

THE

HISTORIAN

OF HANCOCK COUNTY

www.hancockcountyhistoricalsociety.com

Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi

February 2023

COMING EVENTS AT LOBRANO HOUSE

The monthly luncheon meeting will be held on Thursday, February 16, 2023, at noon at the Kate Lobrano House. The guest speakers will be Dr. Bill Bradford and Mary Harris who will speak on medical care in Hancock County. **Reservations are required** and may be made by calling 228-467-4090. **Please call by noon on Wednesday, February 15**, 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 \$15.00 for members and \$17.00 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 pulled pork, hash brown casserole, coleslaw, éclair cake, and yeast rolls.



Judd Brooke and his family have a tradition of loving the piney woods.

NECAISE CROSSING II

By
James Keating, M.D.

Some of the loveliest rural land on the Gulf Coast is located in the northeast section of Hancock County. Old agricultural neighborhoods that include Necaïse Crossing, Sellers, Crane Creek, and Steep Hollow share a common historical, cultural heritage over 180 years. Some of the present-day landowners are fifth generation cattle farmers. Other residents love the longleaf pine trees, serving as good stewards of their forests. These codependent

communities and some of their interesting inhabitants are the subject of this article and several forthcoming articles.

Judd Brooke (b. 1947) owns a large tract of forest land in Hancock County, and his family has a tradition of loving the piney woods. Judd's father, Clyde A. Brooke (1922-2009), from Ruston, LA, was a geologist for the Amico Oil Company who many years ago bought 140 acres at \$12.50 an acre in the Necaïse Crossing area. Clyde married Ruth Ola Fultz (1921-2020) from Montgomery County, Texas, who was a school teacher. Clyde loved to hunt quail. The Brooke Family has enlarged their forest acquisition from 140 acres to 4,400



THE HISTORIAN

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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.”

acres.

Judd Brooke went to high school in Houston and graduated from Millsaps College in 1971. He did graduate work in psychology at Boston College. Divorced, he worked for Amico negotiating land leases. Judd moved to Necaise Crossing in 1991 and commuted to work. Early retirement in 1997 allowed him to live full time in Necaise Crossing in his beloved forest he called Brookewood.

Judd reports that the management of forest land in today’s marketplace is a challenge for the individual landowner who embraces the concept of prudent forest management. The timber mills are not paying top dollar for pine wood in today’s market. Judd is using his personal funds to pay property taxes (\$6.00/acre), liability insurance, chemical spray for Cogon grass (\$80.00/acre), control fires (\$35.00/acre), and replanting (\$175.00/acre). A full-time staff employee is needed to manage every one thousand acres maintaining land line (perimeter fence), fire lanes, creek crossing, and reducing invasive species like Chinese pivot, Japanese climbing fern, and Cogon grass. Traps are employed to slaughter seventy-five hogs a year. Many

forest land owners are not cutting their pine timber, waiting for the price of pine wood to rise.

The Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) supports programs to reestablish long leaf pine ecosystems. There are resource dollars (\$32.00/acre) for prescribed fires and cost sharing for replanting activity. A conservation easement can offer benefits for forest owners such as Judd that would allow significant tax write-off benefits or direct payments.

A big headache for landowners is a hunter who does not always respect private property. At present, there is a fair deer population in Judd’s forest, whereas from 1952 until 1967 there were almost no deer on the land. Judd does not lease his land to hunters, and his woods are posted. Nevertheless, nuisance dog/deer trespassing hampers forest management striving to reach objectives of wildlife management. Some hunters in the past have used dogs trained to drive the game to a local county road just off the property border. The exposed deer crossing the road were then shot by the hunters with relative impunity. Fortunately, the practice has diminished significantly in the recent past in Hancock County be-

President’s Corner

Chili Cook Off, 2nd Saturday’s “HOT Spot,” Cardboard Boat Race, and Saint Augustine Centennial Celebration are opportunities for us to showcase the resources and importance of the Hancock County Historical Society.

Our sponsorship or participation in these events are opportunities for us to make the public aware of and encourage support of our mission.

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Your membership and contributions allow us to remain a vital resource to our community.

