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OF HANCOCK COUNTY

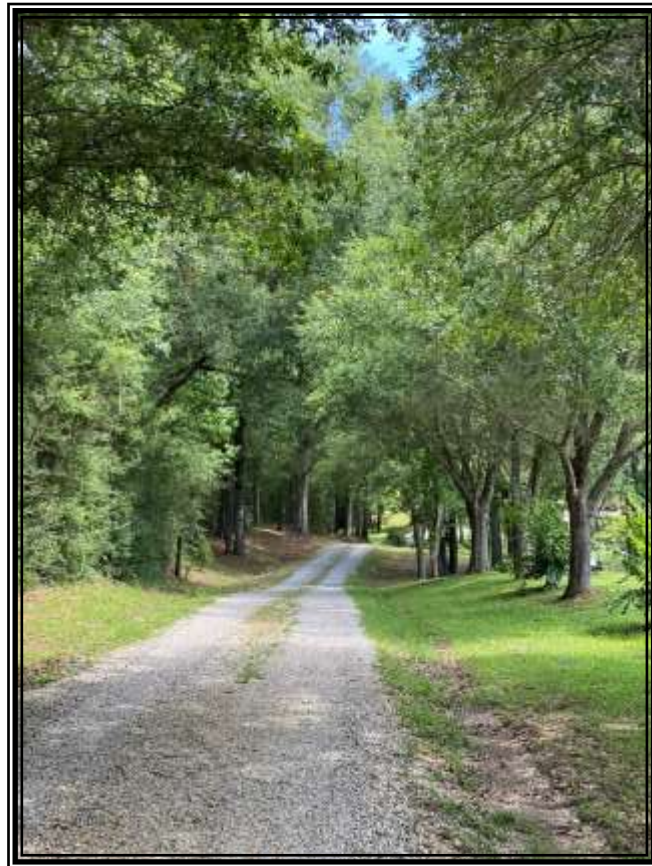
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Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi

July 2021

COMING EVENTS AT LOBRANO HOUSE

The monthly luncheon meeting will be held on Thursday, July 15, 2021, at noon at the Kate Lobrano House. The speaker will be Giulia Saucier who will speak on her book *A Mississippi First Family, The Sauciers from 1603 to 1865*. **Reservations are required** and may be made by calling 467-4090. **Please call by noon on Wednesday, July 14**, to make your reservation in order to help us plan seating which is limited to forty-eight 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 door. The catering order is submitted on Wednesday morning prior to the luncheon on Thursday. If you need to cancel your reservation, please call by 2 p.m. on Tuesday prior to the luncheon if at all possible so that the society does not incur unnecessary expenses. It is catered by Almost Home Catering, Michelle Nichols, chef. The lunch menu is Tuscan garlic chicken breast, tomato feta pasta, Caesar salad, dinner rolls, raspberry amaretto bread pudding.



Henleyfield was a small community in 1820 on the ancient byway known as the Columbia-Gainesville Road (aka the old Black Wolf Trail).

HENLEYFIELD/ BYRD'S CHAPEL

By
James Keating, M. D.

Ed.
Virginia Olander

Early Hancock County history also includes the events and stories about the pioneer settlers of the lower Pearl River valley in land that is in present day Pearl River County. In the early nineteenth century, the original Hancock County in-

cluded territory that is now in Pearl River County, Harrison County, and Stone County. Two important neighborhoods that attracted farmers from Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina were Henleyfield and Byrd's Chapel. These settlements still exist, located just thirteen miles north of Picayune. They were located on the ancient, important byway running north/south on the high ground or ridge along the East Pearl River, which correlates with Mississippi Highway 43. Fortunately, there are several fifth generation descendants of these



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James Keating, Publisher
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.”

noble pioneer settlers from the Byrd, Fergurson, Burks, Bowen, and Harvey families who have contributed their stories and family genealogies for this article.

