

THE

HISTORIAN

www.hancockcountyhistoricalsociety.com

OF HANCOCK COUNTY

Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi

June 2019

COMING EVENTS AT LOBRANO HOUSE

The monthly luncheon meeting will be held on Thursday, June 20, 2019, at noon at the Kate Lobrano House. The speaker will be Mr. Clyde Koerner, a veteran of World War II, who will speak on his experiences during the war. **Reservations are required** and may be made by calling 467-4090. **Respectfully we must request that you please call by noon on Wednesday, June 19,** 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 \$14.00 for members and \$15.00 for nonmembers,** payable at the door. It is catered by Almost Home Catering, Michelle Nichols, chef. The lunch menu is smothered hamburger steak with onions, garlic mashed potatoes, salad, pumpkin gooey butter bars, and bread.

Beginning in June 2019, the price of lunch will increase to \$14.00 for members and \$15.00 for non-members. The price of lunch helps defray monthly operating costs of Lobrano House.



The Clermont Harbor Hotel
The photo comes from an old postcard, c. late 1920s.

Clermont Harbor ...the birth and life of a town

By Russell Guerin

This writer must begin with an apology for personal references. My devotion to Clermont Harbor and its memories is too complete to do otherwise. After all, my dad built our first home in Clermont before I was born....

A copy of a lovely plat is now housed in the map drawer of the historical society. The original dates from about 1910

and clearly identifies Section 17, Township 9 south, Range 14 west. The same cold legal description was used on February 28, 1837, at the U. S. Land Office at Jackson, where 571.34 acres were sold at the rate of \$1.25 per acre. The cost was \$714.17. The purchasers were Peter Chambliss and Charles Lacoste of Natchez.

Land descriptions by township, range, and section are parts of the Public Land Survey System. While they may identify an exact location, they do nothing to tell of what eventually became a loving, breathing, loving community of people. Section 17 is

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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.”

now known simply as Clermont Harbor.

Perhaps the enthusiasm which accompanied the 1837 sale did not last, as on December 19, 1849, 129.85 acres of the above land were put up for auction “at the door of the Court House in the city of Natchez between the hours of twelve o’clock M. and four o’clock P.M.” The highest bidders were Robert Nott [Mott] and Thomas Lee at five cents per acre, the total being \$6.49.

Clermont Harbor is relatively elevated land situated between two marshes. Its pine forest reaches down to the Mississippi Sound, ideal for fishing and hunting for early settlers. As indicated by pottery shards, arrow heads, and other evidence, we know of prehistoric Native American Indian occupation. Indeed, there was once a major midden just down the beach from Clermont.

The earliest written evidence that the site was observed by later explorers tells of Bienville as he passed by in 1699. Chronicler Andrew Penicaut observed in his journal a nearby waterway measuring “one league wide and four leagues in circumference,” clearly meaning the Bay of St. Louis. “Three leagues away we found a creek up which the tide ascends.” That would have been Bayou Caddy, with Clermont in between.

The Joors
 Or, the Iooors...

Even before the sale above by the U.S. Land Office, the Joor family, who had migrated from the east coast, claimed ownership of several parcels in Hancock County. During that era they had changed the spelling of their native *Ioor*.

The earliest record is found in the Tax Rolls of the county. Listed in 1828 is John



A larger copy of this map (c.1910) may be found in map drawer #3 (local towns and areas) at the Kate Loblano House.

Joor with an enormous claim of 3,940 acres at "Shieldsboro." It must be considered that *Shieldsboro*, even though later considered as a name for the City of Bay St. Louis, also referred to a much larger general area.

The major part of this land was his purchase of the Mares Claim, which is identified as present-day Lakeshore. Tax Rolls of the 1830s list John Joor with as many as fifty-six slaves to work his plantation. The location of his property is shown as "Point Clear." Still, the size of his total lands being approximately six square miles indicates, together with other evidence, that it may have included Clermont Harbor.

Although the first Joor was an absentee landlord, his descendants were important to the development of Clermont Harbor and Hancock County. Immigrants like the Joors moved west to Mississippi after Indian Removal, a decision made during the administration of President Andrew Jackson. It forced the Choctaw nation and others to vacate the lands of their forebears. Some migrants, like the Joors, appeared to have already acquired wealth and came with their slaves. Others came with little more than one hundred dollars, which could purchase eighty acres from the U. S. Land Office.

