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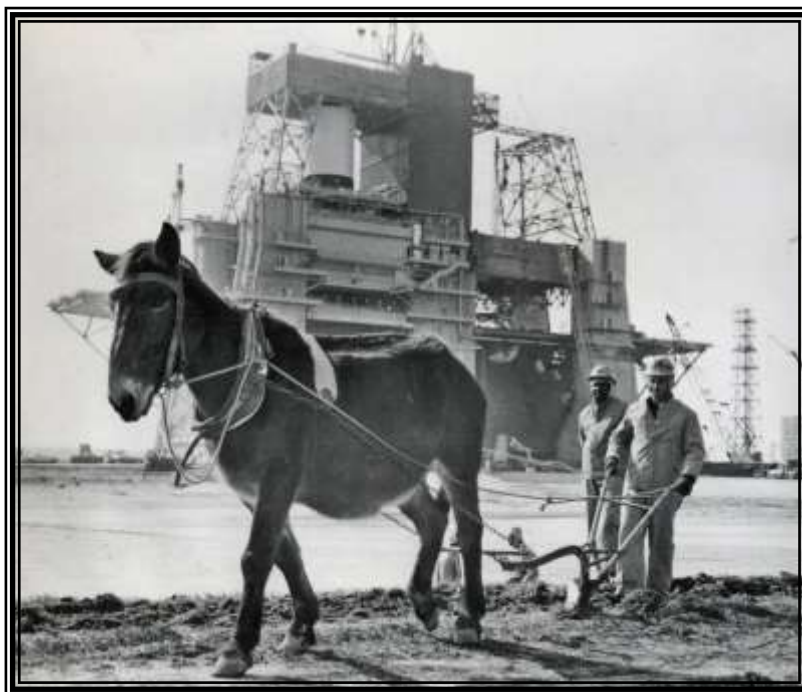
April 2020

CORONAVIRUS UPDATE FOR LOBRANO HOUSE

The Board of Directors for the Hancock County Historical Society has decided to cancel our monthly luncheon meetings and close the Lobrano House to visitors until further notice. Should you have any questions or have an immediate need to access information from the Society, please do not hesitate to contact us by phone (228-467-4090) and leave a message if no one answers. Or you may get in touch with us by email at hancountyhis@bellsouth.net. In either case, someone will get back to you as soon as possible. The newsletter will be published as usual.

HELP NEEDED

A few years ago, a very kind person donated an old, now antique, Underwood typewriter to the Historical Society. It was used by a former Chief of Police of Bay St. Louis, and I think a member of his family is the one who made the donation. At the time I wrote down the information I was given about the policeman who owned it, who donated it, etc. Unfortunately, in cleaning up the front room, vital information about the history of the donation was lost. If you can help, please call the Society at 228-467-4090, or send an email to hancockcountyhis@bellsouth.net.



THE OLD AND THE NEW

In early spring 1967, when NASA engineers at the Mississippi Test Facility needed shallow trenches dug to protect electrical cables, they employed mule power and a one-bottom plow to render the straightest furrows for those cables. In the background is the dual-position B-1/B-2 Test Stand used to static test fire the “workhorse” of America’s space hardware, the Saturn V S-IC rocket. (from the collection of Cindy Donze Manto)

STENNIS SPACE CENTER

By
James Keating MD

On October 4, 1957, Russia surprised the world with the launch of the first artificial satellite called *Sputnik 1*. Consequently, the United States perceived the potential threat to national security because of the obvious Soviet technological lead in research and

development for the conquest of space. On July 29, 1958, President Dwight D. Eisenhower created the National Aeronautic and Space Agency (NASA). In 1961, President John F. Kennedy launched the Apollo Program to commit the United States to land a man on the moon by the end of the decade.

