

THE

HISTORIAN

OF HANCOCK COUNTY

www.hancockcountyhistoricalsociety.com

Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi

March 2022

COMING EVENTS AT LOBRANO HOUSE

The monthly luncheon meeting will be held on Thursday, March 17 at noon at the Kate Lobrano House. The speakers will be Cheryl Thompson, Executive Director of Gulfside Assembly, and she will speak on the history of the organization. **Reservations are required** and may be made by calling 228-467-4090. **Please call by noon on Wednesday, March 16**, 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 chicken and sausage jambalaya, green beans, salad, garlic bread, and pecan pie cobbler.

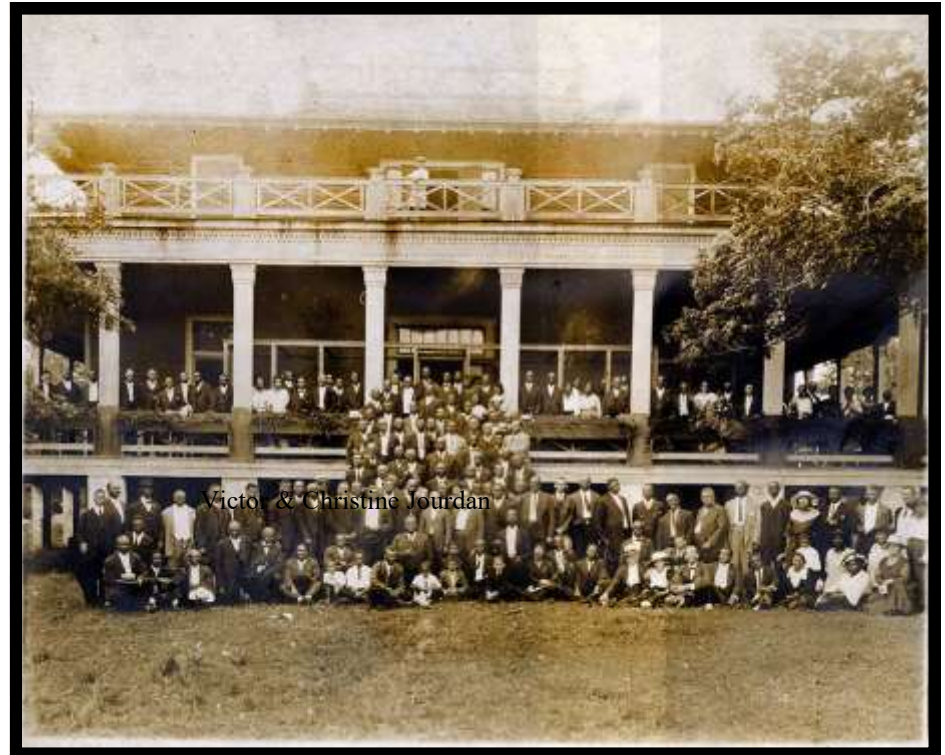
DEAD SEA SCROLLS

Presented by Jon Caridad

Thursday, March 17
10 A.M.

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County Library

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Registration Required
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Victor & Christine Jourdan

Gulfside Assembly
Waveland, Mississippi
Photo taken c. 1930s.

GULFSIDE ASSEMBLY

THE ENDURING OASIS

By
Wendy Sullivan

In 1923, news that Waveland beachfront property would be developed into a gathering place for Blacks was a cause for celebration in Mississippi's African American community. Finally, people of color would have a place where they could legally access

the beach. Along the rest of the coast, public access was restricted to whites only. The South at that time was strictly segregated along racial lines. The beach wasn't the only place where African Americans were denied access: Hotels, recreational facilities, public restrooms, restaurants were also forbidden by law. The only way to legally circumvent the beach restriction was to privately own beachfront property, something out of reach of most Blacks at that time. So when Robert E. Jones, the first African American bishop in the Methodist Church, was promoted to Bishop of the Southern states, he purchased 300 acres—and leased another 316 from the state of

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**LOBRANO HOUSE
HOURS**

MONDAY — FRIDAY
10:00AM — 3:00PM
Closed: 12:00—1:00 (lunch)

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.”

Mississippi to—to create a place for gathering, fellowship and education.