"...two of three huts..."

It appears that Peter Horry Ioor, a son of John, actually took up residence in the Cler-

mont Harbor area. This was brought out in a mention in an 1852 report by State geologist Benjamin Wailes when he toured southwestern Hancock County: "I parted with him [Judge Daniels of Clifton Plantation] in the morning and traveled 14 miles; through a level, dreary wasted pine forest, with only two or three widely separated huts, and swarming with mosquitoes and very destitute of water, to Mr. Peter Ioor's, who was kind enough to ride with me by road leading to Mr. Asa Russ's on the Lake Shore." Wailes' destination, the Russ land, was later known as Sea Song Plantation and is now Buccaneer Park.

Wailes may well have considered the pine forest to be *wasted*, but in time it was that forest and its higher elevation that would have attracted buyers, residents, and developers. In the memory of this writer, there was, it is believed, at least one stand of virgin forest left in what was the Chalona property on the beach at Forest Avenue. The trees behind the tennis court were so tall as to be the object of lightning strikes on multiple occasions.

Judging by the comments from the Wailes journal, the 17th section was not yet heavily populated, but as time passes, local people whose names are recognizable for their activity in the county began to be interested. Prominent among them were Bordages and Lobrano. Those owners authorized John B. Ioor and F. C. Bordage "...for the purpose of changing

the plat of Clermont City in accordance to the plat or may thereto [*sic*] attached. This was to be at the expense of Ioor and Bordages."

Examples of sales activity follow:

- 1852—Bob Mott and wife Joanna sold 440 acres to Marie Herron for \$500.
- 1866—Peter H. Ioor to Phares, \$2500, undivided half of Sec. 17.
- 1884—Jacobs to Joseph Lobrano, \$1800
- 1897—Lobrano to John B. Ioor and F. C. Bordages, \$1000 for part of Sec 17
- 1897—Ioor and Bordages file plat of Clermont City.

By 1898, "Clermont City" was platted, indicating that a village was in the making.

A title search reveals that when the plat was filed, there were only a handful of owners. It is fortunate in that their names have been recorded, and it is noteworthy that several were local businessmen. In point of fact, it was a Bordage who partnered with an Ioor to create Clermont City. Others were E. H. Hoffman, Edwin and Frank Bordage, Edgar Gelpi, W. J. Quinn, N. Foirot, J. A. Turner, Joseph Faigy, W. J. Gex, W. F. Delcure, F. Dillmann, Mrs. T. B. Turne, F. Banderret, Dan Bordage, Charles Sanger, and Catherine Hoffman.

New Plat, New Name

A new plat was filed in 1903, creating the town's present grid of streets and renam-

ing the town to Clermont Harbor. The new document included a dedication, reading

“...and we donate for the use of the public forever all streets and alleys as shown on this map reserving however the riparian rights for all property owners on the streets and Avenues running to the water’s edge for bathing, erecting bath houses, and all else that would tend to give the owners of property in this plat and off the water’s edge riparian rights. Provided however that such right be universal and not a benefit or source of revenue to anyone or any body of persons to the exclusion of others.”

Names from the Joor family are reflected in street names of the new plat. Besides Ioor, they are Herron, Guignard, and Poinsett.

Gulf Coast Development Corporation

After the turn of the 20th century, real growth began with the investments of the Gulf Coast Development Corporation (GCD) and its president, Charles Hopkins. In 1910, GCD claimed ownership of “ninety-nine one hundredth 99/100 of what is now known as Clermont Harbor....” The town began to take shape in the next few years, for by 1910, there were fifteen resident property owners and five non-residents.

In the process, plans were detailed to widen streets and “to make the low part of said lands into a magnificent lake...” It was claimed that the digging of the lake was contracted to cost over \$25,000.” Besides the widening of streets, some sidewalks were laid and the harbor was dug. Thus, the new name became “Clermont Harbor.”

