

THE

HISTORIAN

OF HANCOCK COUNTY

www.hancockcountyhistoricalsociety.com

Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi

November 2020

HANCOCK COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY 2020 NOMINATING COMMITTEE

The nominating committee held a meeting by phone on November 2, 2020 to select candidates for offices to be voted on by the membership. Members attending the phone meeting were George Saucier, Bill Stakelum, Ron Ladner, and Norma Soro.

The committee selected the following members to recommend for election:

1st Vice President	Beverly Frater
Membership	Chris Roth
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Communications	Virginia Olander

Please submit any further nominations you may have to the following email address: hancockcountyhis@bellsouth.net by November 30, 2020.

In addition the Board wishes to attract a volunteer from the membership to fill a vacancy.

ATTENTION:

Our board of directors is looking for volunteers among the membership with intelligence technology (IT) and/or accounting/bookkeeping skills.

In addition, *The Historian* welcomes articles for publication, pictures, history, or stories regarding Hancock County.



Alton Adolph "Dolph" Kellar

Dolph Kellar was arguably the most influential politician in Hancock County during the twentieth century

Santa Rosa

One Man's Vision for Hancock County

By
James Keating, M. D.
Edited by
Virginia Olander

Many small towns in the history of the United States and

Hancock County have come and gone while others survived and even flourished to become small cities. One such extinct farming village in the northwest region of Hancock County was Santa Rosa. The compelling history of this place and some of its leading citizens from the Kellar family are the subject of this article. This story spans two hundred years from the migration of early pioneer yeoman farmers in the first half of the nineteenth century to modern times. This narrative of three gener-

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James Keating, Publisher
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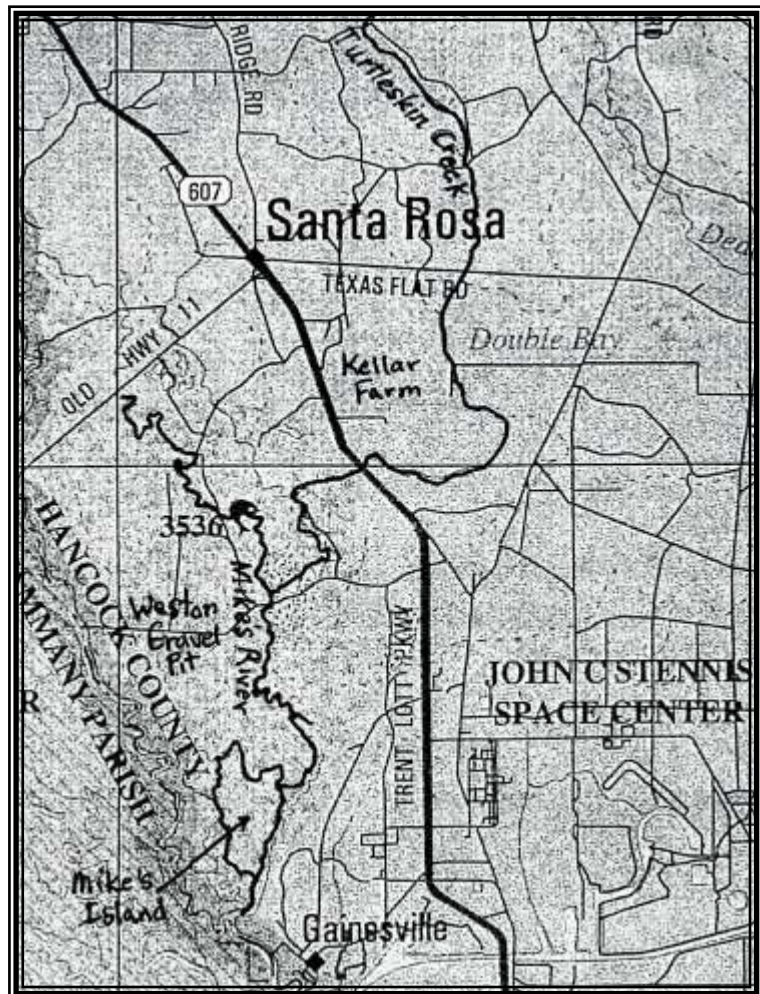
“TO PRESERVE THE GENERAL AND ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY OF HANCOCK COUNTY AND TO PRESERVE THE KATE LOBRANO HOUSE AND COLLECTIONS THEREIN; TO RESEARCH AND INTERPRET LIFE IN HANCOCK COUNTY; AND TO ENCOURAGE AN APPRECIATION OF AND INTEREST IN HISTORICAL PRESERVATION.”

