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HISTORIAN

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OF HANCOCK COUNTY

Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi

April 2019

COMING EVENTS AT LOBRANO HOUSE

The monthly luncheon meeting will be held on Thursday, April 18, 2019, at noon at the Kate Lobrano House. The speaker will be Rachel Dangermond, who will speak on the 100 Men Hall and its contribution to Blues Music in 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 17,** to make your reservation in order to help us plan seating which is limited to fifty-four 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 painting depicts the Creek War in the Southeast United States
1813—1814.

ANDREW JACKSON AND THE WINDS OF WAR

By
James Keating, M.D.

General Andrew Jackson was a great hero in American and Hancock County history. The War of 1812 began on June 1, 1812, when the United States declared war against Great Britain. British strategy targeted the port of New Orleans because it was the gateway to the heart of the American West. Indeed the British questioned the legitimacy of the Louisiana Purchase of 1803 and, moreover, intended for New Orleans to

become a prize of war. Although the Battle of New Orleans on January 8, 1815, dashed Britain's hope of capturing New Orleans, earlier military engagements by Jackson's army executed against the Creek Indians and the ports of Mobile, Pensacola, and Bay St. Louis had already sealed their fate. Hancock County and its citizens were right in the middle of the preparations and execution of the several stages of battle, both naval and land. The U.S. Navy and Purser Thomas Shields played key roles in this drama. This article will describe the trap that the British were forced into by the events in the fall of 1814.

In December of 1812, President James Madison through his Secretary of War, William Eustis, ordered Tennessee military General

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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.”

Andrew Jackson to assemble an army of two thousand volunteers and proceed to Natchez, Mississippi. Thirty boats carried troops to Natchez in five weeks. The British were expected to attack New Orleans in 1812. However in March of 1812, Jackson was ordered by a new Secretary of War, General John Armstrong, to return to Nashville.

For several decades British agents had been providing the Five Civilized Tribes of the West (Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek, and Seminole) weapons such as rifles. Additionally the Creek Indians were promised land if they would be their allies and attack American settlers on the frontier. In fact a bounty for scalps was a common practice. The British envisioned a joint military engagement with the Creek Indians to take New Orleans and other strategic Gulf Coast targets. On August 30, 1813, Creek Indian Chief Red Eagle (aka William Weatherford) lead a large band of Creek warriors to a crude stockade called Fort Mims, which was near the Alabama River in the Mississippi Territory. Accordingly three hundred settlers were slaughtered. Thus began the Creek War of 1813. As a result President Madison and Tennessee

Governor Willie Blount ordered General Jackson to reassemble his volunteer army division of two thousand soldiers and neutralize this Creek Indian threat.

In November 1813 Jackson engaged a large force of approximately one thousand Creek warriors at the Indian settlement of Talladega. Employing a classic pincer tactic, he placed eight hundred cavalry soldiers in two winged formations adjacent to a central division of twelve hundred infantry soldiers to repel the attack of the opposing Creek army. This maneuver broke the back of the Creek attack and killed three hundred braves. The remaining seven hundred warriors successfully escaped into the forest. In short this inexperienced General Jackson had successfully masterminded his first major battle. Jackson maintained his army in the northern Mississippi Territory during the winter of 1814. At this time the British had taken Pensacola which was in the Spanish colony/territory of Florida. To wit, the British supplied the Creeks with rifles, uniforms, and other supplies. Next Jackson attacked the Creek fortress of Horseshoe Bend on March 27, 1814, that contained one thousand warriors. In like manner Jackson employed another pincer



General Andrew Jackson



Purser Thomas Shields

maneuver using two units of foot soldiers. Hence most of the Indians were killed in that siege. The Battle of Horseshoe Bend ended this Creek War. The Treaty of Fort Jackson signed August 9, 1814, gave the United States twenty two million acres of land in the Mississippi Territory. As a consequence the Creek Nation could no longer assist the British in their projected attack of New Orleans.