The original name of this shoreline oasis was Gulfside Chautauqua and Camp Meeting Group. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, the Chautauqua Movement was extremely popular across the country, offering cultural entertainment and education speakers in peaceful campground settings. Gulfside was organized on the original Methodist church retreat model, embracing the movement’s four pillars—faith, recreation, arts, and education.

Built during a period of persecution and segregation, Gulfside Assembly empowered African Americans disenfranchised from the larger community, providing skills and education unavailable elsewhere. From 1924 to 1939, Gulfside Assembly offered summer programs from April to August including 4H, Scouts, summer school, and seminary for Methodist pastors. Families of color came together from all over the South to enjoy the beach at this safe retreat.

Gulfside also had a significant role in educating African American boys through the year-round Poor Boys’ School. Using the public school, they were able to



Bishop Robert E. Jones

provide quality education for impoverished boys who could not access education otherwise.

But even getting to the campground presented many challenges. African Americans were prohibited from walking along the dirt road that was Beach Boulevard then, and of course, walking along the beach wasn’t an option. So those Blacks traveling to Gulfside by train from Louisiana, north Mississippi, Alabama, and Texas had to carry their gear and luggage and

President’s Corner

At our February luncheon meeting, we recognized four individuals who, over many years, have contributed significantly to the success of the Society. Those recognized were Margaret Sarrat, Al Sarrat, Beth Weidlich, and Rosemarie Schaap. Their volunteerism forms some of the building blocks that are the foundation of our Society. Such a foundation has been built over the years by the generous donation of time, effort, and financial support that make the Hancock County Historical Society the outstanding organization that it is today.

As part of our community outreach effort, we are once again hosting the highly successful and entertaining “What Floats Your Cardboard Boat” race on Saturday, May 21. The more boats we have, the better the race, so reach out to friends and family and join the fun. Full details are available on the HCHS website at [HancockCountyHistoricalSociety.com](http:// HancockCountyHistoricalSociety.com).

Chris Roth

President



This photo shows visitors at Gulfside, possibly at one of the summer conferences in the 1930s.

and Caucasian Conferences in 1968 to form the United Methodist Church, Gulfside expanded its role in bringing together the community including students from Tulane, Dillard, and Xavier.

Like many coastal properties, Gulfside has experienced its share of storm damage, requiring community resiliency and perseverance. In the legendary 1947 hurricane, a tsunami swept over the property. Likewise, Hurricane Camille in 1969 left devastation in its wake at Gulfside and coast-wide. After Camille, a national fund-raising campaign helped with rebuilding costs.

Just months before Hurricane Katrina hit in 2005, new buildings were finally completed, and the doors were opened. The Gulfside website recounts that, when all was destroyed by the unprecedented storm, Deaconess Martin, director at that time, “is reported to have thanked God for a heritage—if not buildings—strong enough to withstand gigantic storms.”

In the aftermath of Katrina, the leadership at Gulfside pivoted and focused on caring for the wounded community around them instead of reconstructing lost buildings. The grounds once again became campgrounds as the

walk along the tracks from the railroad station to Gulfside.

Despite the challenges, Gulfside Assembly grew and thrived.

When the purchase was made, the property contained only one building, a mansion that had formerly belonged to the family of Andrew Jackson, Jr. Initially in a state of disrepair, the house was restored under the bishop’s direction, though it burned in 1947 in a fire of unclear causes.

After World War II, the retreat center grew rapidly with the addition of a chapel, a 100-room inn, a 1000-seat auditorium, and a house for the bishop. These buildings were constructed of cinder blocks to prevent destruction by fire. Tent-like cabins were built for youth to camp in.

“I fondly remember the rustic tent-like cabins I stayed in at Gulfside Assembly in the 50s and 60s as a child,” said Cheryl Thompson, Executive Director of Gulfside Association. “Coming from my home in New Orleans, I met other African American children from the Southern states, spending time on the Gulf Coast at this remarkable summer camp.” Ms. Thompson recalled that the adults stayed in the hotel/inn.

Residents of Waveland and Bay St. Louis would participate in

activities as day campers. Golden Fairconneture, one such resident, remembers enjoying Gulfside’s recreational facilities, swimming in the Mississippi Sound, and playing on the “beautiful” sand beach.

