THE HISTORIAN

www.hancockcountyhistoricalsociety.com

Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi

COMING EVENTS AT LOBRANO HOUSE

The monthly luncheon meeting will be held on Thursday, February 20, 2020, at noon at the Kate Lobrano House. The speaker will be Lili Stahler Murphy, who will speak on the Smithsonian Exhibit which is coming to the Ground Zero Museum in Waveland. Reservations are required and may be made by calling 467-4090. Respectfully we must request that you please call by noon on Wednesday, February 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. Served at noon. lunch is \$14.00 for members and \$15.00 for nonmembers, payable at the It is catered by Almost door. Home Catering, Michelle Nichols, chef. The lunch menu is meatloaf in brown gravy, cheddar cheese grits casserole, broccoli salad, sticky toffee date cake, and yeast rolls.

HANCOCK COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

We have requested Charles Gray provide an oral history of his extensive knowledge of the history of Hancock County. This project will be recorded and made available at the Kate Lobrano House for

(continued on p. 2)

HISTORY OF DIAMONDHEAD, MS (2005—2020)

By Jim Keating, M.D.

The second part of the history of Diamondhead is a compelling story about a young community that endured a natural disaster followed by the effects on its local economy of a catastrophic national financial crash. In spite of these challenges, the citizens of Diamaondhead took bold action to solve their problems beginning with the incorporation of the community. Resourceful forward-thinking community acwas vital in the Historical Society collecting the information on the creation of the City of Diamondhead.

Charles H. Ingraham,

Jr., was the first Mayor

of Diamondhead. He

February 2020

OF HANCOCK COUNTY

tivists recruited its most talented leaders to create a brand new municipal government served by future mayors and a town council. This is their story.

Any period of Mississippi Gulf Coast history must include the occasional catastrophic hurricane, which becomes a seminal event for that time frame. Katrina was a Class III monster hurricane hitting Hancock County on August 29, 2005. The initial insult was a thirty-foot tide that flooded (via the Jourdan River) low elevation property in the Kiln and Diamondhead. Isolated tornados and hurricane-force winds generated by the storm did much damage to these communities. Nevertheless, the twenty-seven foot storm surge that followed the initial flooding



THE

HISTORIAN OF HANCOCK COUNTY

Eddie Coleman, Editor James Keating, Publisher Charles Gray, Executive Director

Published monthly by the HANCOCK COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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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 IN-TERPRET LIFE IN HANCOCK COUNTY; AND TO ENCOURAGE AN APPRECIATION OF AND IN-TEREST IN HISTORICAL PRESER-VATION."

was even more destructive in nature. Specifically, the surge almost completely leveled 250 houses in the South Side of Diamondhead mowing down everything in sight in a matter of minutes. Water is dense and heavy, and a cubic yard of H2O weighs 1,700 lbs. Furthermore, the surge of Katrina moved into the South Side of Diamondhead at a speed of 15 mph and destroyed everything in its path. On the North Side of Interstate 10 there was flood damage to 460 houses. Fifty-one people died in Hancock County alone.

Following Katrina there was no power in Diamondhead for more than two weeks. In Mississippi, one fourth of the labor force lost their jobs and regional unemployment was 24% for a while. Luckily, the 3,500 houses and condos not destroyed in the North Side of Diamondhead became a place of refuge for some of the 100,000 inhabitants of the Gulf Coast who were rendered homeless by Katrina.

Diamondhead became a focus of the 'Mississippi Renaissance' that would represent the amazing recovery in Hancock County after the storm. Indeed, in a few weeks, the population of Diamondhead swelled from

(continued from p. 1)

years to come. Your contributions to cover the cost of this project are most appreciated.