ations of the Kellar family who grew up on small farms in Santa Rosa includes biographies of Ed Kellar, Dolph Kellar, and Tim Kellar. The Kellars were a vital catalyst to the amazing economic development in Hancock County in the second half of the twentieth century. This prosperity was fostered by a spirit of boosterism managed by able leadership and bold innovation by the board of supervisors in Hancock County.

Santa Rosa is a historic area in the northwestern part of Hancock County that is now a ghost town. This old farm community was located where present day Texas Flat Road intersects with Highway 607. This town evolved along an ancient Indian trail known in local folklore as the Old Black Wolf Trail. This part traversed north/south along the east ridge of the East Pearl River and allowed

migratory buffalo and later Indians to walk from the northern regions of the Pearl River to what would become the town of Gainesville without having to cross a major river. From Gainesville the trail went due east to present day Bay St. Louis, circumventing Devil’s Swamp that is now in the NASA Buffer Zone.

The ancient pathway, Old Black Wolf Trail, was the precursor of the Columbia-Gainesville Road. Small villages popped up along the Pearl River in the nineteenth century such as Walkiah Bluff, Henley Field, and Jackson’s Landing. In 1814, two thirds of Andrew Jackson’s army passed through Santa Rosa along what was later called the Caesar-Flat Top Road. One third of that army went west along what would later become old Highway 11 across the three branches of the Pearl River. A third division of



that army went south through Gainesville to Pearlinton. From there cannons and heavy wagons were ferried to New Orleans via the Rigolets and Lake Pontchartrain just in time to fight the British in Chalmette, LA, historically called the Battle of New Orleans. Santa Rosa has always been located at a crossroads of key byways in its history.

In 1835, President Andrew Jackson enforced the Indian Removal Act of 1830. Most of the Choctaw Indians in Hancock County and southern Mississippi moved to Oklahoma. A small group of them living in Center (Caesar) were advised by the Indian agent, Freeman Jones, to hide in Devil's Swamp. It is speculated they clustered in Santa Rosa which was near their original village. One modern day resident of Santa Rosa, Irma Kellar Frierson, reports that she discovered on her father's farm an Indian mound and plentiful artifacts such as arrowheads.

Santa Rosa was called Tigerville in the nineteenth century, presumably because of the presence of wildcats in the primeval piney forest in the early days of settlement. A local waterway was called Turtle Skin Creek because early surveyors endured briars and thorny thickets as rough as a turtle's skin or shell. The largest migration of settlers in the region along the Pearl River occurred after 1845. The local cemetery has gravestones inscribed as early as 1860. This traditional hallowed ground is known as the Turtle Skin Cemetery. The Corinth Baptist Church was built adjacent to the old graveyard in 1920. Early family names buried in this cemetery include Alsobrooks, Blackwell, Carroll, Dean, Fleming, Kellar, McFadden, McQueen, Smith, Thigpen, and Whitfield.

A planter named Jordon Smith established a plantation with slaves before the Civil War just south of Tigerville. The first telegraph line in Hancock County went

from Gainesville to Tigerville to Mobile along the Texas Flat Road. The old Highway 11 road crosses the Pearl River and connects with Tigerville. From there the old Highway 11 went southwest to Highway 90 which could ultimately lead to Texas. In 1885 a post office was established in Tigerville. It existed for five years with R. B. Miller as postmaster. The small waterway in Tigerville known as Mike's River is named after an early pioneer settler, Michael Beck.

