

THE

HISTORIAN

OF HANCOCK COUNTY

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Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi

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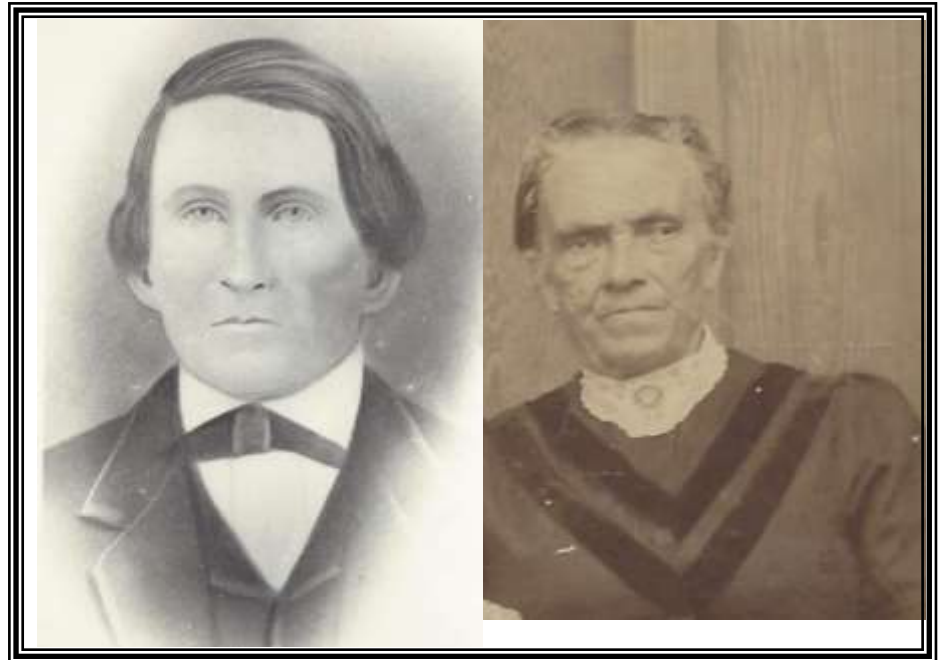
NEWS FROM LOBRANO HOUSE

A successful fund-raising campaign last year enabled the Hancock County Historical Society to make \$18K in much needed repairs to the Lobrano House. After the pandemic passes later this year, we intend to resume our monthly luncheons. The Society is presently creating a video about the history of Hancock County narrated by Charles Gray. Ongoing programs such as the newsletter, the digitizing of the vertical files, and the website have been uninterrupted this year. In addition our membership continues to grow. The Lobrano House is opened each week Monday-Friday, 10:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m., closing from 12-1 for lunch, but we do practice safety precautions such as social distancing and the wearing of masks. The Historical Society continues its mission of preserving the rich heritage of Hancock County.

—George Saucier, President

MEMBERSHIP FEES

It's time for current members to renew their memberships in the Historical Society and to encourage family and friends to join us, too. If your membership is due, your address label will read "Time to renew your membership." Please mail your renewal check to Hancock County Historical Society, P. O. Box 3356, Bay St. Louis, MS 39521. Or you may pay by credit card or PayPal online at our website. Levels of membership and prices are listed on the enclosed insert.



John and Barbara Hausch Zengerling were first generation German immigrants who settled in Bayou LaCroix c. 1839.

Bayou LaCroix

By
James Keating, M.D.

Ed. by
Virginia Olander

The history of the local Choctaw tribe in the nineteenth century in Hancock County includes the interesting story about the nostalgic and historic community called Bayou LaCroix. This community was named after a tributary of the Jourdan River that extends westward for over ten miles into Devil's Swamp, which is in the present day NASA Buffer Zone in Hancock County. In a bygone era, both Native Americans and European settlers raised

livestock and grew crops on small farms. The timber and turpentine industries were also attracted to this spot on a navigable waterway, and subsequently, a small but robust pioneer economy flourished there. Fortunately, there are fourth generation descendants of these early yeomen farmers from the Zengerling and Ladner families who provided fascinating source material and good stories for this article highlighting the good relationship between the European settlers and the Native Americans.

An Indian village called Chicapoula (meaning bad grass) was located at the site of present day Bay St. Louis, Mississippi, inhabited in the eighteenth century by a small Choctaw tribe. Some of these Indians refused to migrate to Oklahoma

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Eddie Coleman, Editor
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Charles Gray, Executive Director

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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.”

in 1835 when President Andrew Jackson enforced the Indian Removal Act. A small group of Choctaw Indians migrated to Devil’s Swamp next to Bayou LaCroix where they successfully survived and enjoyed a relatively comfortable sustenance existence for over sixty years. The men found abundant game to hunt/trap in Devil’s Swamp such as deer, turkey, rabbit, and squirrel. The women raised corn, beans, and wild rice. These Choctaws in Bayou LaCroix became “civilized” over the second half of the nineteenth century, actually owning their own farms. They built wooden houses and worked for their white neighbors and the local businesses doing various manual labors such as logrolling.

