

THE

HISTORIAN

OF HANCOCK COUNTY

www.hancockcountyhistoricalsociety.com

Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi

June 2021

COMING EVENTS AT LOBRANO HOUSE

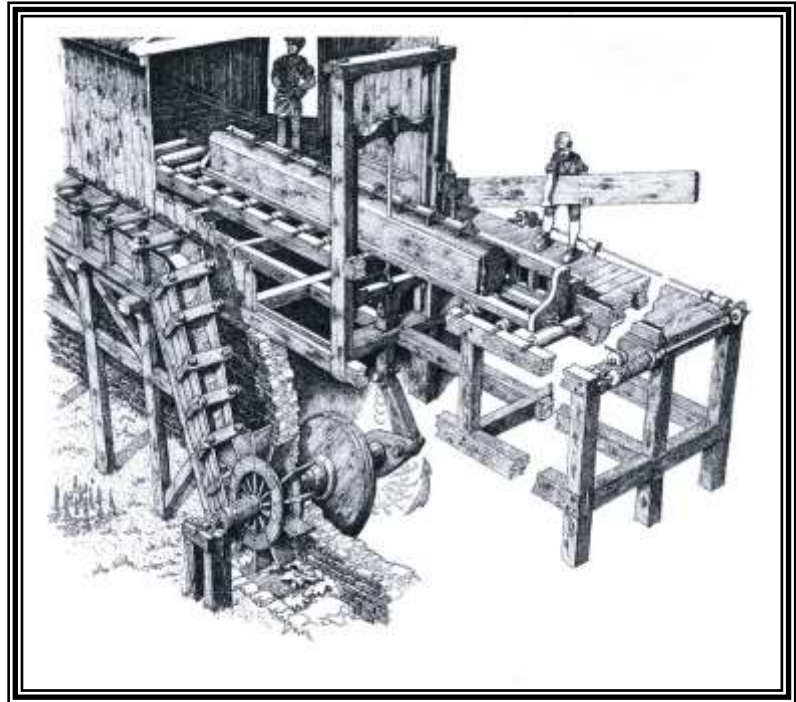
The monthly luncheon meeting will be held on Thursday, June 17, at noon at the Kate Lobrano House. The speaker will be the commercial photographer, Ken Murphy. He will present photographs of the Mississippi Gulf Coast. **Reservations are required** and may be made by calling 467-4090. **Please call no later than noon on Wednesday, June 16**, to make your reservation in order to help us plan seating which is limited to fifty 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 whiskey glazed pork loin, cheddar cheese grits casserole, spring mix salad, and pumpkin gooey butter bars.

President's Corner

Good News! Our June luncheon is a sellout, and we look forward to "business as usual."

"What Floats Your Cardboard Boat" Race: We need boats on the water for this to be a successful fund-raising event for the Society. Please promote to family and friends as we need boats on the water. See p. 8 for details.

The Charles Gray Project, a documentary on the History of Hancock County, the Society, and Charles
continued on p. 2



The up-and-down sash saw, powered by water from a creek or reservoir, greatly increased productivity of small sawmills in Hancock County in the middle of the nineteenth century.

AN ECONOMIC HISTORY OF ANTEBELLUM HANCOCK COUNTY

By
James Keating, M. D.
and
Virginia Olander, Ed.

Antebellum Hancock County witnessed impressive growth of population and a local economy in the period of 1800-1860. The population increased from 40 families to

3,139 people. Three important sectors in this economy emerged which were livestock, cotton, and timber, all of which are the subjects of this article. The carrying trade, initially by locally owned schooners, facilitated the back-and-forth interchange of passengers and market products. Infrastructure, increasing population, and construction are key ingredients of any robust economy. Advances in scientific technology or inventions, including the steam engine, transformed all aspects of the county marketplace. For example, steamboats and later rail-

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

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HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

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PHYSICAL ADDRESS:

108 Cue Street
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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.”

roads appeared in the South during this time frame. Along rivers of the Gulf Coast, small commercial ports evolved supporting sawmills, shipyards, brickyards, cotton gins, and kilns which produced charcoal and naval stores (turpentine, tar, pitch, and resin).