A developer named Bilsby initiated a land development project in Tigerville around 1923 which he called Santa Rosa. The project was designed to envelop the whole town, but was abandoned in the planning stage, probably a casualty of the Stock Market Crash of 1929. Nevertheless, the name of the town, Santa Rosa, persisted.

The sawmill era brought jobs and prosperity to the area. The Weston family in Logtown maintained a large commercial gravel pit in Tigerville. The advent of railroads to Hancock County in the second half of the nineteenth century ended the importance of

the Pearl River as a significant conduit of commerce. When the sawmill era ended in 1932, this region diminished in population and prosperity. Local farmers stayed on the land raising cattle and hogs and growing corn, sugar cane, and sweet potatoes. The Depression kept the farmer "land rich and money poor." Nonetheless, these folks had enough food to eat, and they survived.

Alton Adolph "Dolph" Kellar (1919-1997) and his younger sister Irma Kellar Frierson (b. 1930) were reared on a small farm in Santa Rosa. Their parents were Columbus Clinton "Lumbia" Kellar (1884-1964) and Lola Cleo Alsobrooks (1896-1990). Their respective families had migrated from North Carolina in the mid-nineteenth century. Irma Kellar Frierson was born in 1930 in a railroad boxcar converted as a worker family dwelling in the Weston Gravel Pit. However, Lumbia and Lola later bought a small farm in Tigerville which was called Santa Rosa at this time. There was a small grist mill on the property to which the townspeople took corn and sugar cane to be ground into meal or syrup. As a result four generations of Kellar family members later owned property in this area.

Irma started school at the Aaron Academy in Santa Rosa which was the local public school built by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in 1934. The school offered grades one through eight. Irma then went to Picayune for high school. After graduation she received technical training in accounting and worked for Crosby Dairy Products. Subsequently, she started her own City Insurance Agency in Picayune. Irma married T. J. Frierson (1927-2012) who was a supervisor with the International Paper Company. He fought in the Korean War.

Dolph Kellar married Beulah Frierson (1929-2070), the sister of Irma's husband T. J. Frierson.



T. J. and Irma Kellar Frierson



Dolph and Beulah Frierson Kellar

They raised a small herd of thirty cattle, fifty sheep, a flock of chickens, and about fifty hogs on one hundred acres which was ninety-five percent forest and five percent pasture. In those days farmers raised most of their own food but bought coffee and sugar from the general store. Dolph served in the US Army for five years during World War II. He saw combat in New Guinea and was wounded twice and decorated. While serving in the Pacific Theater, Dolph determined that if he survived the war, he would return home and go into public service to improve the backward status of Hancock County.

The Kellar family from Santa Rosa has played an important role in Hancock County politics providing three generations of service to their community. Irma's uncle, Thomas Edward "Ed" Kellar, was sworn in as Sheriff of Hancock County in 1932. Ed Kellar maintained law and order, especially in the town of Santa Rosa, even though it was on the periphery of the county. In 1936 he was elected to the Hancock County Board of Supervisors (Beat 5) from 1936 to 1939. Ed had previously served as Superintendent of Education of Hancock County from 1924 to 1931. He served as a role model for future Kellar men who would serve

their community with distinction during the next eighty years.

Another Kellar relative, Frank Kellar, was elected to the Hancock County Board of Supervisors and served from 1948 to 1956. Sadly, he died of a gunshot wound to his head in a tragic hunting accident while looking for game along Turtle Skin Creek. His wife, Samantha Kellar, was appointed to serve the rest of his term of office from 1956-1959.

The first or original Corinth Baptist Church was established in 1920. Half of the congregation lived in nearby Gainesville. The pastor would perform baptisms in the nearby Turtle Skin Creek. In 1947 Albert McQueen promoted the creation of a new Baptist church to be located in the center of town that would be named Santa Rosa Baptist Church. At one gathering he announced his plan and publicly put fifty cents into a fruit jar to start a donation campaign. The folks who lived in the center of Santa Rosa split from the remaining Gainesville congregation in the Corinth Church. The Kellar family decided to attend the Santa Rosa Baptist Church.