PLEASE CONTACT THE OF-FICE AT 228-467-4090 IF YOU WISH TO DONATE. FOR IN-FORMATION, CALL VIRGINIA OLANDER, PROJECT DIREC-TOR, AT 504-231-1303. 6,500 to 9,000 because there were no other communities in the immediate region on the coast that were habitable. Every new house sold in six months. In addition, the price of houses increased 25-50% compared to pre -Katrina. In the year following the storm, construction was down because citizens whose houses were damaged had not received their insurance money. The price of building materials skyrocketed. FEMA was paying \$25/hour for labor that traditionally received \$15/hour. Then, a boom in construction, particularly in Glen Eagle, occurred. Houses were built and priced at \$300,000-\$600,000 that were significantly different from the usual 'single tract' houses that had been built in Diamondhead since 1969. However, the boom post-Katrina in Diamondhead and in the rest of the United States evolved into an unsustainable housing bubble.

After 2006, elsewhere along the coast, big real estate developers were building fifty house projects in each in the six coastal counties. Banks gave mortgages to customers with poor credit ratings. These mortgages acquired the nickname 'NINJA' mortgage, a slang term that stood for "No Income, No Job, no Assets." There was often no attempt by lenders to verify the applicant's ability to repay such loans. Likewise, homeowners took advantage of the higher prices of real estate and had their property reappraised at a higher value so they could negotiate with the banks bigger equity loans. Wealthy and middle class house-flippers with mid to good credit scores further exacerbated the speculative bubble in the real estate sector of the economy. As

a result, the bubble eventually burst when US mortgage-backed securities laden with tranches of subprime mortgages collapsed in value and the Financial Crisis of 2007-2008 occurred.

In June of 2006, forwardthinking citizens of the community, many of whom were active in the Property Owners Association (POA), held a meeting in the card room of the Community Center to address the subject of Incorporation of Diamondhead to become a city. Rumors had circulated in the community about the threat of annexation by Bay St. Louis. Bay St. Louis did in fact publish their annexation plan that included north Bay St. Louis up to and including the I-10 exit 13 as phases 1-3. Diamondhead was shown as phase 4 to include the South Side, the business area north to Diamondhead Drive East, the Community Center, churches and Noma Drive to the Jourdan River. They did not indicate that they were the residential interested in property to thnorth. Ingraham reports that "The casino had been a real possibility since the mid-1990s and it would certainly have been a boon to the area. However, when we were planning for the city, we did not include any potential revenue from a casino in our potential sales tax or revenue calculations as we recognized the uncertainty surrounding the casino." Moreover, the prospect of the expiration of the covenants in 2020 meant the probable inability of the community to collect revenue through POA dues. Such a scenario represented a real potential financial train wreck for Diamondhead.

Community activists such as Chuck Ingraham, Rufus Bruce, Jerry Bourg, Lloyd Ramirez, and John Yarlborough engaged in discussions with attorneys like Bragg Williams, city planners like Jerry Mills, city officials, and others with knowledge of incorporation and annexation issues. In July 2006 the POA addressed the issue and appointed the Government Information Committee which was headed by John Yarlborough who was vice president of the POA. Ingraham remembers: "I was asked to serve on that committee that made the study of the various options. In December, 2006, we engaged Bridge and Watson of Oxford, urban planners to be our consultants. Chris Watson worked with us and suggested that we contact with Jerry Mills to be our incorporation attorney. We brought him in January 2007."

Consequently, Incorporation was recommended to the POA, and an education campaign of the residents was conducted. As a result, a petition for incorporation was signed by 76% of the property owners and the petition was filed with the



Thomas E. Schafer IV Second Mayor of Diamondhead

court in the summer of 2008. Nevertheless, some citizens challenged a lower court decision approving incorporation, but after a lengthy legal battle, the Mississippi State Supreme Court authorized or confirmed incorporation in 2012. Chuck Ingraham became the first mayor and the town council included Dianne Ackermann. Henry Holcolm, Ernie Knobloch, Ronald Lee Rech and Dalton Roberson. The city council developed a comprehensive financial plan, a zoning ordinance, a budget, police force, hired city employers and began collecting sales tax rebates and property taxes. The council also initiated action to purchase the city hall with a \$1.1M municipal bond.