During this period of Hancock County history, raising livestock was the most important sector of the economy. More free people earned a livelihood raising cattle than in any other endeavor. Livestock on Hancock County farms included cattle, hogs, and sheep. Sustenance yeoman farmers were often herders in this era who grazed their animals in the piney forest. These herders did not even necessarily own the forest land where their cattle grazed. If they owned land, they did not grow much corn or cotton. Herders from Georgia and the Carolinas migrated to this region after 1820 attracted by the availability of open federal lands or cheap farmland after the majority of Native Americans had been removed from the area. Herders bought the cows raised by the stationary farmers and planters and drove them to the interna-

tional marketplaces of Mobile and New Orleans. The cows were then slaughtered and butchered at meatpacking plants that salted, smoked, and pickled the meat. Barrels of meat were loaded on ocean-going ships for the east coast, particularly Georgia and the Carolinas. More corn than cotton was grown at this time in Mississippi which was fed to the cattle in the weeks right before marketing. The hides of the cattle were also profitable for leather production.

Bartholomew Grelot (1768-1851) and Philippe Saucier (1747-1820) moved to the DeLisle area around 1781. This Saucier plantation was called Windy Hill and was located on an eight mile Spanish land grant on a bluff overlooking Bayou DeLisle adjacent to the Wolf River. This side of the Saucier family specialized in cattle and timber. The other side of the Saucier family, the descendants of Henry Saucier II (1734-1810) and Marie François Rouseve (1755-1810), focused on cotton and timber. Pierre Phillip Saucier (1798-1873) and his children later moved from the DeLisle area around 1850 to become some of the first settlers of the communities now called Worthan (Cowtown) and Saucier.

The herders and stationary farmers were codependent. The herders needed corn to feed their cattle before sale. The farmers sold their cattle to the herdsmen for profit who then, as middlemen, transported cattle to distant markets for resale. The historian, Guilia Saucier, reports in *A Mississippi First Family* that in the 1840's "it was possible to stand in one place in Pass Christian to watch two thousand

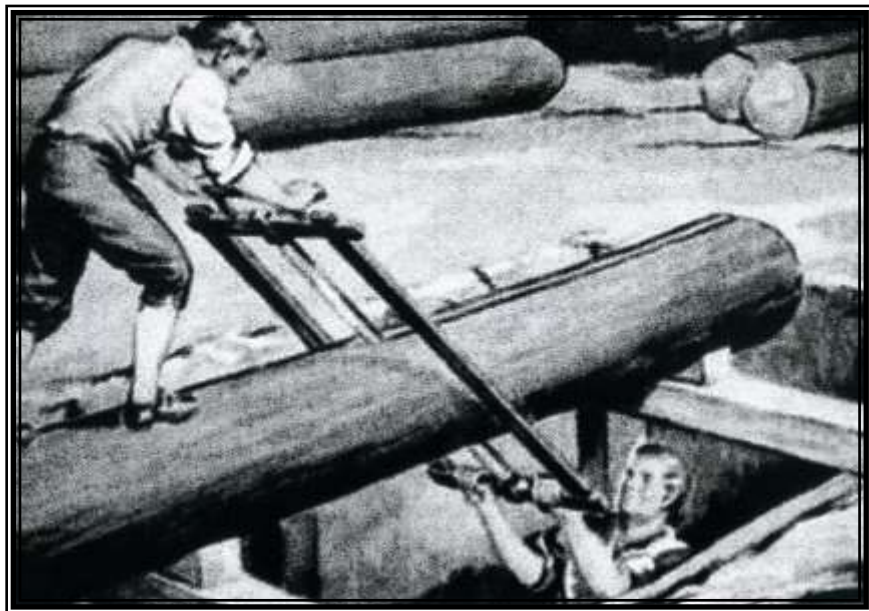
continued from p. 1

Gray's many contributions, is scheduled for completion on June 30th. It will be presented to our members at a special event. Stay tuned!

History is made every day by the bold actions of individuals whether on a small or large scale.

Best to All

Chris Roth
President



A two man crosscut saw was employed over a sawpit or trestle with one sawyer over the log and the other below.

head of cattle plod ahead of drovers on their way to the market in New Orleans.” The value of slaughtered livestock in the South in 1860 was half a billion dollars which was twice the value of the South’s cotton crop.

In the early nineteenth century, cotton was grown on small farms in the Pearlinton/Logtown area of the lower Pearl River valley. However, this commodity assumed greater significance to the Hancock County economy as established and well financed planters from South Carolina migrated to Mississippi. They built large plantations on the Pearl River, from the upriver town of Monticello south. The crop was transported by flatboat down to Pearlinton to be ginned. Schooners, and later steamboats, transported the processed cotton to New Orleans, reaping immense profits from their carrying trade.