Santa Rosa is located just over the Hancock County/Pearl River County boundary line. During prohibition in Mississippi from 1908-1966 alcoholic beverages were not legally sold in the state. Yet in Santa Rosa a healthy cluster of taverns evolved. One group of five barrooms flourished on old Highway 11 between the center of town and the East Pearl River that was granted licenses to sell liquor in Hancock County. These honky-tonk watering holes included Shorty's Tavern, the Halfway Club, the Prentiss Club, the Lamp Post, and the County Line Barroom. In downtown Santa Rosa two other taverns were available for the nearby thirsty citizens of both counties named Ike Frierson Club and the Green Lizard.

According to Irma Frierson her uncle, Sheriff Ed Kellar, main-

tained law and order along this strip of bars on Highway 11. However, in 1936, after Ed Kellar left the post of county sheriff to join the Hancock County Board of Supervisors, the new sheriff who was from Bay St. Louis did not effectively patrol this area. Consequently, this cluster of nightclubs became a "no response zone," and the neighborhood deteriorated at night into lawless chaos. Patrons got injured and/or shot in nightly brawls. The peaceful, religious citizens of Santa Rosa lobbied the county and state to no avail for relief, wishing to return this zone to law and order.

The situation was so bad that the pastor of the Corinth Baptist Church felt inspired to wage a publicity campaign on behalf of the town and his congregation to rid the community of this evil state of affairs. In sermons to his congregation, Sunday after Sunday, the minister urged the town to lobby the county to revoke the liquor licenses of these bars. Tensions mounted in Santa Rosa because these commercial outlets were the livelihood of some of its citizens. One Sunday, two armed men stood up during one such sermon and verbally threatened the pastor with bodily harm if he continued his crusade and actually pointed loaded guns at him. From that day forward the minister had to be escorted to the church from his home on Sundays by two police motorcycles, one in front of him and one behind. The matter was finally settled in 1967 when NASA removed everybody and all businesses from town to create the NASA Buffer Zone.

After the creation of the NASA Buffer Zone, the Corinth Baptist Church was sufficiently compensated that the building was moved to Nicholson. Likewise, the Santa Rosa Baptist Church facility and its contents were donated to the Waveland Baptist Church. Nowadays it is being used by the Christian Woman's Job Corp. After all expenses were paid, there was

\$36,373.53 left over of the compensation money, which was put in a trust for the Mississippi Baptist Foundation. Irma Frierson reports, "That fund has grown to \$79,673.63 since then. Each year the interest is donated to the Cooperative Program as per the request of the former pastor, the late Reverend Richard Lubbert, to spread the "Good News."

In the 1950's Santa Rosa had three general stores, two selling dry goods and groceries, and the other, the Jack Brunson Store, offering groceries and produce. Incidentally, Jack Brunson was the Justice of the Peace, and he held court in the store after hours. Santa Rosa had about two hundred residents at this time. Although the town had no resident physicians, Dr. Woodward and Dr. Martin from Picayune and Dr. Fountain from Bay St. Louis made house calls to this farming community.

Dolph Kellar first entered public service by winning election to the Hancock County School Board in 1951 and served in the capacity for thirteen years. During this period he supplemented his income by working as a superintendent of the Sam Whitfield Timber Company. He owned a pulpwood truck and transported timber from the woodcutters in the forest to the Whitfield concentration yard in Logtown. Dolph also owned a gravel truck and hauled gravel from the nearby Weston Gravel Pit to various road construction sites.

In 1964 Dolph ran for the Hancock County Board of Supervisors and won his first term. He served his county for twenty-eight years and accrued a distinguished record as probably the most influential politician in Hancock County in the twentieth century. His vision and foresight inspired a backward, impoverished county to transform its economy and modernize its infrastructure in the second half of the twentieth century.

