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HISTORIAN



OF HANCOCK COUNTY

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Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi

June 2023

COMING EVENTS AT LOBRANO HOUSE

The monthly luncheon meeting will be held on Thursday, June 15, 2023, at noon at the Kate Lobrano House. The guest speaker will be Ron Thorp, who serves as Chairman of the House Committee on the HCHS Board of Directors. He and his wife Gretchen moved to Hancock County permanently in 2007. He plans to entertain us with fun, facts, and fellowship. **Reservations are required** and may be made by calling 228-467-4090. **Please call by noon on Wednesday, June 14**, to make your reservation. Seating is limited to forty-eight (48) people, and we need to order the correct number of lunches. **Served at noon, lunch is \$15.00 for members and \$17.00 for nonmembers**, payable at the door. The catering order is submitted on Wednesday at noon prior to the luncheon on Thursday. If you need to cancel your reservation, please call by noon on Wednesday 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 hamburger steak, parsley potatoes, green beans, yeast rolls, and banana bread cobbler.



This log dogtrot house was constructed in 1902 and was home to four generations of the legendary Shaw Family. The farm was a sheep station to the neighborhood offering its facilities for sheering until 1958 when open range herding ended, precluding herders having large herds of sheep. In 2006 it was donated by the Shaw Family to the Land Trust for the Mississippi Coastal Plain to be an outdoor southern folk museum.

STEEP HOLLOW II

By
James Keating, MD

Rural historic neighborhoods in Hancock County were settled in the Nineteenth Century by pioneer farm families that migrated from the Atlantic seacoast. The opportunity to acquire good land by a process called homesteading was a compelling incentive for a family to move to the piney forest. The neighborhoods of Steep Hollow and Barth are considered part of the story of the

network of settlements in Hancock County previously described in earlier newsletters revealing the shared history of Crane Creek, Sellers, and Necaise Crossing. The Smith Family will be featured in this article. Early settlers included Nimrod Smith and John Smith Sr. Their present-day descendants, Jody Jones, and his mother, Charleen Jones, provide us with interesting genealogy and rich history of the early Steep Hollow settlement. A nicely preserved outdoor museum, the "Shaw Homestead," is maintained in Barth as a historic landmark and will be presented, which will provide the reader with an education depicting how the

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Eddie Coleman, Editor
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**LOBRANO HOUSE
HOURS**

MONDAY — FRIDAY
10:00AM — 3:00PM
WEDNESDAY—10:00AM—
5:00PM
SATURDAY—1:00PM—3:00PM

CLOSED 12—1 (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.”

pioneer farm family survived and prospered in these challenging times.

Nimrod Smith (1798-1855) was one of the original pioneer settlers in Sellers (Please see the March 2023 *Historian*). Nimrod has at least ten generations of descendants in the northeast region of Hancock County. His great-great-great-great grandson is a resident of Steep Hollow, Joseph “Jody” Jones (b. 1974). Jody is a CWI (Certified Welding Instructor) that operates in the area as an independent contractor. He is married to Jenae Ladner who is from Dedeaux. They have two children: Lane and Bailey. Jody attended high school in Poplarville and then went to welding school where he learned his trade. Jenae is a medical assistant. They live in the same neighborhood as Dubois Ladner (Please see the May 2003 *Historian*.) on Luke Jones Road. Jody is a rich source of local history.

Jody reports that his great-great-great grandmother, Hannah Smith (1814-1908), married John Smith, Sr. (1818-1857) though she and John were not closely related. This family came from the Caroli-

nas originally. They took a homestead on the Big Biloxi River area in Harrison County near Saucier, MS. Sadly, John died in 1857 leaving Hannah with eight children, and she was pregnant. Hannah promptly moved to Steep Hollow to a site approximately one fourth of a mile from the present-day Steep Hollow Church. She chose this area because there were members of the Smith Family in the general vicinity and she also had friends and family there in the Dedeaux, Harriel, Rutillus and Herndon families. These families were considered some of the first settlers in Steep Hollow. These families had lived in the same neighborhood in North Carolina. In addition they had significant resources for that time and indeed were “well-to-do” back in their home community in rural North Carolina.

Hannah did not remarry. Over her lifetime, she and her family prospered. When she died, she had accumulated 640 acres of good farmland. Some of her descendants still live on that land in Steep Hollow. She reared nine children, and these offspring's became leaders of the community. Her youngest son,

PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

Cause for celebration: Saint Augustine Seminary will be celebrating its Centennial October 28-29, 2023. Founded by the Society of Diving Word (SVD), this was the first seminary to train Black priests in the United States. The SVD originally came to Mississippi in the early nineteen hundreds to educate Black children and despite efforts by the KKK and Jim Crow era prohibition, they were successful.

The celebration weekend will include tours of the grounds, historical exhibitions, food trucks, and musical entertainment on Saturday. On Sunday there will be a reenactment of the original procession, led by a jazz band, from Saint Rose Church to the seminary, followed by mass and lunch hosted by the parishioners of Saint Rose.

As our community did 100 years ago, please join us in support of this historical celebration.

Chris Roth
President



Jody and Jenae Jones met in 1993 through a mutual friend. Jenae comes from the old Ladner Family in Dedeaux. They married in 1994 and reared two children. Jody's father, Luke Jones, is a Native American Navy Viet Nam War veteran.

Telfair Smith, also accumulated a large tract of farmland. He donated land for the school and the Steep Hollow Baptist Church. Telfair married Miranda Breland. Hannah died in 1908 and was the first person to be buried in the Old Smith Cemetery on Barth Road. Another cemetery in town is the New Steep Hollow Baptist Church Cemetery.