The community of Henleyfield is named after one of the most interesting people in Hancock County history. Jeremiah Monroe Henley (1775-1858) was born in Salisbury, Rowan, North Carolina. His family moved to Claiborne County, Mississippi, in 1807, traveling down the Old Federal Road. Jeremiah migrated to Hancock County shortly thereafter and married Mary Ann Perry who lived in the area of Hancock County which later became known as Henleyfield.

Jeremiah received a permit to settle ten arpents (six hundred acres) on the Pearl River just west of present day Pica-yune in 1810 from the Spanish Government District Commandant representative, Simon Favre. Subsequently, he traded his land with his father-in-law, Burwell Perry, who owned the

Griffen place where the old church at Henleyfield now stands. This location was attractive to Jeremiah because Perry’s land was partly cleared for pasture and cultivation. In addition, there was a good spring providing water. Also, this land was on the Columbia-Gainesville Road and the side road to Pool’s Bluff. The only way to cross the Pearl River in this area at that time was on Pool’s Ferry that was located at Pool’s Bluff.

Jeremiah learned that he could earn a significant amount of money by enlisting in the French Army for a single tour of duty. He enlisted and joined Napoleon just in time to invade Russia. After the Battle of Borodino near Moscow on September 12, 1812, the French retreated to Germany. Jeremiah survived this adventure and returned to Hancock County with enough hard currency to buy animals such as sheep and cattle and other items needed to start a farm.

Later, after the Battle of Waterloo in 1815, Jeremiah was approached by one of Napoleon’s brothers to participate in a scheme to move Napoleon to New Orleans and establish a new government or country. Secret agents met Jeremiah on the shore of Waveland, and the group traveled to the east bank of the Pearl River. According to legend a large amount of gold coin was buried there. The agents made several trips to New Orleans, but the friendly contacts there did not wish to cooperate. These agents decided to return to France, but reportedly left the money buried for use at a later, more favorable date, when the scheme might be accomplished. The agents never returned. Nev-

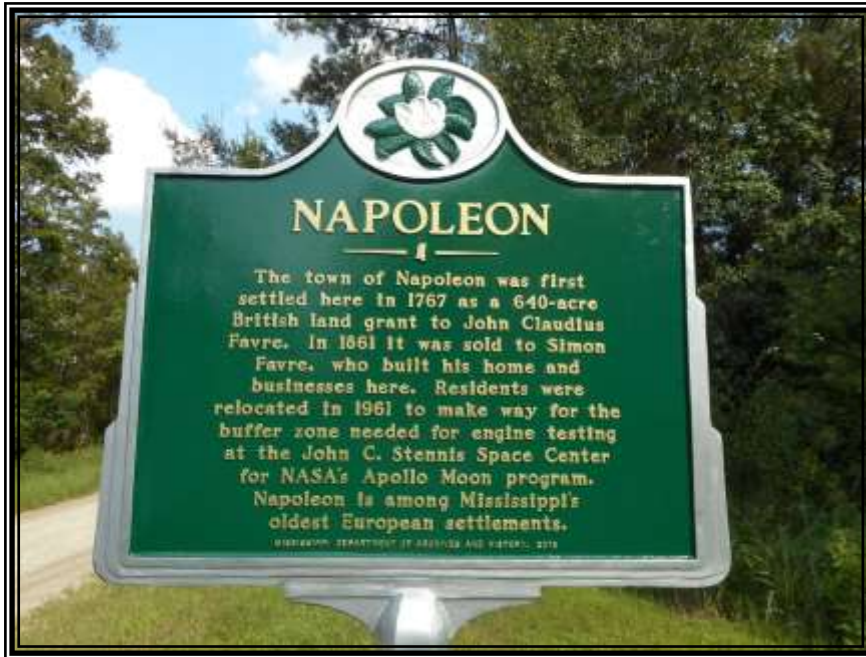
President’s Corner

Welcoming back our members to our June luncheon was indeed a special event and we look forward to being back on a familiar and enjoyable routine.

Please join us for July’s luncheon and bring a friend member.