The Kellars lost their farm when NASA created the buffer

zone which engulfed all of Santa Rosa. The Hancock County Board of Supervisors forced NASA to pay \$480,000 compensation for infrastructure before it would allow NASA to begin breaking ground. This action created an adversarial mood between the U. S. Government and Hancock County. As a result NASA condemned Dolph's farm on a fee basis. He was therefore poorly compensated for his property. Fortunately, he was able to purchase another farm in Beat 2. Over the next twenty years relations improved between these parties, and at the end of his career, Dolph commented that overall the Stennis Space Center was a good development for the county. Nevertheless, many landowners such as Bill Whitfield did not feel justly compensated for the land taken from them by NASA. Most of the property in Dolph's Beat 2 was timberland owned by the International Paper Company and the Crown Zellerback Company and the Gaylord and Crosby families.

Even with the loss of his family land because of its being located in the buffer zone, Dolph maintained his vision of the progress of Hancock County and the belief that he could help the county move forward. In 1972, the *Sea Coast Echo* reported that Mississippi was the poorest state in the union and that Hancock County was the poorest county in the state. During the 1960's local businessmen and county supervisors Dolph Kellar and R. J. "Manny" Hubbard embraced a vision to create an industrial park and a hospital which would bring industry and big business to Hancock County. They achieved a consensus among the electorate and the other supervisors to act. A bill was introduced in the Mississippi State Legislature which authorized the county to create the Hancock County Port and Harbor Commission. The plan was financed with a US Economic Department Administration grant of \$2,779,200 and a

bond issue of \$926,400 to be paid by the commission over a thirty year period. In 1965 the board authorized a second project of building a commercial airport with adjacent airport. In addition a hospital was built on Dunbar Avenue in Bay St. Louis. Dolph felt it was important for the county to have significant infrastructure and not to be totally dependent on NASA for its future growth and development. Over the next fifty years his vision and foresight proved prescient because all of the projects succeeded and contributed to a remarkable era of prosperity currently enjoyed by Hancock County citizens.

When Dolph took office in 1964, there had not been much improvement of county roads in eighteen years. Most roads in Beat 2 were not paved. In his oral history Dolph reported that he accomplished some blacktopping of roads in Beat 2 every year he was in office. He also promoted the building and maintenance of bridges. In 2004, seven years after Dolph had passed away, the State of Mississippi honored him by designating the part of Highway 43 from the Kiln to Picayune as "Dolph Kellar Memorial Highway" in recognition of his leadership role in building infrastructure such as paving hard surfaces on the many county roads.

Continuing the family's dedication of service to the citizens of Hancock County, Timothy Adolph "Tim" Kellar, the son of Dolph Kellar, is the Clerk of the Chancery Court in Hancock County. He was born in 1957 and reared in Santa Rosa. Tim went to ele-





Timothy Adolph
"Tim" and
Jean Wells Kellar

Tim is the Clerk
of the
Hancock County
Chancery Court.

mentary and high school in Pica-yune. He attended Pearl River Junior College and the University of Southern Mississippi. He is an avid hunter/outdoorsman, who became a crack shot, thanks to the tutelage of his father. Tim married Jean Wells (b. 1955) in 1986.

Elected to the position of Clerk of the Chancery Court for Hancock County in 1996, Tim has served twenty-four years in this position. Tim served concurrently as the County Administrator to the Hancock County Board of Supervisors from 1996 to 2009. After 2009 the position of County Administrator has been filled by another person because the responsibilities of the two jobs were more than one person could accomplish gracefully. Tim reports that he is most proud of his role in modernizing the Chancery Court with automation. The court had relied previously on an antiquated paper system that required, for example, two weeks to record a deed. The current modern computerized system can accomplish the same act of recording a deed in two minutes. This automation development generated a user-friendly county government that enabled citizens to review deeds or other documents without an attorney. The old fashioned paper court system had been transformed into an electronic system which manag-

es court pleas, deeds, and other documents quickly and efficiently. Tim has been President of the State Association of Chancery Courts and is a dedicated community activist. He provided the invaluable source material for this article and has been a long-standing supporter of the Hancock County Historical Society.