Accordingly, a “Space Crescent” or aerospace corridor evolved on the southern US in 1961 to take advantage of the longer periods of fair weather flying. Cape Canaveral was the chosen launch site and the

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**LOBRANO HOUSE
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MONDAY — FRIDAY
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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.”

old Michoud defense plant in east New Orleans became the principle missile factory. Houston was picked to be Manned Spacecraft Center with responsibility for development of spacecraft, mission control, and astronaut training. The George C. Marshall Space Flight Center in Huntsville, Alabama continued as the research lab where the famous German rocket scientist, Dr. Werner von Braum (1912-1977), and his team would invent the science needed to put the Saturn Rocket and its astronaut crew on the moon.

A test site was required proximal to the Michoud missile factory. For this reason, a Mississippi Test Facility (MTF) was selected to be located in Hancock County because there was the possibility of transportation by water (barge) of the huge missile engines via the Pearl River. This test site was named the Mississippi Test Facility (MTF) from 1961-1975, the National Space and Testing Laboratories (NSTL) from 1975-1988, and the John C. Stennis Space Center (SSC) from 1988 to present day. The story of this facility over the last six decades is an important chapter in the history of Hancock County.

A large sparsely populated buffer zone of 128,000 acres of piney forest was available in the western part of the county. It was complete with utilities and available by highway and railroad. This projected buffer zone would envelop the historic, riverside towns of Gainesville, Napoleon, Logtown, Westonia, and Santa Rosa. In 1961 there were 250 residents in Logtown and 100 residents in Gainesville. All residents were required to leave their houses and live elsewhere. Highway 43 was called “the Mississippi Trail of Tears” in 1961. The cost of this land acquisition was \$215M. The Rouchan and Geraci houses became the original construction headquarters of the MTF.

In 1965, this incredibly ambitious, colossal project required over 6,000 workers. It contained three separate complexes. One industrial complex housed logistical and support services. Another separate administrative complex was built for engineering and management offices. A third complex contained the rocket test stands with embedded data collection points. Four separate giant 200-400 ft. tall test stands were constructed, each containing support and service facilities such as maintenance, storage warehouses, railroad spur lines, fuel tanks, and separate test control centers. In addition, a small navy or fleet of vessels was required which included tugboats, barges, and floating fuel tanks. A 7 1/2 mile canal system with a lock connected the Pearl River to the test stands. The large, heavy rocket engines would be transported by water from the missile factory at Michoud to the testing facility in Hancock County. Three phases of development, construction, activation, and operation, were accomplished in three years once the project began. On April 22, 1966, the first rocket engine test successfully took place.

Hancock County could not gracefully accommodate the massive influx of workers and their families. Hastily prepared villages of house trailers in Bay St. Louis represented the initial, partial solution or first response to the problem of housing. The Hancock Bank put a branch in the MTF, which acquired the nickname of the “trailer bank.” The mayor of Bay St. Louis at that time was John Scafide who struggled from 1961-1968 to expand and improve the sewerage and water system infrastructure with little success. Moreover, the streets were torn up, many impassable. Needless to say, new workers chose to settle in Picayune, Slidell, and Pass Christian. By 1966, only 470 families of the permanent 3,200 employees of the MTF lived in Hancock County.

Hancock Bank's Leo Seal Jr., a strong supporter of NASA, invited the manager of the NASA facility in 1966, Jackson M. Balch, to give a "straight forward" talk to the people of Bay St. Louis at a town meeting. Balch told this audience that "your schools have a long way to go. The price of real estate is unbelievably high, and you need modern zoning that is enforced." The town of Diamondhead had not been created at that time. Nevertheless, the new MTF had generated a much-needed economic boom in the county and the adjacent Gulf Coast region. During the years of 1962-63, the MTF created directly or indirectly 9,000 jobs with a total annual income of \$65M in southern Mississippi and Louisiana. Hence, the bonded indebtedness in the towns surrounding the MTF increased from \$1M in 1962 to \$20M in 1969. School buildings increased by 40% and housing units 101%.