As mentioned previously, at the turn of the nineteenth century, the descendants of Henry Saucier II and Marie François

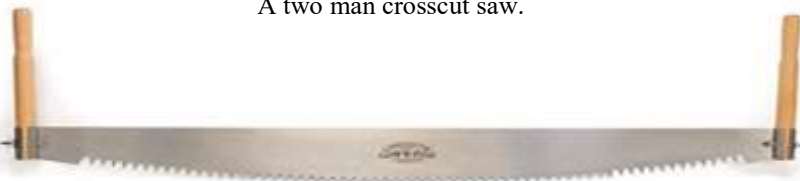
Rouseve moved from their tobacco plantations in Louisiana to Hancock County, planting cotton and cutting timber. They were some of the local, large cotton planter class, well-financed by New Orleans bankers. The Cowan-Fields plantation (later known as Elmwood) introduced Sea Island cotton to the county in the early 1800’s. The Sauciers established large plantations worked by numerous slaves on the choice land adjacent to the rivers in Hancock County. Large Saucier plantations included Sea Island (aka Laurel Wood on Bayou Mulatto), Cedar Bluff (Bayou Philip), Sugar Farm (Bayou La-Croix), and Belle Fontaine (Pine Hills). The largest plantation in early Hancock County with around one hundred slaves was the Farr Plantation (in the

present-day location of Pica-yune). Other big cotton plantations were the Proctor Plantation in present day Nicholson, and the Jordon Smith plantation in Santa Rosa.

During the decades of the 1830’s and 1840’s, cotton emerged as a more significant sector of the county economy. The parallel sector of slave trading, legal and illegal, was practiced by many of these planters. There was growth of the population of Hancock County in these decades. However before 1837, corn was the principal crop in Mississippi. In the 1850’s, the major planters in Hancock County moved with their workers to the Mississippi Delta. Consequently, the population of Hancock County diminished from 3,670 in 1850 to 3,134 in 1860. Nevertheless, cotton was planted and sold in Hancock County during and after the Civil War.

The piney forests of Hancock County provided the early pioneer settlers at the turn of the nineteenth century products for commercial trade with New Orleans and Mobile—firewood, charcoal, and naval stores. In New Orleans, which had no local forests, only firewood, stove wood, and charcoal were used for heat and cooking, but not coal. Entrepreneurs such as Simon Favre (1760-1813) and Jean Baptiste Dolby (1770-1835) in Pearlinton transported these products in their schooners. On the Wolf River and Jourdan River commercial enterprises evolved which included

A two man crosscut saw.





This historic landmark is located adjacent to the ancient Dedeaux oak in DeLisle, Mississippi.

forest products such as lumber, staves, and shingles. In that era, productivity was greatly enhanced by the dummy lines, small gage railroads to transport logs to the giant mills from the sites in the forests all over the county where the trees were cut down.

Four Saucier families were some of the first permanent settlers of the Wolf River and Shieldsboro communities. In 1810, after President Madison annexed West Florida, Dr. William Flood was sent to Hancock County to appoint Simon Favre Justice of the Peace for the Pearlinton area. He then sailed to Shieldsboro and appointed Phillip Saucier Justice of the Peace for the communities around the Bay of St. Louis.

Pierre Moran III (1784-1845) settled on the Wolf River (DeLisle) with a Spanish land grant in 1796. The aforementioned Sauciers had preceded the Morans and other French families who were migrating to the

sawmills, shipyards, and charcoal manufacturing kilns. Early French settlers on the Jourdan River built kilns to produce charcoal and naval stores from pine trees for caulking wooden boats. This village evolved into a small commercial port on a navigable waterway and eventually became affectionately known as "The Kiln."

The timber industry became the dominant sector of the economy in the latter nineteenth century. But in the late colonial period, woodcutting was done inefficiently with axes, wedges, and simple hand saws. More effective was the crosscut saw which came into common use in Hancock County in the early decades of the nineteenth century. Early sawmills employed a sawpit or an elevated trestle six or seven feet high to make lumber products from logs. A sawpit was a deep six-foot trench dug under the cutting site. One sawyer was placed in the pit under the surface of the ground or under a trestle holding on to the handle at one end of the long crosscut saw blade. A second sawyer was poised above the log or piece of wood to be cut holding the handle at the other end of

the saw. Later, around 1830, sawing machines using vertically oriented crosscut saws, called up-and-down sash saws, were employed powered by water, horses, or mules. After 1840, the steam engine-driven circular saw blade transformed the timber industry because it afforded greater efficiency and productivity in sawing wood. Thus, the Pioneer Era of the timber industry occurred from 1840-1890. Later, the Sawmill Era (1890-1930) produced enormous amounts of



Near the bank of the DeLisle Bayou adjacent to the Wolf River sits the Old DeLisle Cemetery on which rests a collection of Saucier tombstones.