In conclusion, the historic village of Santa Rosa was located at a crossroads of key byways in early Hancock County. The Kellar family provided three generations of leadership in Hancock County during the twentieth century. They demonstrated the concept elucidated by Timothy Mahoney in his article *The Small City in American History*. He wrote "[The] roots of civilization—good will, neighborliness, fair play, courage, tolerance, open-minded inquiry, and patience—are best transmitted from one generation to the next in small communities to be then spread throughout entire larger societies." Almost every historic village in the county had at least one vibrant church such as the Corinth Baptist Church or the Santa Rosa Baptist Church that defined the social and cultural character of its small town life, fostering virtues of self-control, hard work, and religious faith. The loss of the small towns of Santa Rosa, Logtown, Gainesville, Napoleon, Bayou La Croix, and Westonia was an unfortunate, if necessary, price to

pay for the greater benefit of having the development of the Stennis Space Center with its large buffer zone which engulfed one third of the land in Hancock County.

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GETTING TO KNOW YOU

We have prepared a series of articles about our Board of Directors and Staff. We hope you enjoy their interesting recollections of how they got here.



Chris Roth

Camors C. (Chris) Roth

Membership and Fundraising
Chairman

Chris was born in New Orleans. He and wife Connie have resided in Bay Saint Louis since 1994. He and Connie have four children and eight grandchildren.

Chris graduated from the University of Louisiana Lafayette and served in the United State Marine Corps Reserves. He spent forty-five years in the insurance business as agency owner, manager and consultant.

He retired from Hancock Whitney Bank in 2016. With his experiences as a boat owner and being a former US Coast Guard licensed captain, he now represents both buyers and sellers as a boat broker.

In the past, Chris has held leadership positions in several organizations: President of the Ouachita Parish (LA) Agents Association; President of the Northeast (LA) Chapter of Chartered Property and Casualty Underwriters; board member of the Louisiana Independent Agents Association; national board member of the American Bankers Insurance Association; and Commodore, Treasurer and Board Member of the Bay-Waveland Yacht Club.

Chris also chaired the Bay Saint Louis Bicentennial Committee in 2018.

Currently Chris is Director of the Stennis Flag Flyers, a member of the Bay Saint Louis Harbor Commission and former Chairperson, Bay Saint Louis Rotary Club member and volunteer, Saint Rose de Lima Church member and volunteer and member of the Hancock County Chamber of Commerce.

The Hancock County Historical Society is quite fortunate to have Chris as a board member.

William Edward Coleman (Eddie)

Assistant to the Executive
Director

Editor of *The Historian of
Hancock County*

Eddie was born in Meridian, MS. When he was six, his family moved to Wade, MS, and he lived there and in Ocean Springs much of his life. He moved to Waveland in 2002.

Eddie received his undergraduate degree in English at the University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, and his Masters in Education from USM, Gulf Park. While an undergraduate, he was a member of the University of Southern Mississippi marching band (The Pride of Mississippi), the university concert band, the university symphonic band, and the university wind symphony. He taught high school English for thirty years at St. Martin High School (SMHS). He was Chairman of the English Department for fourteen years and had the honor of receiving the yearbook dedication twice during his years of teaching there.

Unlike most English teachers, Eddie went into teaching to teach grammar rather than literature. But of course, as an English teacher, he did teach literature, too—American Literature. He especially loved exposing his students to Edgar Allen Poe.