On June 18, 1814, General Jackson of the Tennessee militia was promoted by President Madison to the rank of Major General of the regular U.S. Army. Two days after the signing of the Creek Indian Treaty, Jackson took his residual army of five hundred soldiers to Mobile, Alabama. Jackson believed the British would attack New Orleans from the east after the British Navy landed its army in Mobile. Located about 150 miles east of New Orleans, Mobile had an excellent harbor with its own protected bay. Besides, the British had already landed three warships at Pensacola with a small force of men and armaments. The United States had approximately five hundred soldiers stationed in Mobile. To aid them, Jackson requested Tennessee Governor Willie Blount to send his entire state militia consisting of General John Coffee's cavalry and friendly Cherokee warriors as well as artillery batteries, transport, and supplies. In addition, at the narrow entrance to Mobile Bay, Jackson appointed Lieutenant William Lawrence to command Fort Bowyer with 160 infantry to prevent a British naval landing or invasion. In an ensuing battle, Lieutenant Lawrence successfully repelled four British men-of-war ships and a land force of seventy-two Royal Marines. After the cannons of Fort Bowyer sank the British warship *Hermes* the British withdrew. As a result Jack-

son had denied the British the port of Mobile to land any army to march on New Orleans. The British would have to look elsewhere for their landing.

Pensacola was fifty miles east of Mobile in Spanish territory. Jackson took five hundred soldiers and marched north to Fort Mims, Alabama, to meet General Coffee, and on October 25, 1814, a force of 1,800 cavalry and 750 Choctaw and Chickasaw warriors joined Jackson. His army had grown to four thousand men. In Pensacola Bay Fort Barrancas controlled the inlet. The Spanish had handed the fort over to the British without a fight. However, Spanish Governor Don Mateo Gonzalez Manrique refused to hand over the town of Pensacola. Jackson then led a force around the back of the town at dawn while appearing to be camped peaceably to the west of the city. The Spanish and the British in their warships were caught by surprise and capitulated in short order. For this reason the British blew up Fort Barrancas and withdrew to Jamaica on November 7, 1814.

Jackson marched back to Mobile from Pensacola in three days on November 11. On November 22 Jackson marched west toward New Orleans on the Old Federal Road. He covered three hundred miles in ten days. On November 30 Jackson and his officers were ferried across Lake Pontchartrain to New Orleans. The Federal Road ran along the 31st parallel and passed through the northern border of Hancock County (present day Pearl River County). After reaching Hancock County, the army divided. A small portion of the army took a more southern route than General Jackson and his officers which included most of the artillery, ammunition, heavy equip-

ment, and other supplies that had to be hauled in heavy wagons. All along the way engineers and scouts were sent ahead to prepare the trail. Quartermasters and commissary contingents rounded up food and feed for from the local farmers in the thinly settled countryside of Hancock County. The quartermasters went to every farm in the area and bought cattle, sheep, hogs, corn, dried fruit, and other supplies. The farmers of Hancock County were happy to sell their stock because the U.S. Army offered them twice the market price for these supplies and paid with hard currency. The lower division of the army passed through Caesar on the way to Pearlinton. At that time every boat on the Pearl River was commandeered to furnish transport to New Orleans before the British arrived in Lake Borgne.

On December 9, 1814, the British armada carrying the invading army was sighted making anchorage between Cat Island and Ship Island in the Gulf of Mexico south of the Mississippi Sound. The defense of New Orleans was going to be a joint effort of the U.S. Army and the U.S. Navy. At the New Orleans station Master Commander Daniel Todd Patterson had a flotilla of gunboats at his disposal. These shallow draft sailing vessels (sixty feet long and eight feet wide) were well adapted to the shallow waters of Lake Borgne. A schooner, *Seahorse*, and a converted fishing boat, *Alligator*, serviced these boats. Each gunboat had a large bore cannon and several smaller guns. The flotilla commander, Lieutenant Thomas A.P. Catsby Jones, attempted to delay the British landing.