During the late 1960's and early 1970's, forty-two rocket engine tests for the Apollo Program were conducted. All Apollo space vehicle booster rockets tested at the MTF performed as designed without a single failure. On July 20, 1969, Astronauts Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin were the first humans to walk on the lunar surface, thus ending the race with the USSR to the moon. Unfortunately, NASA had no plans for the MTF after the Apollo Program that was scheduled to end in 1972.

Senator John C. Stennis of Mississippi and Jackson Balch shared a vision to extend the mission and the life of the MTF that would not depend entirely on the budgetary ups and downs of the space program. Balch predicted that satellite-based technology would foster tremendous advances and opportunities in oceanographic and environmental research. The platform of space (satellites) was the place to study the weather, the oceans, and the land.

Mississippi Senator Stennis



Senator John C. Stennis

Born in Kemper County, John Stennis received his bachelor's degree from Mississippi A & M College, now Mississippi State University, and received his law degree from the University of Virginia. Representing Mississippi, Mr. Stennis served in the United States Senate from 1947—1989.

(D-MS) was the Chairman of the Arms Services Committee. He enlisted the support for this vision of a multiagency environmental and space center with Senator Allen J. Ellender (D-LA) who was Chairman of the Appropriations Committee. Senators James O. Eastland (D-MS) and Russell B. Long (D-LA) were also recruited. The problem was that the 1970 budget of NASA had been reduced. The cost of the Viet Nam War had escalated and inflation complicated finances. Senator Ellender questioned whether "the government would let this magnificent scientific complex become the world's biggest 'white elephant' or do we give it another, and, perhaps, an even more important job to do?" President Richard M. Nixon was persuaded by Stennis and his cohorts of the wisdom of this vision, a utopia of scientists working across all disciplines and federal agencies engaged in the study and regulation of space. Nixon established the Earth Resources Laboratory (ERL) to be embedded in the MTF. In addition, the Coast Guard National Data Buoy Project and the Bureau of Marine/Commercial Fisheries

were relocated to the MTF as well. As a result, the future of the MTF was insured by the strategy of "full utilization" of the site.

While the facility continued to test rockets for the new Space Shuttle Program (1972-2011), Senator John Stennis helped guide other potential tenants to the MTF. In 1976, the US Naval Oceanographic Office (NAVOCEANO) with 1,200 personnel relocated from Suitland, Maryland to the MTF (now called the NSTL). The Navy has historically surveyed, charted, and mapped the features and conditions of the world's oceans that are constantly changing. The Navy operates seven oceanographic ships that "have no homeport and are forward-deployed surveying the ocean 365 days every year. These ships conduct physical, chemical, and biological oceanographic operations."

Jerry W. Reshew (1928-2017) was Deputy Directory of this operation and also supervised the move to Hancock County. He was an earth scientist that represented the epitome of the type of researcher Senator Stennis envi-



Jerry Reshew

An earth scientist, Mr. Reshew was just the man Senator John Stennis wanted and needed to expand the mission of the Mississippi Test Facility.

sioned would enhance the mission at the facility. Some of the projects Reshew supervised for the Navy then were classified, but Reshew did report to his son on one occasion that they were involved with the early pioneer work on GPS. Reshew and many other workers settled in the newly developed town of Diamondhead in 1978 representing a good place in Hancock County for affordable housing.

Scientists with the NSRL and the Naval Oceanographic Office were working along side sixteen other federal agencies, the Slidell Computer Complex and two university outlets. A synergism evolved with this multiagency arrangement. Scientists were using satellite data, airborne sensors, automated ocean buoys, laboratory instruments, computers, and other scientific devices to study space, ocean, and earth-oriented projects. Stennis Space Center is the home of Special Boat Team 22 and the Naval Small Craft Instruction and Technical Training School as well as other Navy tenants.

In 1978, Senator Stennis engineered the construction of a large Army Ammunition Plant to manufacture the 155 mm M483A1 howitzer-fired projectile. This huge plant was located on 7,000 acres of the northern portion of the site that cost \$479M and employed 1,300 workers. The facility was dedicated on March 31, 1983 and deactivated in 2009.