In addition to recreation, Gulfside played a key role in the Civil Rights movement. The organization’s website explains that they served as a “staging area for opposition to racism and segregation.” Judge Constance Baker Motel had headquarters at Gulfside during the James Meredith case in 1962.

When the Methodist church united its African American



Enjoying the water at Gulfside on a summer day



Althea Belton (left) and Cheryl Thompson (right)
(photo by Wendy Sullivan)

assembly hosted volunteers from around the country who had come to help the coast recover.

There's also a new office, located at 301 Herlihy Street in Waveland. Inside the building is the beautiful Katrina Cross made of stained glass recovered from the grounds after Katrina. Leroy Parkins, a Katrina volunteer, created a table, a cross, and a podium using driftwood.

Althea Belton recently joined the Gulfside staff as community outreach coordinator and missionary. She recently replied, "I am excited about the history and the opportunity to build the Gulfside community through collaboration.



This is a photo of the Bishop Kelly Open Air Chapel, built in her honor after the devastation of Hurricane Katrina in August 2005.

(photo by Wendy Sullivan)

RUSSELL GUERIN RECEIVES AWARD

By James Keating

The Award Committee of the Mississippi Historical Society selected Russell Guerin to be presented an Award of Merit at the March 10-11, 2022 meeting in Hattiesburg.

Around 1995, Russell visited the Lobrano House and met Charles Gray. Charles inspired Russell to do research and write about the history of Hancock County. Since then, Russell has written over ninety articles on his website, *A Creole in Mississippi*, many of which have been published in the Historical Society newsletter, on our website, or in his book, *Early Hancock County*. Russell has been fascinated by old records, property deeds, death certificates, court documents, and newspaper articles. He has been a mentor and a role model for the members of the Hancock County Historical Society who share his passion for written history.

THE ANDREW JACKSON HOUSE

There is a legend in Hancock County that President Andrew Jackson owned what was known as the



Russell Guerin

Jackson House on South Beach Blvd. in Waveland. As with most legends and tales, there is some truth to the story and some myth. The truth is that there *was* such a house in the Waveland area, and the myth is that the house and property were not owned by President Andrew Jackson. The truth is that the owner was Andrew Jackson, Jr., the adopted son of the President. The son, his wife, Sarah, and their son, Samuel, bought the property several years after the President's death.

(For more detailed information, please check the HCHS website.)



The Andrew Jackson House



Katherine Ohman, Dr. Christian Stephenson (Mississippi State Extension Service County Agent), Anita Warner (Arbor Day Chair), and Al Reisz



Kay Stroehman, Ginny Littlefield (President of the Bay-Waveland Garden Club), Anita Warner, Barbara Huet, Bob Huet, and Mely Straub



Raul Verduzco and his son Isaac—two great volunteers who dug the hole for the new tree

ARBOR DAY

By

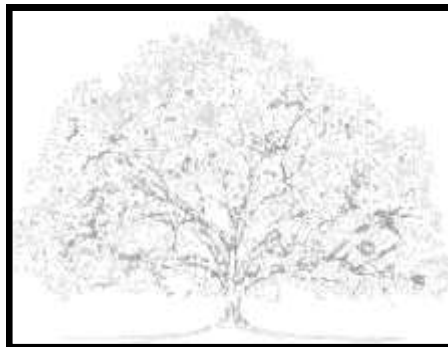
Anita Warner
Bay/Waveland Garden Club and
Historical Society Oak Tree Registrar

The term *Arbor Day* literally means tree day, and the word *arbor* comes from the Latin word for tree. Arbor Day is celebrated in Mississippi on the second Friday in February. This year on Arbor Day, February 11, the Bay Waveland Garden Club installed a 12' live oak tree (*Quercus Virginiana*) in the Bay Saint Louis Community Garden, located at 400 Bookter St. the corner of St. Francis. This new oak tree was planted very near the spot where the registered live oak, "Saint Francis," stood before it was severely damaged in Hurricane Zeta in late October 2020. The community garden is a project sponsored by a committee of four citizen volunteers who oversee the edible forest and the garden beds. They are Katharine Ohman, Al Reisz, Albert Gherich, and Dr. Christian Stephenson, Mississippi State Extension Service County Agent.