Chris Roth

President



Jim Currie is a passionate conservationist of longleaf piney forests.

cause of cooperative, collective push-back by local landowners. There is a need to change these hunting laws in Mississippi as has been done in Texas and other states.

Jim Currie and his wife, Laura, live in Leetown, near their childhood friend, Judd Brooke, also down Necaise-Caesar Road. They retired from a family business in 1999 in Belize, which was in printing and office supplies. In 1999 they bought two hundred acres of forest from Judd, and over time they have enlarged their holdings to 1,170 acres. They share with friend Judd the same love of the piney forest, but struggle to pay for the necessary forest management. Jim grazes cattle in his forest. The land value has ranged from \$1,500/acre to \$2,000/acre.

Wildlife Mississippi is a private, non-profit organization dedicated to conserving, restoring, and enhancing fish, wildlife, and plant habitation throughout Mississippi. Judd Brooke and Jim Currie are passionate conservationists who hold leadership roles in this operation. Wildlife Mississippi contributes to the conservation and expansion of longleaf pine habitats through a variety of efforts including the promotion of conservation easements on private lands, prescribed burning, control of invasive plants on public and private lands, and development of additional con-

servation incentives for private landowners. Longleaf pine forests support species such as gopher tortoises, black bears, Mississippi gopher frogs, white tail deer, wild turkeys, quail, and red-cockaded woodpeckers.

Judd and Jim are good stewards of their longleaf piney forest wildlife habitat. Roughly ninety percent of Mississippi land is privately owned. A guiding principle of Wildlife Mississippi is that hunting, fishing, and other forms of outdoor recreation are part of Mississippi's natural heritage and should be utilized as a

means to provide a sustainable source of food, recreation, and as a means of fish and wildlife management based on sound science. Judd and Jim wish to dedicate their land as an easement to Wildlife Mississippi to protect their longleaf forest in perpetuity in return for financial support to accomplish their goal.

Cattle farming has been a consistently profitable sector of the agriculture economy of Hancock County over the last two hundred years. Other sectors such as timber, cotton, dairy, and tung oil have come and gone. In the antebellum era, more people earned a livelihood raising cattle than in any other endeavor. Livestock in Hancock County farms included cattle, hogs, and sheep. More of the cattle farms past and present were located in the northeast part of the county, which is a quite picturesque, gently rolling hill landscape with abundant water and soil, excellent for pasture. In the 20th Century the local stockyard was in Dedeaux on the county line between Hancock and Harrison counties. It was here that Jules "Poss" LaFrance sold his cattle which he raised and drove from his home in Ansley.

Shelby Ladner remembers much of the history of Necaise Crossing during the 1950s.



The Ladner Family has historically raised cattle since colonial days in Hancock County, first by the patriarch Christian Ladner on Cat Island who later moved inland. One of his many descendants, Chandler Ladner (1900-1979), bought forty acres in 1920 for \$1.25/acre and began his farm in Necaise Crossing with four heifers. Other Ladners have lived in Necaise Crossing for seventy-five years like the Hebrew Ladner Family. Today, three generations of the descendants of Chandler Ladner operate a combined herd of two hundred cows and 1,500 acres of pasture land.

Shelby Ladner (b. 1928) is a rich source of information and describes the local history of cattle farming over the last one hundred years. Shelby remembers as a young boy riding with his father in their old logging truck to Picayune to shop on Saturdays for household staples like rice and beans. Shelby remembers that the local farmers like his dad gathered behind the Bank of Picayune and talked for hours. The Thigpen Hardware Store was another place of business his father frequented. Shelby reports that in his youth there were many sheep and cows in the adjacent open range land. His father on occasion grew soybeans, sugar cane, and sweet potatoes as a cash crop.

Shelby met his wife, Elora (b. 1939), at a ball game between the Sellers School, which Shelby attended, and the Dedeaux School, which Elora attended. They married in 1957 and had three children: Kathy, Tracy, and David. The Ladner Family has augmented their income like so many farmers in the United States with employment at institutions like the Stennis Space Center. Shelby worked at Stennis in the maintenance department for thirty-seven years. Son David has his own business and is an independent contractor with heavy equipment such as bull dozers that clear land and build ponds.