Wolf River and Jourdan River neighborhood. The Ladner and Cuevas families originally raised cows on Cat Island. Their descendants settled all along the Gulf Coast. In the DeLisle and Kiln areas the Sauciers were soon joined by other early French Catholic settlers with names such as Necaie (Nicaise), Lizana, Dedeaux, Cassidy, Lasabbe, Toulme, and Favre. The descendants of these families intermarried and had large families. They generated a close-knit society of extended families, many of whom still live in Hancock County.

During the 1820's and 1830's, a custom house operated in Shieldsboro. Timber products were subject to tariffs before they were exported to Cuba, Mexico, and Texas. By 1840, there were at least ten sawmills in Hancock County. The Saucier and Toulme families intermarried and John B. Toulme (c.1795-1867) owned a sawmill in partnership with D. R. Walker in the Pearl River area. William "Captain Bill" Poitevent (1814-1890) built a sawmill in Gainesville around 1840. In 1846, Henry Weston (1823-1912) migrated from Maine to work for Poitevent. An important sawmill in the Kiln was started by Captain Sam Favre in 1859. These early pioneer timber entrepreneurs from the aforementioned historic families of Hancock County in the later nineteenth century morphed into titans of the lumber business. These mills and the wealth they created were the foundation of a more modern and diversified economy in the twentieth century.

In conclusion, livestock, cotton, and then timber were the

principal sectors of the economy of antebellum Hancock County. Commercial centers evolved on rivers along the Gulf Coast such as Pearlington, Gainesville, Kiln, and DeLisle. Shieldsboro was a small, but important, resort town and fishing village. Before 1837, corn, not cotton, was the principal crop in Mississippi. Nevertheless, after the emergence of the Cotton Kingdom in the antebellum South in 1860, the value of livestock was twice the value of the South's cotton crop. In this era, the timber industry was primitive because the tools of the trade such as the crosscut saw were so labor intensive. The advent of the steam engine-driven circular saw transformed the timber business into a more lucrative enterprise. A collection of close-knit families migrated to Hancock County and started commercial enterprises that built a robust economy. These families intermarried for several generations and their descendants populate the Gulf Coast today.

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THE EVOLUTION OF HANCOCK COUNTY

By

James Keating, M. D.

In 1812 settlers in the Pearl River valley held a meeting at the Burnt Meeting House in Henleyfield, a small community approximately nine miles northwest of present day Pica-yune. A delegation was elected to the Mississippi Territorial Legislature which was authorized to request the formation of a new county to be named Hancock within the newly acquired Gulf Coast. They proposed that the new Hancock County should encompass boundaries that would include what constitutes present day Hancock, Harrison, Stone, and much of Pearl River counties (See map.). The formal creation of Hancock County occurred on December 14, 1812 by an act of the Mississippi Territorial Legislature.

The first county seat of Hancock County was the village of Center (Caesar) that was located at the crossing of ancient Native American trails or by-

Chronology of HANCOCK			
Map	Date	Event	Resulting Area
⑪	21 Feb 1872	Lost to creation of PEARL	470 sq mi
⑨	28 Feb 1878	Gained from PEARL; PEARL eliminated	1,000 sq mi
⑫	22 Feb 1890	Lost to creation of PEARL RIVER	640 sq mi
⑬	16 May 1908	Lost to PEARL RIVER	480 sq mi