Colonel Charles Henry "Chuck" Ingraham is a retired US Marine logistics officer. He commanded support units that gave him invaluable experience in areas of motor transport, engineering, supply, and construction. He served as the first mayor for eighteen months. "Ingraham reports that there are four forms of municipal government in Mississippi: Mayor-Board of Alderman Commission Form. Form. Council-Manager Form, and Mayor-Council Form (Strong Mayor)."

A "Council-Manager" form of government was selected for the city of Diamondhead. The mayor is only the titular head and he is on the town council with only one vote.

Chris Watson, Bridge and Watson Urban Planners, Jerry Mills, and Pyle, Mills, Dye and Pittman Attorneys at Law were commissioned to design the government of Dia-

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The first city council of the City of Diamondhead

L to R: Ronald Lee Rech; Ernie Knobloch; Chuck Ingraham; Dianne Ackermann; Henry Holcolm; Dalton Roberson

mondhead according to Municipal Government in Mississippi of which Mills is a contributor. The D'Iberville model was installed and their officers were helpful to the town planners. Ingraham now regrets that the incorporation plan did not annex acreage or land north of the city in Hancock County. If such land had been annexed, there would be good work sites in the town boundaries that would attract more commercial development. A casino would be a good business to have in Diamondhead for many reasons; however a casino was not factored into any financial considerations for the incorporation of Diamondhead. Ingraham also thinks that if the amenities such as the golf courses, country club, tennis courts, and swimming pools had been transferred to the city in an orderly, iterative, manner over the past seven years, the current struggle between the POA and the city might have been avoided.

Thomas E. "Tommy" Schafer IV was elected mayor in 2013. He was re-elected in 2017.

A Great Recession occurred in the United States from 2008-2012. There was little or no building in Diamondhead during that time. The price of houses plummeted. The Purcell Company like many real estate companies suffered difficult times due to a lack of revenue. In the Purcell Company 2016 merged with the Johnson Development Company in Houston. People's Bank became the new owners of Glen Eagle that contained 56 lots for sale.

During the last three years, the economy of Diamondhead has seen a resurgence. The Alfonso Reality Company has sold many lots in Glen Eagle for a reduced price of around \$25,000 to builders. Many small affordable houses have been built and sold in the compound. In short, these new, older downsizing homeowners continue to transform the character of Dia-

mondhead from а resort/ retirement town to a wage-earner bedroom community. For example, these customers do not want a big lot, lawn, or a pool. These "Jewel Box" houses range from 1200-1400 square feet and cost around \$250,000. The expression 'jewel box house' is a metaphor describing a fancy, small home with 'gems' inside like custom molding and marble or granite kitchen counter tops. Incidentally, 30% of these little houses are investment products that constitute affordable rental property. That is to say the lower income homeowners of Diamondhead do not see the value of spending \$1 M on the two golf courses and they might reject any POA dues or voluntary parcel assessment. In spite of these challenges, the city of Diamondhead is considered by many observers to be the most attractive and beautiful community on the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

In conclusion, Diamondhead is a valuable case study in the economic history of the real estate sector in Hancock County. Indeed, the ups and downs of the national economy directly impacted the compound and its citizens over the years. Forwardthinking community activists like Chuck Ingraham and the many other men and women who volunteered their time and energy to design and execute the plan for a self-sustaining city are to be applauded. Also the city owes a great debt of appreciation to the Purcell Company that built and fostered the whole project for decades.

Thus, after 50 years the dream project of investor Malcom Purcell McLean to create a brand new city in undeveloped forestland in Hancock County is a reality. An incorporated city of over 10,000 inhabitants flourishes today along the Jourdan River near the Bay of St. Louis. Although the storm surge of Katrina almost completely wiped out the entire neighborhood of the South Side, the North Side recovered and became a refuge for thousands of displaced citizens of the Gulf Coast, and Diamondhead grew substantially in size.