In this same time frame, a turpentine kiln was established in this location by the name of Dill and Vizard. This neighborhood attracted other timber industry such as a sawmill on Bayou LaCroix and the community was called Dillville at that time. These Indians peacefully coexisted with the white settlers and also established farms and raised livestock. The Indian men traded fish, meat, and hides at a local store while the Indian women and children wove beautiful baskets to sell on the streets of downtown Bay St. Louis.

The able leader of this tribe was Chief Thomas Tikaler (Taylor) Yearby (1818-c.1903). He actually spoke English and French in addition to his native Muskogean Choctaw. Because of these skills, he became an ambassador of goodwill in his community. In old age he was succeeded by his son-in-law, Chief Bilbo Henry Taylor (b. 1834). An important and prosperous early German settler in town, John Zengerling, invited his Indian neighbors to his house often to introduce them to Christianity. Later, the white and Indian inhabitants worshiped together in the early churches.

According to the 1890 Cen-

sus, there were twelve Indian families in Bayou LaCroix. The first white settlers established a cemetery in the center of the community that included the hallowed burial ground of the Indian dead, and it is preserved to this day. The original church was a small, simple wooden building probably built around 1860. In 1879, Father LeDuc built a larger, more traditional church next to this cemetery called the Holy Cross Catholic Church on five acres of land donated by one of the first German settlers, Matthew Verderber, brother-in-law of John Zengerling. In 1881 Bishop Janns confirmed twenty-seven Indians in Dillville. Indian family names in Hancock County in this era include Favre, Bilbo, Yarber, Chafer, Taylor, and Yakumintwand. In 1901 Bayou LaCroix had 156 whites, 47 Indians, and 1 Negro.

In 1903 the United States took most of the remaining Choctaws in Dillville as wards of the state and granted them land in Oklahoma. Some went and came back; some stayed. Consequently, the population of Dillville was reduced to approximately one hundred inhabitants. Indians had married into their white neighbors’ families, and, as a result, many citizens in the county today have traceable amounts of Choctaw in their ancestry. Some of these Indians who moved to Oklahoma acquired significant wealth when oil was struck on their land. Bill Favre was one such Choctaw Indian who moved to Oklahoma with his wife and worked a farm on a tract of land given to him by the U S. Government. Oil was discovered on his property in 1920, and the family became prosperous. Bill drove his new Buick automobile to Bayou LaCroix in 1928 to visit his brother, Dave Favre. However, Dave was never tempted to leave Hancock County for Oklahoma.

The Dill and Vizard turpentine kiln in Bayou LaCroix coexisted with the sawmill in the second



This photo was taken in 1920 at the Dillville School in Bayou La Croix

The children are identified on page 5.

half of the 19th century. The Hancock Naval Stores Company bought it out around 1910. Nevertheless, the town of Bayou LaCroix was called Dillville until the 1930's. R. R. Perkins, who was a key figure in the turpentine industry in Hancock County, organized this turpentine company. Perkins came to Mississippi from South Carolina and organized into two conglomerates all of the ten kilns in the county. The Hancock Naval Stores Company was domiciled in Dillville and this enterprise was worth \$250,000, working seventy crops with ten thousand turpentine boxes each. Schooners shipped Naval Stores products of turpentine, resin, tar, and pitch in the early days and by tugboats/barges later. They loaded the barrels of product at the wharves at Bayou LaCroix for distribution to Mobile, New Orleans, and Gulfport. In Gulfport the barrels of naval stores were transferred to ocean-going vessels headed for European ports.

By the turn of the 20th century, Dillville had become a small, but busy commercial port located on a navigable waterway—Bayou LaCroix. The port community boasted a sawmill, turpentine kiln, church, school, store, cemetery, post office, and over one hundred residents. Many of the farmers worked part-time in the kiln and

sawmill operation to supplement their income, especially in the off-season.

The sawmill operation at Bayou LaCroix was the R. J. Williams Lumber Company that was one of the best-equipped yellow pine mills in south Mississippi in that era. Logs were transferred to the mill from the piney forest by a network of small gauge “dummy lines” hauled by small logging railroad engines. The company also maintained a shingle mill. After all the huge virgin pine trees were cut down in Hancock County, the sawmill era ended around 1930, and the turpentine kilns and lumber sawmills went out of business. All that remains today at the site of the old sawmill is the “old mill pond” which is near the original Zengerling house.