Eddie feels very fortunate to have met so many wonderful,



Eddie Coleman

successful, energetic, and talented young people at SMHS. He feels inspired by seeing that each one is giving back to his/her community in so many different ways. Several of his former students became teachers; a few returned to St. Martin. Some went into the medical field, some entered law, and others chose different professions. Many of them also began their own businesses in various fields. Several entered the military; some even achieved the rank of colonel or commander. A future Secret Service agent and a Guard at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier once sat in his classroom, too. Some of his students became police officers, and some have served in state and local government. Having taught in the same school for so many years, he also taught the children of his earlier students. Eddie still keeps in contact with many of his students through Facebook, an indication of how he was admired by them.

During his thirty year tenure at St. Martin High School, Eddie was honored as Star Teacher five times. This honor is selected by the senior student chosen by the Mississippi Economic Council as the school's graduating Star Student.

For the first three years of teaching, Eddie also continued working at Singing River Hospital, a job he had begun before his senior

year of high school. He first worked in housekeeping and then in the laundry. After his first year of college, he worked as a male attendant, once known as a hospital orderly.

During his years of teaching, he also worked at Wicks and Sticks for one year and Walden Books for twenty years. From 2003-11, he taught first at the Jeff Davis campus of Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College (MGCCC) and then at the Keesler Center of MGCCC. In addition, as an adult, he took dance classes at Nancy's School of Dance for Education and Performance in D'Iberville and performed in several little theater productions, among them "A Chorus Line," "Camelot," and "Funny Girl."

HCHS was fortunate to welcome Eddie in June, 2004. He has been a vital part of this Society since, keeping the *Historian* publications on schedule while handling all the other busy clerical work. He helped carry us through the trying aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. It is an understatement to say that Eddie goes above and beyond, and his devotion to the Society is immeasurable.

Bienville and the Chickasaw Wars

By James Keating M.D.
and
Geoff Belcher

Jean Baptiste Le Moyne Sieur de Bienville (1680-1767), brother of Pier Le Moyne Sieur d'Iberville, is best remembered as an explorer of the Gulf of Mexico and an early governor of French Louisiana. In addition, Bienville was a cofounder of Mobile and father of Biloxi and New Orleans. Yet Bienville was also an experienced and ruthless Indian fighter who waged war against the Chickasaw tribe in present day northern Mississippi and Tennessee. The Chickasaw tribe,

allied with the English from the thirteen colonies such as South Carolina were able to block flow of French river traffic up and down the Mississippi River that connected French Canada with New Orleans. In fact the English supplied the Chickasaw with guns and built and manned forts in their key villages. Consequently the first half of the eighteenth century witnessed almost continuous warfare in Mississippi between the Choctaw Indians allied with the French and the Chickasaw Indians allied with the English.

Bienville had an exceptional aptitude for languages. By 1700 he was fluent in Muskogean, which was the language of the Choctaw and Chickasaw. Specifically, Bienville could converse with the various Indians in the region without an interpreter. Furthermore, he was a skilled hunter and a fearless warrior. For these reasons he was respected and feared by all the local tribes. He often camped with the Choctaw and accompanied them on many buffalo hunts over the years. He and his fellow Frenchmen fought in sporadic battles with friendly Indian tribes such as the Choctaw against the Chickasaw and English soldiers. Indeed, in battle he dressed like his Indian comrades, sometimes wearing only a loincloth and war paint. He had a large serpent tattooed on his chest and abdomen. Moreover, he was capable of acts of terror against his enemies and would demand heads (not scalps) in reparation/retaliation. If necessary, he even had enemy combatants burned alive.

In 1736 Bienville conducted a military campaign against the fort at the village of Ackin (modern day Tupelo). He led an army of twelve hundred French soldiers and Choctaw warriors up the Tombigbee River from Mobile. Unfortunately the army was unsuccessful in battle, and Bienville retired from the field, however, with his army intact. A second campaign was organized in 1739 at great expense to France and was conducted via the Mississippi River at

Chickasaw Bluffs (modern day Memphis). Although this campaign did not vanquish the Chickasaw Nation in battle, a satisfactory peace treaty was signed which opened up the Mississippi River, and Bienville claimed victory. Governor Bienville was recalled in 1743 and lived comfortably the rest of his life in France.

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