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CARNIVAL AND MARDI GRAS

Edited by Eddie Coleman (from the files of the Hancock County Historical Society)

On Fat Tuesday in 1699, d'Iberville and several companions, who had left Old Biloxi on an excursion to explore lands to



Past Mardi Gras Royalty *—from the Scafidi Collection*

the west, made camp sixty miles south of what later became New Orleans and named it *Point du Mardi Gras.* To commemorate the day, they had a drink of wine to bid farewell to the flesh. Thus, this simple ritual began the celebration of Carnival, which we call Mardi Gras, in the United States.

Mardi Gras is a celebration older than Christianity itself with beginnings in prehistoric Greece. Among those pagan peoples, it was a spring sacrificial festival, in which the villagers thanked their gods for the fertility of their land, their animals, and their women. As this rustic custom was absorbed by the magnificent empires of Greece and Rome, it was expanded and corrupted into a day of licentiousness and lust until it was finally tempered, tamed, and timed by the early Christian Church as the last day of indulgence in wine, food, and revelry—the final farewell to flesh before the Lenten season. It followed the Church throughout Europe and became one of the most eagerly awaited annual celebrations of Italy, France, and even England.

There are really two celebrations of Mardi Gras in New Orleans. In one, the old and established social organizations and families follow traditional, well-preserved rituals. The other is a free-for-everyone free-forall. Early celebrations had ladies throwing roses and bonbons from their balconies; however, this tradition soon degenerated to street "riff-raff" throwing sacks of flour and ultimately mud on revelers. By the time the Spanish controlled the Gulf Coast. these celebrations were so out of hand that the Spanish officials outlawed them for a while. After 1803, the Americans reinstated the traditions, but masking was outlawed when the mysteri-

ous Aaron Burr appeared in New Orleans one year during the celebration.

In 1820 Creole youths returning from Paris brought with them the idea of large groups banding together, and the first "official" parades began. Both Mobile and New Orleans have major Mardi Gras celebrations with Mobile's celebration being the older of the two. Although a friendly "rivalry" exists nowadays, the New Orleans Mystic Krewe of Comus was organized in 1857 by the "Cowbellians," a Mobile group that paraded on New Year's Eve. The first Comus parade consisted of two floats, one for the king, and the second depicting Satan in the blazing fires of hell. Carnival, as we know it, was born!

In 1872 the Krewe of Rex was founded, and the tradition of Rex as "King of Carnival" began. Coincidental with the founding of Rex and the carnival season, the Grand Duke Alexandrovich Romanov of Russia was visiting in the United States and pursued a popular American actress, Miss Lydia Thompson, to New Orleans. He had become enamored of her after seeing her performance in the comedy Bluebird in which she sang "If Ever I Cease To Love," which immediately became the Duke's favorite song.

Upon learning of the Grand Duke's impending arrival, the people of New Orleans made what they considered appropriate preparations for his arrival, including a throne for him on the porch of the City Hall. However, the Grand Duke arrived not as a prince of Russia, but in the uniform of a Russian Naval

Lieutenant and refused the throne prepared for him, preferring to stand throughout the ceremony. To justify his actions, he quoted from the Declaration of Independence that "all men are created equal." Just as Rex rode up on his horse and bowed to the Grand Duke, someone in the band began singing "If Ever I Cease to Love." The Grand Duke was not amused, having preferred to keep his love affair with Miss Thompson a secret.

The Grand Duke's appearance at the Comus Ball later that evening also reflected his displeasure with events earlier in the day. He refused to dance with any lady. He gave Miss Thompson a diamond necklace, but a few days later left town with another actress named Lotta Crabtree, who was playing in *The Little Detective* and to whom he gave an armband set in diamonds, pearls, and turquoise. Ah, so much for *noblesse oblige*!

POST-WORLD WAR II CELEBRATION

(Edited from Louisiana's Loss, Mississippi's Gain)

After World War II the Parent-Teacher Association of Bay High School decided to celebrate Mardi Gras with a parade and a carnival ball. Thus began an annual tradition of the school.