In addition, a beautiful hotel with Greek Revival architecture was built, and it was called Harbor Inn. All white and made almost entirely of virgin cypress, its forty rooms and twenty baths made an impressive building. Truly, its image dominated the town’s beachfront.

A point of curiosity about the new plat may invite speculation. This is because one of the main streets, Clermont Blvd., after it runs south from the railroad to Third Street, shoots a right angle to Lake Ave., which then twists and turns to the boat launch. Keep-

ing in mind that this was planned in 1910 or before, when there was little auto traffic and most people were expected to arrive by train, it appears that the plan was to have boats pick up and transport guests either by water over the harbor or by carriage on Lake Ave. Clermont Harbor, and its hotel, it was hoped, was to become the “Riviera of New Orleans.”

Mother Nature’s contrary Plans

None of the succession of owners was blessed with the art of timing,, at least as far as the hotel was concerned. It was part of an ill-fated scheme to create a Riviera for New Orleans. It was nearly destroyed by a fierce hurricane in 1915, the first year of its completion.

Mr. Hopkins apparently was soon ready to try again to make the hotel a success. This entrepreneur had been developing subdivisions in Virginia and previously had developed areas of New Orleans and Waveland. In the Virginia enterprise, Hopkins had employed Mr. Hugh Turner Carr, a construction superintendent in whom Hopkins had a great deal of trust. Carr, in his fascinating little book entitled *My First Eighty Years aboard the Planet Earth*, narrates that in September 1925 Hopkins came to Carr’s home with train tickets to Clermont and a key to a house for which a year’s rent had been paid. With these items, Hopkins made a request of Carr that he go and re-



Hugh Turner Carr



Nearly destroyed by the 1915 hurricane, Hugh Turner Carr was hired to restore it to its earlier grand style. It reopened in 1926, and visitors continued enjoy it through the Depression years.

build the hotel. Carr's book counts one store, one post office, and millions of mosquitoes in Clermont Harbor, but he evidently fell in love with the area nonetheless. From 1925 on, Carr spent the rest of his life in Mississippi.

From the fall of 1925 through mid-1926, the hotel reconstruction proceeded well. It was then time to attract the attention of investors. On July 4, 1926, "a special train from New Orleans, Louisiana, brought five hundred people for the opening." Games were played; there were races and fish fries. Carr wrote that there was standing room only in the hotel.

While the village may never have developed to the desires of GCD, people did buy and build and fell in love with the easy, slow life of the community. Eventually, there were two groceries, two bars, two churches, an ice cream parlor, a commuter train, and much suc-

cessful fishing and crabbing. On Sunday afternoons the city boys played softball against the locals. Hometown musicians brought their guitars to the and entertained for free.

Clermont Harbor had the longest pier in the area, nine hundred feet in length. Due to the gentlemen's agreement achieved in the Civic Association, people who owned beachfront property were asked not to build their own pier, but instead to support the one and wonderful community pier. Because of the pier, no one could come to Clermont and be a stranger very long. Eventually, a newcomer would find the way to the end of the pier. That was where people congregated, and they were welcoming and friendly.

The Civic Association contributed in many ways. As the county in those days provided no street lights, the association successfully encouraged all

home owners to have at least one outdoor light near the street. In another way, it was through their intercession that an oyster reef was created in front of Clermont. The idea was first suggested by my father, who contributed the first ten dollars. Soon there was enough money to have a load of shells dumped from a barge; it was productive, people coming from Bayou Caddy to fish at "Guerin's reef."

World II Years

A dedicated resident, Mr. Carr, did his civic duty during World War II by building and staffing a plane spotting tower. It was built to resemble a lighthouse.

Residents of Clermont saw evidence of the war in a number of ways. At times, wreckage was recognized as it floated down the beach during tide changes. Once, what appeared to be a partial torso was observed; I still hope it was part of a dead cow or pit. Another time, we retrieved a life preserver with a name stenciled to its



The Waveland pier



The Guerin residence stood at the corner of Beach and Forest Avenue. Unfortunately, it was destroyed by Hurricane Camille in August 1969/

side. My father had reason to call the authorities, and an FBI agent was sent to collect it. It was one of the few times we saw a man with coat and tie in Clermont.