On December 13 forty-two British shallow draft barges



The Battle of Lake Borgne

with twelve hundred soldiers were sent to clear Lake Borgne of the US Navy sailing vessels. Lt. Jones sent the *Seahorse* into the Bay of St. Louis to protect the stores of Purser Thomas Shields and discourage a landing there. Five British barges went into the Bay and engaged the *Seahorse*. Simultaneously Purser Shields' battery fired on the advancing barges which were powered only by oarsmen. A naval battle occurred, and the *Seahorse* held off the British barges for a short time. Eventually Sailing Master William Johnson decided to set fire to the *Seahorse* and the supplies on shore. A local militia company in Bay St. Louis retreated to Pearlinton.

The next day the forty-two British barges captured five American gunboats in the Naval Battle of Lake Borgne. On December 15 Purser Shields and Navy Surgeon Doctor R. Morrell were sent under a flag of truce by General Jackson to negotiate with Admiral Sir Alexander Cochrane the parole of prisoners of war and to attend to the wounded American sailors. Shields and Morrell were placed on the hospital ship, *Gorgon*, but were not released until January 12 which was after the ensuing land battle in Chalmette,

Louisiana. Nevertheless Purser Shields saw naval action on January 20 because he commanded a small group of armed sailing vessels sent to harass the retreating British barges on Lake Borgne. It is a curious footnote that Purser Thomas Shields requested remuneration from the US Congress in 1819 for \$6,581 compensation for those naval stores blown up during the aforementioned conflict in Bay St. Louis.

In conclusion, when the Battle of New Orleans commenced, General Jackson had already proved himself to be the most experienced, able, and successful American general in the US Army in the War of 1812. He had organized and engaged his army in several large battles of soldiers with the Creek Indians, Spanish soldiers, and British land and sea forces at Horseshoe Bend, Mobile Bay, and Pensacola. Affectionately known as Old Hickory by his soldiers, Jackson balanced courage with great caution. He exercised patience in gathering intelligence and reconnoitering the seascape/landscape of the Gulf Coast. He was always one step ahead of the British. Thus, the British were encouraged to approach New Orleans

through the Mississippi Sound and Lake Borgne because it appeared to be the path of least resistance. With the success of Purser Thomas Shields, the US Navy and Army and the citizens of Bay St. Louis, the British were delayed long enough for Jackson to lead his army through northern Hancock County in time to prepare his men and await the arrival of the British in Chalmette.

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PURSER THOMAS SHIELDS

Purser Thomas Shields was a quartermaster in the United States Navy and maintained a large storehouse in the village of Bay St. Louis to supply US gunboats in the Bay of St. Louis and surrounding waters. In addition he had erected a small two gun battery on the bluff to protect these stores. While here, he was instrumental in protecting the village and the bay from the British in the War of 1812.

Even though the little town was referred to and known as Bay St. Louis, there was no official name. By an act of the first Mississippi State Legislature in 1818, the official name became Shieldsborough to honor Purser Thomas Shields, whose father (also named Thomas) owned land there. Nonetheless, local people and others continued referring to it as Bay St. Louis. The official name remained Shieldsborough through a second reincorporation of the town in 1858. However, in 1875 the city was reincorporated as Bay St. Louis, the name the town had always been called even when the official name was Shieldsborough.



The USS Shields (DD-596), a Fletcher-class destroyer, was a ship of the U. S. Navy named for Purser Thomas Shields, who fought in the Battle of New Orleans and the Battle of the Bay of Saint Louis.