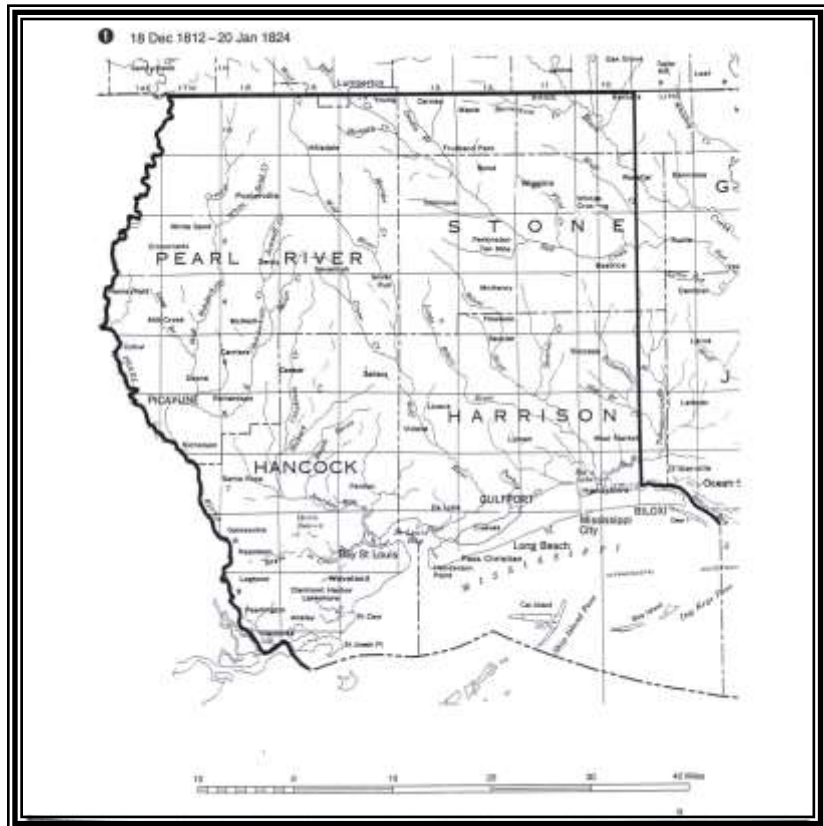
(Heavy line depicts historical boundary. Base map shows present-day information.)

The numbers in the Chronology of Hancock listed here—11, 9, 12, 13—refer to the numbered maps on p. 7 at the right.

ways. However, by 1840 the residents along the Gulf Coast in the eastern part of the county requested the formation of a separate county to be called Harrison because the county seat, Center, was too far for residents in the eastern part of the county to travel to conduct official business. On February 5, 1841, an act of the Mississippi State legislature created the county of Harrison from territory formally in the eastern portion of Hancock County.

In 1872 the Mississippi State Legislature created Pearl County from the northern section of the original Hancock County and a part of southern Marion County. Byrd's Chapel community was chosen to be the county seat of government. Unfortunately, the new Pearl County quickly became insolvent because of a depression in this area caused by the economic effects of the Civil War. There was no real tax base to provide revenue to run a government. Consequently, Pearl County was abolished by the Mississippi State Legislature in 1878.

The advent of the New Orleans and Northwestern Railroad stimulated the timber industry in the region representing an important catalyst for growth and prosperity. In 1890 the Mississippi State Legislature created Pearl River County with Poplar-



The dark lines in the map show the boundaries of Hancock County when it was formed as part of the Mississippi Territory in 1812.

ville as the county seat. In this time frame Picayune was incorporated as a town in 1904, but was still in Hancock County. In that same year Lumberton was taken from Pearl River County, leaving the county with no sawmill timber industry. For this reason Picayune was taken from Hancock County in 1908, and the present boundaries of Pearl River and Hancock Counties were established.

Thus, the present boundaries of Hancock County represent

a great reduction in size compared to the original configuration when the county was created in 1812.





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**THE SMITHSONIAN
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Waveland Ground Zero Museum (WGZM) will host a Smithsonian Exhibit entitled “Crossroads: Changes in Rural America.” The Ground Zero Museum is one of only six sites in Mississippi chosen by the Mississippi Humanities Council to host the newest traveling exhibit from the Smithsonian Institute’s Museum on Main Street (MoMS) Division. This exhibit was designed specifically for smaller and rural communities and our museum is the only site along the Gulf Coast! We are thrilled to be partnering with MoMS and the Mississippi Humanities Council to bring this special presentation to our city and county. We are fortunate to have been awarded a Partnership grant from MS Gulf Coast Marine Resources.

The exhibit showcases how rural communities have changed, adapted, and persevered over the decades. The exhibit will have interactive areas and encourages visitors to think about their community and see it in a new light. The WGZM will present exhibits and lectures detailing our local history throughout Hancock County, “From Logtown to Infinity.”

The museum, at 335 Coleman Avenue, is open Tuesday through Saturday 10am-3pm. Ad-

mission is free. Contact the museum for more information 228-467-9012.

**WAVELAND GROUND ZERO HURRICANE MUSEUM TO HOST A SMITHSONIAN EXHIBIT:
Crossroads: Changes in Rural America**



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