Still in my long-term memory are the sights at night from the seawall of fires on the horizon. Without doubt, we were observing the sinking of tankers coming out of the Mississippi River by German U-boats.

Because of the activity in the Gulf, there was a blackout across the entire beachfront. It was very strict, forbidding people to even strike a match much less light a cigarette. We had blackout shades pulled down over our windows, and car headlights had to be painted black half-way down. The blackouts meant, of course, that we could not flounder in the traditional way, meaning with a kerosene-burning torch, called a flambeau. Not to be deterred, my brothers and I learned to flounder during the day.

Harbor Inn

After an expensive attempt at restoration, the hotel was wrecked finally by the great depression following the crash of 1929. The next eleven years did not see an appreciation of Harbor Inn. It was put up for sale, and on June 30, 1942, it passed to M. Bernhard, Sr. The price was \$6,500 on the basis of \$2,000 cash and the balance in notes to be paid by January 20, 1945. Shortly after his purchase, Bernhard granted an option to my father, Wilfred L. Guerin. He paid only one dollar for a three-month option, but had it been exercised, the sale price would have been \$8,000.

Guerin explored two possibilities before letting the option lapse. On November 9, he wrote to the U.S. Army Air Corps to inquire about the prospect of government housing for "personnel or workmen during, and perhaps after, construction of the field." To put this communication in an historical per-

spective, it must be remembered that this was during the middle of World War II. There had been indications—perhaps rumors only—that an airfield was to be constructed along Highway 90 just north of Clermont Harbor.

The second possibility involved the demolition of the hotel building and the subsequent dividing of the land into lots for sale. Judging from an undated circular which Guerin had printed, it may be assumed that he tested the interest of possible prospects by mail. It is further assumed that due to either a lack of interest or insufficient time, he let the option lapse.

On April 25, 1944, Bernhard entered into a complex agreement with Jeanette C. Carmichael, the express purpose of which was to effect a sale of the property. Again, the stipulated price was to be \$8,000. The exact date of the sale by Bernhard is not clear, nor is the selling price. It appears, however, that the buyer actually was the Clermont Harbor Hotel Corporation, of which my father was president. This occurred either in late 1945 or early 1946. I recall that my father owned 51% of the corporate stock. I also remember that he worked extremely hard in the months preceding the opening date, July 1. He commuted from our home in New Orleans to the hotel almost daily to supervise the reconstruction. It was for him a dream to own and restore the hotel.

Meanwhile, the so-called "dancing pavilion" was also receiving a total renovation. The

corporation had leased the structure to an individual who had grand plans for making it into a beautiful entertainment facility. A new hardwood dance floor was installed, along with tables and chairs, a new bar, and all the requisites for an opening night party. People were invited from all around. They came not just to see the refinished hotel, but also to hear one of New Orleans' major jazz bands. The hotel was reopened on June 1, 1946.

In those days, we spent our summers joyously in Clermont from the day school ended until the day before school began in New Orleans. However, on the particular weekend we were still in the city. We had a house guest for the night who overheard my father's response to an early morning long distance call. What he heard was that the hotel was on fire.

It took only a little while for that dry, old cypress to burn. Within hours, all that remained were the foundations, a spacious veranda, and four stark Greek columns, still reaching, monument-like toward the sky.

Over the years, Clermont survived several tests, beginning with the 1915 hurricane. The hotel burned down, followed by the hurricane of 1947. Then, there was Hurricane Betsy in 1965 and Camille in 1969. In August 2005, Katrina, a hurricane of immense strength and tidal surge, destroyed all but the raw land and the dear memories of the inhabitants of Clermont Harbor. Like the town itself, the hotel had had its trials, but, it was said by some, it could not

survive the careless placement of a floundering flambeau in its basement. The life of Clermont Harbor is analogous to a good short story. The town has had a beginning and a middle. It remains for future residents to tell whether it has had an end.

The Lighthouse at Clermont Harbor

Compiled and edited
by
Eddie Coleman

The lighthouse at Clermont Harbor was built by Hugh Turner Carr in the winter of 1942—43. He had been hired by Charles Hopkins, the owner of the Clermont Harbor Hotel, to supervise the rebuilding of the structure after its almost total destruction in the 1915 hurricane. Mr. Carr and his family moved to Clermont Harbor in 1925.

