

THE

HISTORIAN

OF HANCOCK COUNTY

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Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi

May 2022

COMING EVENTS AT LOBRANO HOUSE

The monthly luncheon meeting will be held on Thursday, May 19, 2022 at noon at the Kate Lobrano House. The speaker will be Thomas Stennis, who will speak on Amtrak returning to the New Orleans to Mobile run. **Reservations are required** and may be made by calling 228-467-4090. **Please call by noon on Wednesday, May 18,** 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 non-members,** 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 blackened catfish, dirty rice, potato salad, triple chocolate brownies, and rolls.



This photo of the LaFrance marina was taken in 2022. The marina is owned and operated by Quitman and Kyong Suk Cates.

ANSLEY II

By
James Keating, M.D.
Virginia Olander, Editor

In the most southern part of Mississippi in the coastal county of Hancock, there is the fishing village of Ansley with a two-hundred year history worth recounting. This companion article, Ansley II, tells the story of the town after 1940 when “Poss” and Mabel LaFrance started an important landmark, The LaFrance Marina. The business survives today

owned and operated by Quitman and Kyong Cates. Another item of interest in Ansley is a large liquid natural gas (LNG) depot on Lower Bay Road, an important energy infrastructure asset for Hancock County. A salient feature in the neighborhood is the extensive, pristine, coastal marshland which is a wilderness preserve owned and maintained by the state of Mississippi. One of the oldest families in the neighborhood is the Ladner family.

An enduring landmark in Ansley is the famous LaFrance Marina in the village on Bayou Campbell. The story of “Poss” LaFrance symbolizes the charac-

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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.”

ter and spirit of this neighborhood in the twentieth century. Jules “Poss” LaFrance (1913-2004) was born in Ansley. His father was from Point la Hache, LA, but his mother was from the local Dorn and Ladner families, two of the oldest in the area. His family spoke French, but Poss hated the language and refused to speak it, preferring English. His mother’s family also had some Choctaw blood. His uncle coined the nickname “Poss” when he was a boy, but its meaning is obscure. Poss had only three years of grammar school, which was located two miles from his home. Nevertheless, he was a “truly educated man who was successful in a variety of pursuits,” but is principally known for the marina at Ansley which bears his name. Poss and that marina embody the soul of Ansley.

In 1923 the village of Ansley had around fourteen families, and the center of this small hamlet was where the railroad tracks crossed the main road. Poss’s family lived in a two room cottage with open windows and mosquitoes most of the year. Poss did physical labor

at an early age. He married Mabel Dorn (1906-1988) in 1939, and they started a fishing camp in 1940. They lived in a two-room bungalow, “trapped, run cows, and raised hogs,” glad to survive hard times during the Depression.

Poss started collecting skiffs for rental to fishermen for \$1.50 a day. He repaired old broken ones and learned how to build new ones from cypress wood. In 1948, Poss started working for the county clearing roads, which had been overgrown since the Hurricane of 1947. It was so bad that a horse and wagon could barely make it through the Old Lower Bay Road and Whites Road which provided the only byway from Ansley to Pearlinton.

In 1953, Poss bought a used fishing boat from a man who lived in Shell Beach, LA, for \$3,500 which he named “Mabel L” after his wife. The Biloxi-type power boat was thirty-five feet long with a shallow hull made of cypress. Poss could now fish for live bait such as shrimp, cocahoe minnows, and small crabs, used by his customers fishing for salt water reds

President’s Corner

It is with sadness that I write about the passing of Charles Harry Gray. While much has been written and will be written about Charles, I will only comment briefly on his impact on the Hancock County Historical Society. When Charles joined the Society in 1985, he was the seventh member and today we have almost 300 members, thanks largely to the efforts of Charles. He personally took pictures of hundreds of homes in the county and cataloged them including historical notes. Charles secured the Kate Lobrano House for the Society’s headquarters, computerized our operations, and began the task of digitalizing our records. He had an encyclopedic memory for all things historical regarding Hancock County and beyond. Charles was a man with a mission and inspired others over the years to take up the cause. I consider myself fortunate to have known Charles and to be a part of the legacy he created.

Chris Roth
President



Poss and Mabel LaFrance

and specks. Business improved with the addition of the live bait boat. As he made more money, he added improvements such as a wharf, the LaFrance Marina store, a live bait shop, and a fuel dock. In 1973, Poss sold out the whole operation to Dave Robertson from Independence, LA. Poss then retired. He passed away in 2007 and was buried in the Bayou Caddy Catholic Cemetery next to Mabel.

Between 1973 and 2005, the LaFrance Marina changed hands several times. Quitman Cates sold his dry cleaning business in Memphis, TN, and decided to rebuild the LaFrance Marina in 2007. Quitman Cates (b. 1946) married in 1999 a fellow American citizen of Memphis of Korean descent, Kyong Suk. They have a daughter currently studying at the University of Mississippi. Quitman and Kyong run the business, and they rebuilt the wharf, marina store with live bait tanks, and fuel dock. An earlier development, the Heron Bay Estates, had con-

structed slips and roads in the harbor. However, the many camps in this development were destroyed by Katrina. Quitman has a boat to catch live bait.