“History, despite its wrenching pain, cannot be unlived; however, if faced with courage, need not be lived again.” Maya Angelou

Chris Roth
President



ertheless, the community that developed there was called Napoleon. The gold coins have never been found.

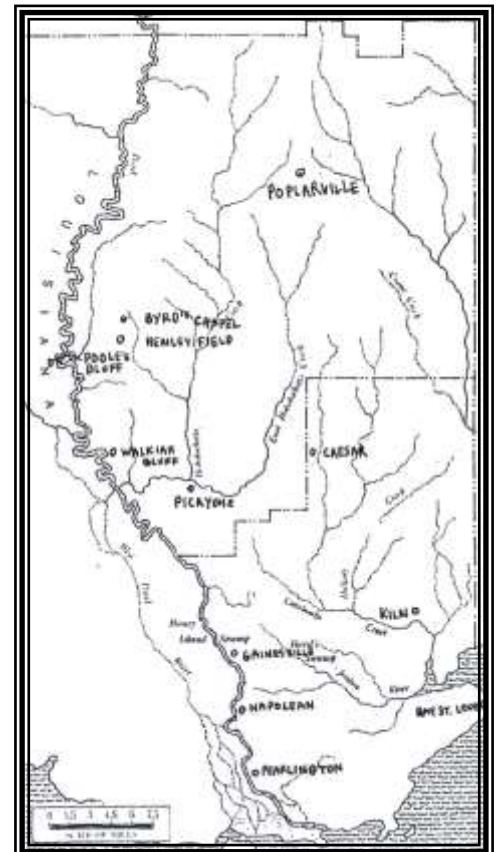
Jeremiah, who died in 1858, and Mary Ann reared a large family, and there are presently many descendants in the region. Originally the settlement of Henleyfield was named Pine-tucky, an amalgam of piney forest and Kentucky. This odd name was probably the creation of some of General Andrew Jackson's army who had marched through this area on their way to what became the Battle of New Orleans, and who later returned there to settle. Henleyfield is remembered by the old timers such as Harry Hudson "Hut" Bowen (b. 1931) as a place with stockmen who raised large flocks of thousands of sheep as did Jeremiah Henley on his large field. Consequently, the name was changed to Henleyfield. Hut's family has lived in Henleyfield for several generations. Hut remembers that as a young boy his father and others

in the community sheared sheep. The younger boys helped by tamping the wool as it was put into containers.

Even though the area of Mississippi south of the 31st parallel had originally been settled by French and Spanish Catholics and that area was still considered by most residents to be under Spanish rule, some English Anglo-Saxon Protestants from the east coast of the United States had moved into the area along the Pearl River north of present day Pica-yune. However, it was not until the signing of the Adams-Onis Treaty in 1819 that these lands were fully recognized as part of the U.S. Early settlers to this region around Henleyfield in 1817 included Jesse McGehee, John Wheat, Henry Jarrell, John Strahan, James Tate, Solomon Lott, and Edward Buckley. Nevertheless, some earlier settlers along the lower Pearl River such as the Frenchman Simon Favre had received Spanish land grants. The McGehees first set-

tled at Walkiah Bluff which was an ancient and excellent natural landing nearby on the Pearl River for Native American canoes and later steamboats. Today, Warren Glen McGehee (b. 1933) lives in Henleyfield where his ancestors have farmed for five generations. The McGehees migrated from the Scottish highlands and into Virginia before they came to the area of the Pearl River.

In 1820 the State of Mississippi authorized Alexander Frazier to build a toll bridge over the Hobolochitto Creek where he had previously owned and operated a primitive ferry. This allowed a more convenient crossing of this waterway on the important Columbia-Gainesville Road just nine miles south of Henleyfield. This location was the



precursor of Picayune. Jim Smith bought a tract of land containing a grove of beautiful poplar trees from some neighboring Choctaw for twenty bushels of corn. His nickname became "Poplar Jim Smith," and that site was the precursor of present day Poplarville.