John Cornelius Stennis (1901-1995) was the son of a gentleman farmer in the town of DeKalb which is in Kemper County in Mississippi. He graduated from the University of Virginia Law School and was elected to the Senate in 1947. Stennis was considered the "Conscience of the Senate" because of his reputation for integrity, diligence, and judgement. He authored the Senate Ethics Bill and served on the Arms Services and Appropriations Committees. He retired from the Senate in 1989. On November 1, 1961, Stennis stood on a flatbed trailer in Logtown and promised the families that their sacrifices and patriotism would be remembered. He promised the citizens of Hancock County who lost 40% of their land (and the property tax revenue it would generate in the future) that he would do everything in his power to insure that the facility would be used in a manor that would benefit the local region and the United States. John Stennis kept that promise. For this reason, in May of 1988 President Ronald Reagan renamed the NSTL the John C. Stennis Space Center (SSC).

After Apollo (1961-1972) the rocket test stands at the MTF saw use during the Space Shuttle Program (1972-2011) and the Space Launch Program (2010-present).

Leo Seal Jr., President of the Hancock Bank, and Roy Estes, Director of the SSC, shared the vision of blending education and tourism at the Stennis Space Center. A 72,000 square foot exhibition hall called *Infinity* was completed in 2012 engaging visitors to explore science,

technology, and history. More than 30,000 students had visited this science center *Infinity* by 2018.

In this 21st Century, Hancock County has continued to evolve and grow as a hub for private aerospace industries and commercial space ventures. Located in the heart of this Gulf Coast I-10 aerospace corridor, the Hancock County Port and Harbor Commission (HCPHC) partners with the SSC, the Naval Meteorology and Oceanographic Command (NMOC), and the Naval Research Laboratory. A growing list of aerospace companies call Hancock County home: Aerojet Rocketdyne (rocket engine assembly and testing), Lockheed Martin Satellite (propulsion system manufacturing), Tyonk (avionics system integration), Rolls-Royce (jet engine testing), and Relativity (rocket engine testing). Stennis International Airport (KHSa), owned and operated by the HCPHC, located at the edge of the buffer zone in the Kiln, is actively seeking a Commercial Launch Site Operator License from the FAA. At their planned Spaceport, horizontal take off aircraft will launch these satellite-laden rockets at a high altitude over the Gulf of Mexico. Small to mid-sized satellites are employed by the military and civilian industries to support or monitor weather, communication, surveillance, security, and research.

A Space Force has been established as a sixth branch of the armed forces, a separate entity from the USAF. Communist China has a plan or strategy to become the dominant power in space by 2049. China intends to build a space infrastructure to dominate the global economy of the twenty first century. America must compete and be the first nation in this race of space technologies, so as to be able to define the principles and rules of this future marketplace of space. Futuristic concepts such as nuclear propulsion technology and solar power stations in space may seem like science fiction today, but in twenty years these innovations

may afford the ability to beam clean energy to anyone or place on earth. The scientists in the various companies and federal agencies in the SSC, Hancock County, and elsewhere in the United States are working on new exciting technologies in this race to space. These include hypersonic missiles and spacecraft, 5G telecommunications, artificial intelligence (AI), 3D printing, quantum computing, and robotics. The Defense Department is outsourcing more and more of the research and development of equipment or arms to private companies, in what is a mutually beneficial partnership to develop new space capabilities.

In conclusion, the various missions at the Stennis Space Center are multifaceted and extraordinary in scope and dimension. The citizens of Hancock County have witnessed much growth and development of the SSC since 1961. In the 1950's Hancock County had a poor, mostly agrarian economy with seemingly little prospect for any dramatic future growth or prosperity. Yet Dr. Werner von Braun was fond of saying "that to get to the moon, we will have to go through Mississippi to get there." The United States did land a man on the moon, and today, Hancock County can boast that it has a robust, diversified economy with an annual Growth Regional Product (GRP) of \$1.2 B.

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