Grandson Destin is a Quality Inspector at Stennis, and he and his wife, Bridget, operate a processing plant and meat market in Necaise Crossing.

Shelby has a herd dog named "Bullet" that can move a herd of cows from one pasture of green rye grass to a forest pasture in five minutes. The cows are given four hours a day only in the rye grass pasture because they would eat all of the grass in short order if given the opportunity. Shelby's land is divided into approximately ten separate pastures that are cultivated into different stages of grass grown or harvested for storage as bails of hay for the winter when there is no good pasture crop. At one time Shelby grew corn for feed, but the feral swine decimated his fields, and corn was labor intensive. Rye is the crop now grown to provide pasture to feed the herd.

On weekends, Shelby, his son David, and his grandson, Dustin, can be found working the farm. Dustin and his wife, Bridget, have recently invested in a USDA Processing and Meat Market business called "A Cut Above." It is located just down the Necaise Anner Road at the intersection of the Necaise Caesar Road. The slaughter house processes mostly beef, but can also process hogs, goats, and sheep. This vertical integration of cattle farming offers the other cattle farmers a local plant for their livestock. "A Cut Above" does not process deer for a variety of reasons. However, there are many goats in De-

deaux, and goat meat and mutton are popular meats in Asian and Middle Eastern immigrant cuisine.

In days gone by, Necaise Crossing could boast about having a movie house, two grocery stores, a general store, and three beer joints—Blue Bird, Hill Top, and Bear's Den. Furthermore, this community enjoyed having a rodeo area that hosted a yearly gumbo festival. Presently, there are several important businesses: the Chevron gas station, the Wilson Welding and Fabrication company, and the Dixieland Feed and Grain store.

In conclusion, there are landowners in Necaise Crossing that love the longleaf piney forest. Judd Brooke and Jim Currie support the mission of conservation programs such as Wildlife Mississippi that preserves the longleaf pine forest wildlife habitat. Cattle farming has been a principal vocation in Hancock County economic history. The Ladner, Moran, and Necaise Families have raised cattle for many years, and their lands have been passed down from one generation to the next. Three generations of the Chandler Ladner family tree not only herd beef cattle but now operate a processing plant and meat market.

SOURCES:

- Boyles, Alyene and Cummins, James L., editors. *Wildlife Mississippi: Common Sense Conservation* Dallas: Dallas Printing, Inc., 2018
 Brooke, Judd. Personal Interview, 6



Shelby, David, and Dustin Ladner cut timber with their Wood-Mizer portable sawmill on a Saturday afternoon.

- Dec. 2022.
 Currie, James. Personal Interview, 6 Dec. 2022,
 Ladner, Bridget. Personal Interview, 9 Dec. 2022.
 Ladner, Hubert. "Necaise Crossing." *Ride This Train: People of the Piney Woods*. Bloomington, IN: Books Library Publishing, Co., 2003.
 Ladner, Shelby. Personal Interview, 10 December 2022.

Thank you to Connie Heizmann for the donation of note cards printed from her beautiful original watercolors. The raffle for four cards sold at January's luncheon was quit profitable! Connie has also donated copies of her two books *Scrapbook of Treasured Memories* and *Gulf Coast Memory Scrapbook*. The books and the note cards are available for purchase at the Lobrano House.

NEW MEMBERS

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An inspirational tribute to four New Orleans Saints fans and to the team they loved. This book is for anyone who is an avid Saints fan or who has lost a loved one who loved and was devoted to the Saints team. It is a joyful memoir and is sure to bring pleasure to Saints fans everywhere as it explores the life lessons learned by giving and receiving unconditional support and love. The Forever Saints Fan Club is about joy, hope, courage, devotion, love and faith.

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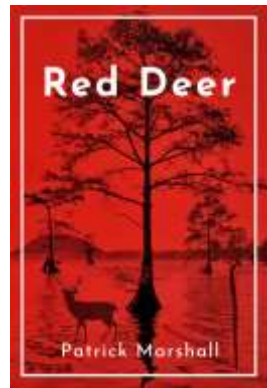
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