Arbor Day Chair Anita Warner oversaw the process of preparing the ground and planting the tree with the aid of Raul and Isaac

Verduzco.

The Live Oak Tree Registry is sponsored by the Bay Waveland Garden Club and the Hancock County Historical Society. Their mission is to register live oak trees that are one hundred years old or older within Hancock County. In addition it is their intention to promote and conserve these natural resources that promote historical events, aesthetic value, and environmental significance. To date we have registered over six hundred live oak trees in Hancock County.



TREE REGISTRATION

If you have a live oak tree or trees on your property in Hancock County that you would like to register, you may get in touch with Anita Warner at treeregistry@gmail.com or call the Hancock County Historical Society at 228-467-4090.

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.

LEA YOUNG

Director of Communications

Lea Young is a native of Missouri and graduate of St. Louis University with a BS in geography/biology. She began her career as an urban planner, one of only two women in her field in the state.

She moved to New Orleans in the 1970's with her engineer husband. She raised two sons there while pursuing a career that included marketing, real estate sales, and as a radio/TV talk show host. She spent twenty-six years as the Public Information Director for the Office of the Orleans Parish Civil Sheriff. In this capacity she also oversaw the community outreach programs of the Reserve Deputies Association.



LEA YOUNG

In a volunteer capacity she was active in many community based organizations and served on the boards of the Alliance for Good Government, the Alliance for Affordable Energy, several civic and neighborhood associations, and president of the New Orleans League of Women Voters. For the last several years she was a history docent at the Historic New Orleans Collection. She has owned her house at 211 de Montluzin since 2002 but only moved to the Bay as a full time resident in March, 2020.

RON THORP

Chairman of the House

I was born on the southeast coast of Rhode Island. Since then I have lived on the northwest coast of the state of Washington, the southeast coast of Georgia, as well as the banks of the Chattahoochee River in Georgia, and in the Heart of Texas. All travel arrangements were made possible by the U.S. Army. They even gave me a tour of Vietnam as a helicopter pilot and allowed me to retire from the Reserves as a Lt. Colonel. During my five years of active duty, I met my future wife, Gretchen Clasen, while

she was attending college at TCU. We have been married for fifty one years and have two children and two grandchildren.

Upon completion of active duty, we moved to Houston, Texas where we lived for thirty five years. While living in Texas, I was involved with our church, local schools, and Boy Scouts for thirty years. I worked retail, was district sales manager for an insurance company, started an office supply company, and built and administered a storage facility business. Texas was very good to us, and we often return to visit family and friends, who also love to visit us in Bay St. Louis.

Being from New Orleans, Gretchen would vacation with her family in Bay St. Louis. We continued that tradition with our children and in retirement finally moved here in 2007.

MICHELLE BREISACHER

Michelle Gaudet Breisacher was born and reared in New Orleans. She attended college at the University of New Orleans from which she received a degree in Ele-



RON THORP



MICHELLE BREISACHER

mentary Education. She has spent thirty-two years as a teacher in Catholic schools in various parts of the United States.

She and her family moved from New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina and lived in various places: Colorado, San Antonio, and the District of Columbia before returning to the New Orleans area and then to their present home in Waveland, MS.

While living in these other cities after Katrina, Michelle continued her teaching career as teacher or as a substitute. Presently she works in St. Bernard Parish for her former employer, Our Lady of Prompt Succor, as a substitute teacher.

She and her husband Karl reside in Waveland with three of their nine children, the three youngest boys. Three of their daughters are presently attending college, and the three grown children live with their families in other areas of the country. In addition she and Karl are the grandparents of two young children.

She is a member and officer of Alpha Xi Delta Alumni Association, and she and her family are members of Our Lady of the Gulf Catholic Church.

A fun fact of Michelle is that she loves fried catfish!

NEW MEMBERS

Stephen Champagne
Bay St. Louis, MS

Nell Frisbie
Bay St. Louis, MS

Hope Kergosien
Bay St. Louis, MS

Emma Connolly
Waveland, MS

Edwina Hughes
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