Sherrod and Zelfa Rouse Byrd were early pioneer settlers who lived three miles north of Henleyfield in the neighborhood of present day Byrd's Chapel. Their nephew, Rev. John Ira Ellis Byrd, was a "circuit rider lay preacher" in Hancock County around 1820. In that year a Methodist church, Byrd's Chapel, was completed, and its first services were held. The neighborhood of Byrd's Chapel evolved separate from the neighborhood of Henleyfield which supported a Baptist church. These two codependent neighborhoods coexist even today. This place was called Riceville before the name of Byrd's Chapel became more common.

There have been four separate Byrd's Chapel church buildings over the last two hundred years. The adjoining ceme-

tery is believed to be the oldest cemetery in Pearl River County. June Ferguson is a fifth generation descendant of this Byrd family who reports that the family came overland from Virginia. A walk through the old cemetery will demonstrate multiple tombstones, the oldest dating back to the 1840's with family names such as Harvey, Tate, Mitchell, Ferguson and Byrd. The church is located on the Byrd's Chapel Road near June Ferguson's house.

During the 1840's, the infamous Copeland gang terrorized the countryside from Mobile to Lake Pontchartrain. James Copeland was born in Jackson County, Mississippi, in 1823 and was a life-long criminal. After teaming up with other like minded individuals, the Copeland gang began stealing, robbing, burning houses, and killing people. One of their hideouts was in the Honey Island Swamp in Hancock County. It has become legend that Copeland buried a treasure in the nearby Catahoula Creek. June Ferguson's great-great grandfather, James Andrew Harvey (1817-1848), was wounded and

died after a gunfight with the gang. This altercation has been called the Battle of Harvey. It occurred on July 15, 1848, and is credited with the decline and downfall of the gang. James Copeland escaped during the battle, but was captured shortly thereafter, tried, and hanged in 1857 at Augusta in Perry County, Mississippi. James Harvey is buried in Byrd's Chapel cemetery. Six Harvey generations are also buried there.

Mary Burks McCullough, a friend of June Ferguson, is a fifth generation of the Burks family. She reports that her great-great grandfather, Daniel Burks (1805-1886), was a farmer in Henleyfield. Daniel was also a member and captain of the "Regulators," the vigilante committee with aforementioned James Harvey who smashed the Copeland Gang at the Battle of Harvey. Incidentally, Daniel Burks served as a drummer boy soldier at age ten with General Andrew Jackson at the Battle of New Orleans. He and his brother, Roland, were granted "bounty land" grants in Henleyfield as compensation for their military service. Their father, John Randall Burks, was an original pioneer settler in this region.

During the Civil War Hancock County became a lawless "no-man's-land" subject to Yankee raids, Confederate cavalry intrusions, and migrating bands of jayhawkers, deserters, and bandits. Captain Redden Byrd commanded the "Regulators" band that pursued jayhawkers and hanged them at Big Spring. Daniel Burks and John Wheat set fire to the Burnt Bridge to prevent Yankee soldiers from crossing into their communities to



The original church at Byrd's Chapel was built in 1820. This building is the fourth structure that has been built at this site over the last two hundred and two years.



Byrd's Chapel
Cemetery

The tombstone on the right side of the photo is the final resting place of James Harvey.

confiscate cattle. The name Burnt Bridge Road commemorates this feat even today. Daniel Burks later served on the Hancock County Board of Supervisors representing this region of the county. He is buried in the Henleyfield Baptist Church Cemetery.

In 1872 the Mississippi State Legislature created Pearl County from territory taken from Hancock and Marion counties. Byrd's Chapel community was chosen to be the county seat of government. A Masonic building in Byrd's Chapel served as both the courthouse and church because the actual chapel had recently burned. The fourth and present church was built in 1934. Unfortunately, the new Pearl County quickly became insolvent because of 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, and Henleyfield and Byrd's Chapel returned to be part of Hancock County.

