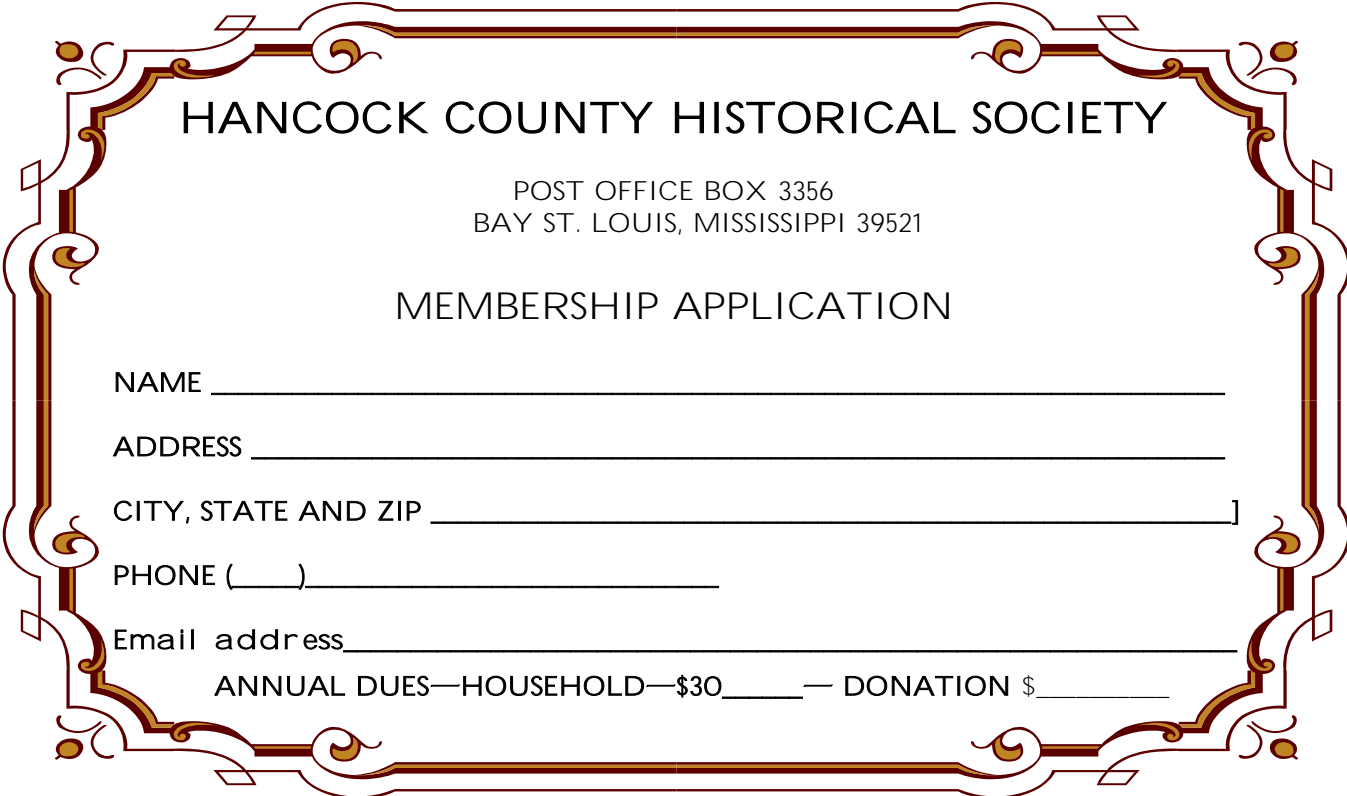
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