Local shopkeepers, students, and civic and school organizations and clubs decorated floats to enter in the parade and delighted townspeople with "an elaborate parade and a day-long celebration of fun and entertainment." Masked and costumed spectators enjoyed viewing this parade of the "Krewe of Chicapoula."

That night a carnival ball was held in the school's auditorium during which a king, queen, and court were chosen from the eighth grade class.

MARDI GRAS IN HANCOCK COUNTY

(Edited from Louisiana's Loss, Mississippi's Gain)

In 1966 the Krewe of Nereids was organized in Waveland. Its parade is one of the most eagerly anticipated of the Carnival season. Family-friendly, the Nereids parade is always well attended by locals and visitors alike. Spectators arrive early to claim their viewing spots.



Many of them make a day of it with picnic baskets piled high with goodies, coolers filled with "refreshments," and lawn chairs.

Organized in the 1970's, the Krewe of Diamondhead held its first Mardi Gras Ball in 1975 with Joe Salvatore reigning as King Ali'i Honua.

Other krewes which parade in Diamondhead are the Krewe of Selene, the Krewe of Royal-T's, and the Krewe of Moonbeams. Other parading Bay Saint Louis krewes are the Krewe of Kids and the Krewe of Real People.

DEDICATION Honoring Faithful Stewards of the Hancock County Historical Society

By Virginia Olander, Director of Communications

Albert Einstein once said: "There are two ways to live your life. One as though nothing is a miracle. The other, as though everything is."

It is my privilege to present the honorees today. I believe it is a miracle we are all here together in this place at this time. Today, we show our gratitude to the 5 honorees as faithful stewards of the Hancock County Historical Society who work every day to keep our doors open.

Each one has given purpose and meaning to the Historical Society. It is no accident but a miracle this building is a place where we not only gather for monthly luncheons and learn about our history.



The gentlemen, left to right: Eddie Coleman, Charles Gray, George Saucier The ladies, left to right: Virginia Olander, Georgie Morton Not pictured: Michelle Nichols and Marianne Pluim

Our doors are open every day to welcome members and visitors. I like to call it a miracle on Cue Street.

The complete stories of each honoree will be printed in upcoming issues of *The Historian*, our monthly newsletter. Today, we highlight the contributions of these people who open the doors and

keep all the moving parts working for all of us.

GRATITUDE is a beautiful word. Gratitude is more than just "thank you." It means you are pleased by what someone DID for you and also pleased by the RESULTS. Gratitude is more like "We thank the Universe for you." Let us all show our gratitude to them and thank them whenever we walk through these doors.

We created the plaque you see here which will grace the walls of this special place. These 5 people are the stars who put these programs together, open the doors for visitors every day, answer the telephone, bring fresh flowers, prepare delicious meals, created our website and keep the history of Hancock County and its people in the archives and yes, even on "The Cloud" for safe keeping.

Four out of the 5 honored here today are Mississippi born. All 5 are Mississippi proud.

I don't know if you can see the quote on the bottom of the plaque but it reads: "The more you know about the past the better prepared you are for the future." Theodore Roosevelt said this and even he is part of Mississippi's history given the the nickname "Teddy" after refusing to kill a bear in Mississippi in 1902.

Michelle Nichols is the founder and owner of "Almost Home" Catering. Michelle prepares and serves the delicious lunches we all enjoy every month. Michelle's story is part of our story. Before Katrina, Michelle was an Investment Sales Representative and stay at home mom in the Kiln. Her family lost their business because of the storm. Michelle jumped into action relying on her already known purpose in her life: Faith, Family and Food. Michelle is a good cook and she put her talents to work.

The Hancock County Historical Society was her FIRST client in 2007. Since 2007, Michelle has built a business including the Hancock County Library System, the Port & Harbor Commission, MSU Extension Service and many others plus life's celebrations including weddings, anniversaries, graduations and birthdays. Today, we thank Michelle for stepping-up to our doors to give us nourishment and faith that our mission will continue for years to come.