In the 1880's the New Orleans and Northeastern Rail-

road was built that passed through this region. The railroad was an important catalyst stimulating growth and prosperity. In 1890 the Mississippi Legislature created Pearl River County with Poplarville as the county seat. At this time, Picayune was still on land belonging to Hancock County. Picayune was incorporated in 1904, and in the 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 boundary of Pearl River County established which includes Picayune.

In conclusion, the history of Henleyfield and Byrd's Chapel reveals the remarkable character of the sturdy, adventurous pioneers that helped build the early frontier economy of Hancock County. The churches provided a strong sense of community and were important institutions in these early villages. Members of key families farmed the land and raised livestock, generation after generation, offering continuity of this society as well as leadership. The ad-

vent of railroads and the sawmill businesses were the most important factors in the modernization of the local economy. At the end of this time, the town of Picayune emerged and became the most prosperous community in this territory. Nevertheless, the proud neighborhoods of Henleyfield and Byrd's Chapel continue to thrive and a strong sense of community persists to this day.

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Compiled by
Eddie Coleman

Communities in Hancock County

Some of the early settlements and communities in Hancock County have been written about in earlier *Historians* and will be in future editions. There are others, however, which were much smaller than Gainesville, Logtown, Pearlinton, etc. Some of these smaller ones are included here.

Ansley

The date of the settlement is not clearly defined, but Ansley is located ten miles west of Bay St. Louis and was established as a flag stop on the L & N Railroad. The town was named for a man named *Ansley* who was once road master on the L & N Railroad. This man was possibly the father of M. E. Ansley of Bay St. Louis. A post office was once located here just south of the railroad station on a road which led to the old Claiborne Plantation on Mulatto Bayou.

Catahoula

Catahoula was more of a rural district than a settlement *per se*. It was located on a tributary of the Jordan River in the central part of the county west of Kiln. The place once boasted a grammar school with three teachers.

Claiborne

Located twenty-three miles west of Bay St. Louis, this settlement was first called Grand Plains when settled by John B. Saucier in 1712. About 1870 the name was changed to Claiborne for J. F. H. Claiborne, whose plantation on Mulatto Bayou lay a short distance to the north.

Fenton

Fenton, a ghost sawmill town, was established on a road leading through the Jordan River swamp about four miles east of Kiln on present-day Kiln-Delisle Road. Once river steamers anchored here and unloaded their cargoes into a large warehouse. Bargemen steered their bulky craft down the bayous into the Jordan River while on shore the teamsters hauled logs through the swamp on ox-wagons.

The town's early settlers were largely of French descent, but among the pioneers were some of the Spanish Cuevas family and others as well.

Santa Rosa

Situated in the extreme northwestern part of the Stennis Buffer Zone, Santa Rosa marks the Mississippi part of Honey Island Swamp, a wildlife refuge and for many years the refuge of pirate bands as powerful, if not so notorious, as the Lafittes of Louisiana. The "King of Honey Island Swamp" and of all the outlaws living there was Pierre Rameau.

Sellers

Sellers was the site of a large vocational high school located on the line between Hancock and Harrison Counties. The school was approximately thirty miles from Gulfport, and at one time there were two stores and a few houses. The community had no definite bounda-

ries, but centered around the school district which probably comprised three hundred people.

Westonia

Westonia was a sawmill town, now extinct, and one of the early group of towns comprised of Logtown, Pearlinton, and Gainesville. It was promoted by the H. Weston Lumber Company. The town was located some distance back from the Pearl River, southeast of Gainesville and Napoleon and northeast of Logtown.

SOURCE:

Brieger, James F., compiler. *Hometown Mississippi*. Privately published, 1980.



ANSLEY TRAIN DEPOT



WESTONIA SCHOOL



SELLERS VOCATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL

H & R BLOCK DONATION

As it has done for the past few years, the H&R Block nonprofit referral program has made a donation to the Hancock County Historical Society. If the agency helped you in filing your taxes and you mentioned the Society, a donation was made to us. This year we received \$600. Look for the program next year.

July 10, 2021

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