Like many small towns in Hancock County, sustenance farmers survived economically in the first half of the 20th century through the depression in spite of the demise of the turpentine and timber industries. These farmers raised livestock and grew crops such as corn, sweet potatoes, and watermelons. A community of closely-knit families thrived on small tracts of land of forty to one hundred acres. The old one room Dillville wooden school building taught twelve to thirty white and

Indian children in 1907. By 1920, there were seventeen pupils. Family names recorded on the 1920 photograph included Zengerling, Ladner, Moran, Johnson, Lusich, and Favre. Other family names engraved on tombstones in the cemetery include Garcia, Sones, Wainwright., Asher, and Rutherford.

Prior to 1948, the Holy Cross Catholic Church held mass once a month performed by Monsignor Gmelch. After 1948, a mass was given every Sunday. The little church had a central hall or nave for the congregation and a small choir loft in the back of the church. A small dressing room or closet (sacristy) for the priest was built next to the sanctuary where the altar was located. A public bathroom was available behind the church. A propane tank near the church was connected to the heater. The church could hold forty worshippers. In the 1960's, the building was moved to St. Henry's Catholic Church in Edwardsville on Longfellow Drive to become a community center. To this day, a local priest still conducts a “blessing” of the LaCroix cemetery on All Saint's Day, November 1st of each year.

During the 1940's, adjacent to the cemetery, a racetrack was built by a man named Litoff. The races were sulking horse carriages (a lightweight two-wheeled single seat cart). Stables for the horses were present next to the racetrack, surrounded by cypress fence. On the other side of the Bayou LaCroix Road, a man named Schwilk built an outdoor



A sulky with jockey and horse



This photo shows the Dillville school c. 1918.

picnic venue that he rented to corporations for large company picnics for up to five hundred guests. The park had a pool, a lifeguard, and a caretaker.

In 1964, NASA established a buffer zone taking one third of the land in Hancock County, forcing the residents in small towns such as Logtown, Santa Rosa, Napoleonville, Gainesville, Westonia, and Bayou LaCroix to relocate elsewhere in the county. Many members of the Ladner and Zengerling families moved to Ansley. Bayou LaCroix is now a ghost town. The cemetery is still maintained by the descendants of the original settlers, but no building such as the church remains.

Today, much of the land in Bayou LaCroix is owned by the prominent New Orleans Hunter White Family. This large tract of timberland is used for recreation such as hunting. A large amount of this land was originally acquired by Emille Joseph Cue, Jr, a prominent business and political leader in the county during the first half of the 20th century.

In conclusion, the story of Bayou LaCroix is another testament to the importance of small towns in the formation of the civilization and culture of Hancock County over the last two hundred years. Many old families in the county can boast of some Choctaw ancestry because white pioneer settlers in Bayou LaCroix and in other historic commu-

nities enjoyed having these Indian neighbors. A walk through the Bayou LaCroix Cemetery will reveal the names of the important old families that worked their farms and owned land, a few for four generations. The historic Zengerling and Ladner families of Bayou LaCroix will be the subject of a forthcoming companion article.

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Frequently Asked Questions

One of the most frequently asked questions at the Historical Society concerns the name of the city on the western side of the Bay of Saint Louis. Is it Shieldsboro or Bay St. Louis?

The first act of the Mississippi State Legislature on January 21, 1818, was to incorporate the village on the Bay of St. Louis as Shieldsboro. The name comes from Thomas Shields, who was instrumental in the Battle of the Bay of St. Louis and whose house was located on present day South Beach Blvd. where Tercentenary Park now stands.

On January 4, 1858, the city



This photo shows the first church in Bayou LaCroix c. 1860-1880.

was reincorporated as Shieldsboro by Mayor J. C. Monet and the Board of Aldermen because citizens of French descent stubbornly refused to use the name Shieldsboro. However, on March 2, 1875, the city was reincorporated under the name Bay St. Louis, a name by which the settlement and later town had always been called even when the official name was Shieldsboro.

For further information please see the July 2011 article written by Scott Bagley. A copy may be found on our website www.hancockcountyhistoricalsociety.com.

IDENTIFICATION OF STUDENTS IN THE DILVILLESCHOOL PICTURE

The students in the picture have been identified as follows: L to R (sitting)— Albert “Boy” Lusich, Eldon Moran, Jorday Johnson, Verdie Johnson, Lillian Lusich, and Sarah Favre;
L to R (mid-standing)— Legier Lusich, Velma Zengarling, Herbert Zengarling, Claiborne Ladner, Rufus Lusich, and Corine Lusich;

L to R (back-standing)— Luvinia Moran, Robert Zengarling, Clara Ladner, George Zengarling, and Arnevia Moran.

This information was provided to the Hancock County Historical Society by Luther Ladner.

“Frequently Asked Questions.”

Beginning this month, we are adding this new section to the newsletter. It may not appear every month, but we hope to include it as frequently as possible. Often members and visitors have a quick question about something in Hancock County, or someone may send an inquiry by email. This section of the newsletter may be as short as a single sentence or possibly as long as a paragraph or two.

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