In the last fifteen years, LaFrance Marina has grown and prospered. Quitman has one hundred campsites that supply water, sewerage, and electricity (30/50 amps). Motor homes are owned by the tenants that might sell for \$20,000-\$100,000. These campers live in the village off-and-on many months of the year and love to fish and hunt. In Ansley the spirit of Poss and Mabel LaFrance lives on in Quitman and Kyong Cates.

On the Lower Bay Road there is a large liquid natural gas depot owned by Kinder Morgan, Inc. This company is one of the largest energy infrastructure companies in North America. It owns and operates a network of liquid natural gas pipelines and terminals. This network of pipelines stretches from California to New England. The installation was constructed in the 1950s by the Tennessee Gas Pipeline Company which is now a subsidiary of Kinder Morgan, Inc. Over the last seventy years, there have been occasional reports of incidents of



Quitman Cates

fuel leaks and explosions. The fossil fuel comes from refineries in Empire, LA. A pipeline crosses the bottom of Lake Borgne and then enters the pipeline canal which intersects the Outside Campbell Bayou and then extends overland to the big depot previously mentioned.

The Terrell family owns land just west of Ansley. A petroleum pipeline that also originates in Empire, LA, crosses their property built during the 1960s by the Colonial Pipeline Company for the Gulf Oil Company. A few oil wells were drilled in Hancock County during the twentieth century, but none are active today. An inspection of a satellite map will disclose an extensive grid of ditches on the Terrell property dug around 1956 by the Mississippi Mosquito Control Agency.

There is a Sportsmens Lake in the eastern part of Ansley, formed during the construction of the railroad in 1870. Dirt from the land was used to build up the foundation of the tracks. A private Turkey Bayou Airpark (runway) was constructed to service this private community and fishing camp.

The entire coastal marshland from the East Pearl River to the mouth of Bayou Caddy (Point Clear) is a continuous wetland preserve maintained by the Mississippi Land Conservation Assistance Network. Within these marshes are ridges, hammocks, or relatively elevated land that resemble barrier islands. They support pine, cedar, and oak stands. Most of the other

marshland contains needle rush, cord grass, salt-meadow, bulrush, reed, or salt grass.

The preserve was acquired from 1998-2013 by a purchase of four major tracts of land: Baldwin, Breckendorf, Ladner, and Stein-Woodward by the Mississippi Coastal Preserve Program. The Baldwin Project was the largest acquisition which comprises the western half of this preserve. It is comprised of 2,483 acres purchased for \$1,167,868 in 2013 from the Gustave B. Baldwin family.

The Ladner family are longtime residents of Ansley. Coburn "Bud" Ladner (1906-1991) was an early resident of Ansley who was the only son of Charles Ladner and Alvina LaFontaine. Bud married his childhood sweetheart, Louise LaFontaine, and they had six children. Bud was a carpenter and an outdoor sportsman. They owned land in Ansley on Bud Ladner Road which goes to the Bayou Caddy Cemetery. One of their six children was Ernest "Bully" Ladner, Sr. (1930-2008), who owned land next to the cemetery and was a caretaker there. Bully was a cattle farmer that grazed his cattle on local marshland such as the Terrell property which is enclosed by the Grand Plains Bayou just west of Ansley. This property is in what used to be called the Claiborne neighborhood that was a flag stop on the original L&N Railroad back in the day. The Terrell family from New Orleans still owns this property.

Another member of the important Ladner family was James Arland "Jim" Ladner (1936-2020). He and his wife, Barbara E. Bennett (1939-1985), moved to Ansley from Bayou LeCroix in 1964 because of the

formation of the NASA Buffer Zone. They had family in Ansley, and there was good land for farming and raising cattle in the area. Jim owned and operated Ladner's Friendly Inn which developed a popular baseball field across the road from his tavern and fostered baseball tournaments every summer between different leagues in the region. There was also a Red Barn Tavern in Ansley next to the railroad tracks, but it was removed when the road was moved for construction related to the Heron Bay Estates project.

James "Jimmie" Ladner, Jr. (b. 1962), grew up in Ansley. In 1999, Jimmie was elected Hancock County Assessor and Tax Collector. He married Cheryl Calhoun (b. 1963) from Waveland, who is an insurance agent. They have two daughters, Heather and Hillary. Jimmie has had an admirable record of service to Hancock County in the last twenty-three years.

In conclusion, the story of the LaFrance Marina is a testament to the adage that success is usually the product of hard work, sound investment of capital, and a touch of good luck. The life of Poss and Mabel LaFrance embodies the experience of many of our ancestors in Hancock County who worked hard all their lives on farms, fishing boats, and small businesses like the LaFrance Marina. These enterprises laid the bedrock foundation of our present-day robust economy. It is sometimes hard to believe the hard-scrabble conditions that most inhabitants of Hancock County endured one hundred years ago. One example of prudent investment into the energy infrastructure was the LNG pipeline constructed by the Tennessee Gas Pipeline Company during the 1950s. Conservation of our wet-

lands along the coast has been successfully accomplished in Ansley by the purchase and creation of the Hancock County Coastal Marsh Preserve. Some of the most important leaders of Hancock County have come from Ansley.

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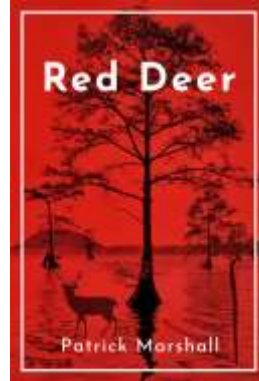
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