In his booklet *My First Eighty Years Aboard the Planet Earth*, Mr. Carr tells of his family's arrival in Clermont Harbor. "In due time, we arrived at Clermont Harbor. [W]hat a disappointment! [W]hat a reception! [H]ad I had train fare I would have left at once. The reception party consisted of millions of mosquitoes. All we could do was to get indoors as soon as possible and then try to clear the house of these pests. The home was amply supplied with mosquito spray and netting so we soon adjusted to this new condition."

Later, he does speak of the good side of the area. His health improved within a short time, he and his family enjoyed the abundant seafood, and the cost of living was lower than any other place he had lived. But he explains that the real draw was the people of the area who "were always willing to help a stranger feel as though he belonged to the community."

After the completion of repairs to the hotel, Mr. Carr and his family made Clermont Harbor their home rather than returning to Maryland. As he relates in his booklet, "The saying here is 'If you ever [come] here and [eat] mullet you will never leave.' I had eaten mullet and liked it, so I stayed." He became a successful businessman and leader in the community. He was instrumental in establishing a school at Clermont Harbor and served as a member of the Hancock County School Board. In addition, he was the owner of the Clermont Harbor Lumber Company, raised chickens, established the Clermont Manufacturing Company, and owned an antique business.

Mr. Carr constructed the Clermont Harbor lighthouse, which in reality was not a lighthouse, but an observation tower. Built in the winter of 1942—43 with the approval of civil defense, this post was served by volunteer workers as an aircraft spotters station during World War II. Observers were trained under the supervision of the Third Fighter Command. Citations were received by observers for their valuable contribution to



The Clermont Harbor "Lighthouse" was built by Hugh Turner Carr in 1942 as an airplane spotters station.

correctly identify this plane and that the fighter planes had theoretically destroyed [it]."

There is another noteworthy incident which relates to an article in the August 2016 *Historian* dealing with German submarines in the Gulf of Mexico. Mr. Carr tells of being awakened one night by two men who were "well-known alcoholics" but who were absolutely sober at this particular time and extremely scared. It seems they had been throwing a cast net when a large object surfaced and began moving through the water. In reality, it was a large tank filled with fuel oil to refuel the German submarine operating in the Gulf. After Mr. Carr's contacting the local sheriff and he the F.B.I., the boat towing the tank was overtaken and the operators dealt with, although in what manner Mr. Carr was unsure. He does emphasize that they were not local people, but from another state. In addition two men were also captured operating signals from the second floor of the Clermont Harbor Hotel. The official story was that the men had seen only a large dog playing in the water.

The tower withstood the 1947 hurricane, after which temporary living quarters were built around the base of the tower by Mr. Carr. This addition later became a workshop. It survived Hurricane Camille in 1969 but was destroyed by Hurricane Katrina in 2005.



our country's war defenses.

Mr. Carr gives this account of the lighthouse. "World War II was upon us and most of my time was spent in the war effort. I was approached on the subject of establishing an observation post at Clermont Harbor for the U. S. Air Force, Third Fighter Command. I built this post known as 'Osborn 5' and fully equipped the same.

"My commanding officer was Col. L. E. Brown, who in a citation said, 'For the best served post in all of Hancock, Harrison and Jackson Counties.'

"My official title was that of Chief Observer. Later, in another citation, I received the silver wings of the U. S. Air Force, and each observer under my command also received gold

wings for their war effort. The post itself was built in the shape of a lighthouse, fifteen feet in diameter at the base, and six feet at the top, and about forty feet high, with a stairway inside to the top. This was a very busy post during the early war years. "One incident I will never forget. A German tri-motor plane approached from the east, was identified, and reported at once. In a very short space of time, the air was swarming with U. S. fighter planes going through all kinds of maneuvers. I did not know what this was all about. In a citation later, I was told that a captured German plane was flown from the east coast to the west coast to test the ability of the observation system and that 'Osborn 5' was one of two posts in the entire system to

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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 25nd Annual Cemetery Tour will be held on Saturday, October 26, 2019, 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.