Marianne Pluim is our webmaster. She created a beautiful Website filled with valuable information and history. Through the years, Marianne has assisted us with technical support and helps us find badly needed computer equipment. She took the Society into the 21st Century by putting our website on the Internet.

Who knew the Information Super Highway would include Cue Street? She updates the website regularly and helps us grow technically. Marianne opened the door for us to be on the worldwide web while scanning and archiving our vertical files to the "cloud." We thank Marianne for her important technical

contributions to the Society.

Georgie Morton is a retired U.S. Air Force veteran with a degree in Accounting. Her assignments included The Pentagon, Chief of Accounting with the VA in Los Angeles and further assignments in Long Beach, CA and Jackson, Mississippi.

Georgie, we thank you for your 32 years service to our country and being the treasurer of the Society. Georgie not only knows the bottom line, she also helps at our luncheons and, more importantly, brings and arranges the fresh flowers. The decorations you see for the holidays or events such as lights and plants are taken care of by Georgie and other honorees mentioned here. Georgie, thank you for being the Treasurer and your talent dressing-up the house and keeping our doors beautiful.

William Edward "Eddie" Coleman, the assistant to the Executive Director, is by profession an English teacher after receiving his undergraduate and graduate degrees at the University of Southern Mississippi. Like many teachers, Eddie has worn many hats including working at Singing River Hospital and Walden Books. As an adult, he took dance lessons and performed in Little Theatre Productions.

Eddie has kept the doors open since 2004 and welcomes guests, teaches students, helps folks find important documents and has answered thousands of questions by those who call or come by. Eddie puts together the newsletter every month and for years has edited and written many articles for the Society. Eddie, thank you for being the Editor of *The Historian* and keeping the doors open.

How many of us in this

room envisioned 25 or 30 years ago we would be in this room today? Anyone? Charles Gray did. Let's look at it another way. How many of us in this room dreamed that we would all be together following Katrina? Anyone? Charles Gray did.

This is the house, the Kate Lobrano House, Charles Gray found for The Hancock County Historical Society. It was his energy, vision and love of architecture as a student in college that brought him to Hancock County.

He served in the 15th Infantry in Germany from 1956-58, Soon after, he went to New Orleans to a New Year's Eve party and stayed 43 years!'

Charles bought into a thriving restaurant, Corinne Dunbar's, on St. Charles Avenue and was vice president of the corporation for 43 years until retiring in 1984. He then bought Beachwood Hall, an

1840 Greek revival antebellum mansion, on South Beach Boule-vard in Bay St. Louis.

Charles Gray is more than the Executive Director he is a wealth of information and a gift to Hancock County. He is a walking encyclopedia of Hancock County History. Anyone who has had the pleasure of a conversation with him will not only be entertained, you will learn quite a lot. His storytelling is informative, interesting and quite humorous. It was his enthusiasm that brought the other honorees into the Society.

Charles has received many awards you see displayed in this room and we would like to show our gratitude to him today with this commemorative award. Thank you, Charles, for your sentimental journey of over 30 years pursuing Hancock County's histo-

ry and finding these doors for us.

Plaque Presented January 16, 2020 Monthly Meeting At the Kate Lobrano House





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NEW MEMBERS

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C. David Fite Bay St. Louis, MS

Beau Gex *Waveland, MS* John and Gwen Impson Bay St. Louis, MS

> Jacqueline Kidd Bay St. Louis, MS

Henry Martinez and Family Waveland, MS

> William Morris Bay St. MS

Debra Murray Waveland, MS E. Carroll Rogers Bay St. Louis, MS

Gary Sr. and Susan Ponthieux Bay St. Louis, MS

Dina Rosetti and Family Bay St. Louis

Elizabeth C. Schroeder Santa Barbara, CA

Albert Watkins Diamondhead, MS

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