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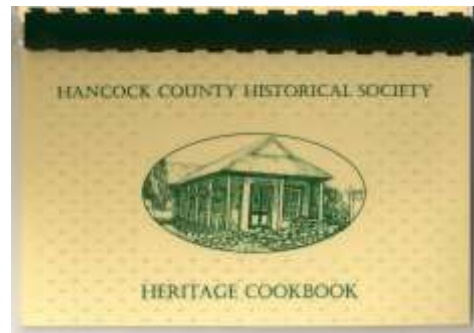
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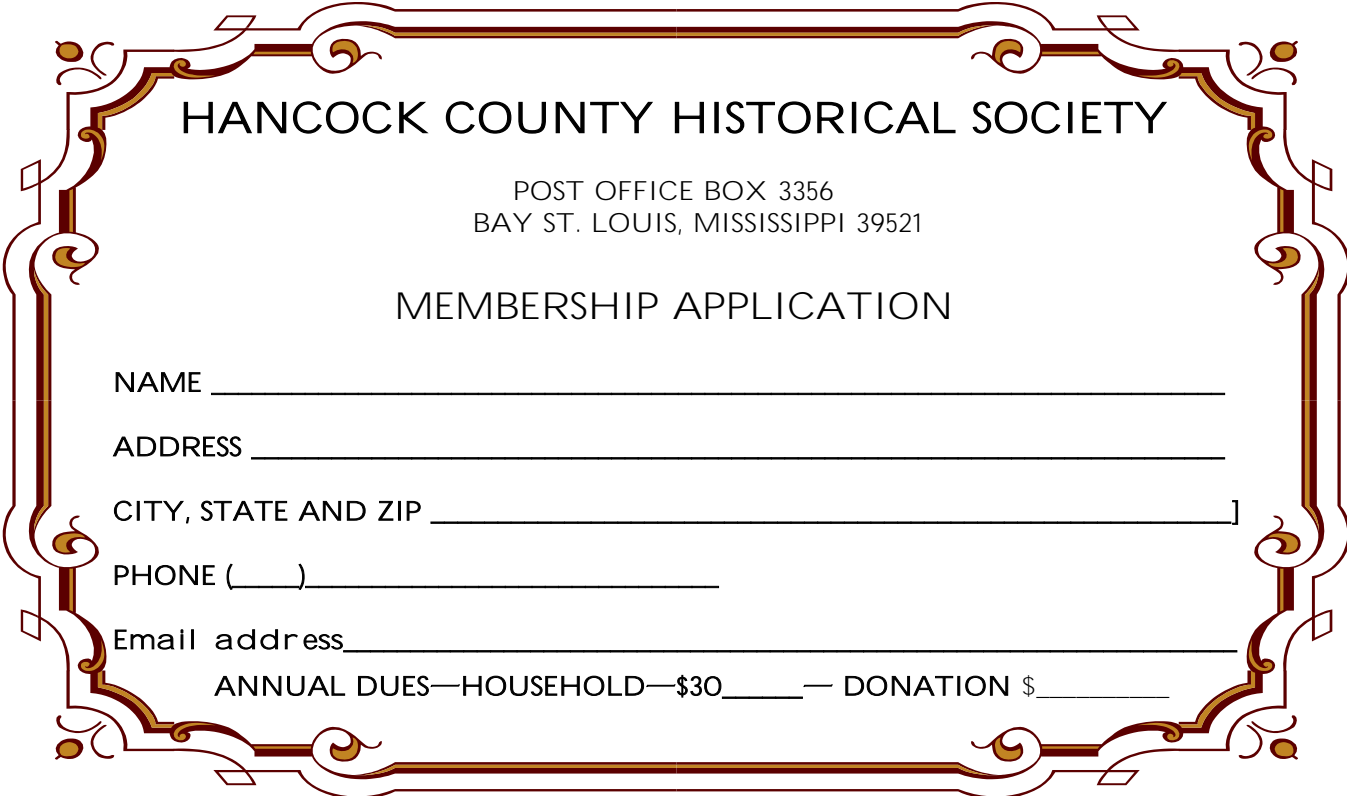
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