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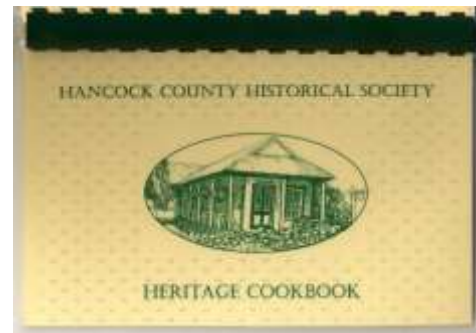
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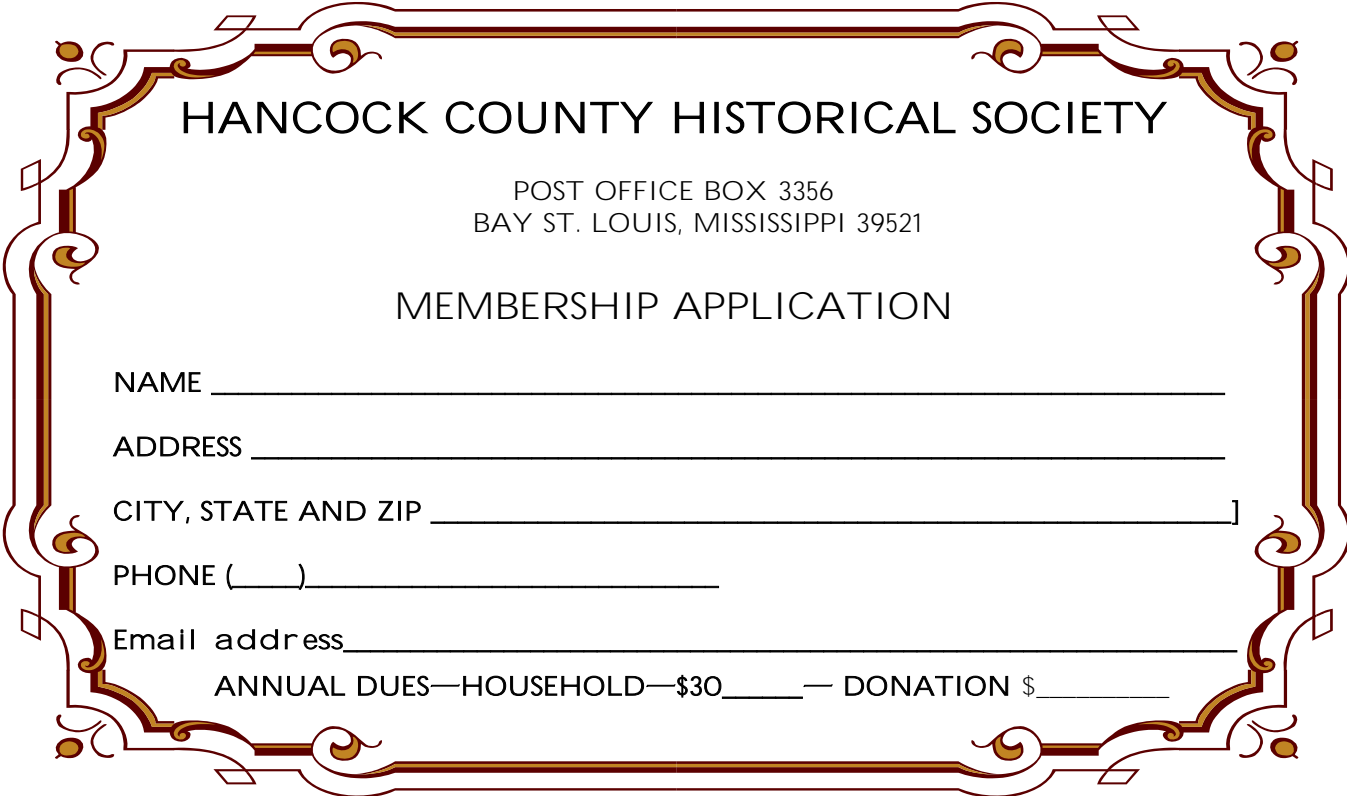
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