These pioneer settlers generated a rural society that survived, despite the absence of modern conveniences such as electricity, plumbing, or running water. These "homesteaders" reared large families, and their descendants are the rich fabric of the Hancock County society today. It is important for modern readers to understand how herders, cattlemen, and subsistence farmers lived in the Nineteenth Century. Fortunately, a quintessential sheep farm has been preserved in its original form as an outdoor museum in this neighborhood called the "Shaw Homestead," which will be presented later in this article. Pioneer settlers like Hannah Smith populated the United States from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean. In one hundred years the

most prosperous, robust national economy in history grew out of their hard work and ingenuity. The extended Smith Family stretched out in every direction. One relative, "Poplar" Jim Smith, was the namesake of Poplarville and was one of the original settlers of that town. Jim Smith had a grove of poplar trees on his farm.

Jody's mother, Charleen Ladnier Jones (b. 1935), attended Steep Hollow School from grades one through six. She then attended middle school and high school at the Savannah School. Charleen married one of her high school classmates, Billy Ladnier, in 1963 and later Leonard "Luke" Eugene Jones (1942-1991) in 1974. She belongs to the Steep Hollow Baptist Church. In the 1940's, there was a division in the church, and half of the members broke away and built the Crane Creek Baptist Church. Charleen was a school bus driver her senior year of high school. She also worked at the local Chief Petty Officer's Club. It was there that she met Luke.

Charleen remembers when dresses were made out of the mate-

rial that was used to package animal feed. A farmer's wife chose a particular feed sack based on the specific pattern embedded in the fabric that matched the pattern on the last sack her family had purchased so that a dress to be made from that sack would have a uniform design. She also remembers the reason that dairy farming disappeared from the neighborhood in the mid-twentieth century. It was because of a public health requirement that dairy farmers use electrical milking machines rather than milking the cows by hand.

Charleen's second husband, Luke Jones, was a Native American and is Jody's father. Luke was a Navy Seabee (nickname for CB=Construction Battalion) for twenty-three years. He served four tours of duty in the Vietnam War. Unfortunately, he was exposed to Agent Orange. He died in 1991 from cardiovascular toxicity complications from Agent Orange. Jody's maternal grandparents were Biser Smith (1910-2005) and Wilma Harriel (1915-2005). Biser worked at the local sawmill and later made supplemental income with the Mississippi Highway Department. They lived at the intersection of Barth Road and Highway 53. They had several cows, and milking them was part of Jody's childhood chores.



Charleen Smith Ladnier Jones

The Shaws were another old and famous family of pioneer settlers in this general neighborhood. They migrated from Georgia and the Carolinas. The first Shaw to settle in the Crane Creek neighborhood was John Gadsden Shaw (1819-1885) (Please see the April 2023 *Historian*.) His grandson, Gilbert Shaw (1878-1943) married Melvina Ladner (1883-1973). They built a one-story, two-pen, dogtrot house of log construction in Barth, a neighborhood adjacent to Steep Hollow. A dogtrot is a breeze-way that connects two parts of a house. This Nineteenth Century domestic farm site has fortunately been preserved as an outdoor museum and is on the National Register of Historic Places. It is called "The Shaw Homestead" and was acquired by Land Trust for the Mississippi Coastal Plain. This treasure is also a Mississippi Coast National Heritage Area.

The Shaw Homestead contains several buildings besides the main house that include a separate kitchen, smoke house, jar house, corn crib, small grist mill, tractor shed, and barn. This historic site is open to the public twice a year, giving visitors a chance to see original folk architecture. These buildings were constructed by these pioneers themselves and few log houses of this vintage are still standing in the United States. The Shaws had little money, limited materials, and no formal training as architects or builders. Yet, the log dog-trot house was a unique American housing type, prevalent in the Tidewater South, consisting of two "pens" or structures, covered by a common or single roof with an open hallway between the two pens, allowing cross-circulation on hot, summer days. The notched corners of the logs employed by these pioneers indicates remarkable carpentry skills. The kitchen was usually built as a separate structure away from the main house as a protection from fires.

The Shaw Homestead is a house and not a cabin. The term "cabin" designates a more primitive log structure that is smaller, cruder, and more simply built. A log cabin was temporary shelter for a pioneer family, but a "house" such as the Shaw Homestead represented a more permanent and proper structure for a family living in this remote area of the Piney Woods. At the turn of the Twentieth Century, this farm house had no fences to keep livestock within pastureland. Livestock such as sheep, hogs, and cows were free-ranging in the adjacent forest. The only fences were situated around large truck gardens or other yards, designated to keep the animals out. There were fields of sugar cane, clover (hay), and corn on this farm. Sugar cane was converted to molasses on the premises. Fruit trees and nut trees also provided food. The Shaws kept a large herd of sheep which they sheered each spring. The income from the wool was significant supplemental income for the very few items that they could not produce themselves.



The corners of this log house were constructed using the half-dovetail notch technique which is self-locking and the most difficult type of notched corner to produce which reveals the remarkable carpentry skills of these pioneer farmers.

In conclusion, Steep Hollow has many inhabitants that are descendants of the several old pioneer farm families such as the Smith, Shaw, Saucier, Breland, De-deaux, Herndon, and Harriel clans. Jody Jones and his mother, Charleen, live in the same old neighborhood where many earlier generations of ancestors lived and prospered. Charleen has witnessed many changes in her lifetime such as an unpaved Highway 53 before 1960. In the 1940's and 1950's two major crops were pecans and tung nuts. Other crops cultivated which have diminished over time are corn, oats, soybeans, and cotton. Jody and his wife, Jenae, live in the same old neighborhood and have shared their family history for this article. The Shaw Homestead is a historic treasure maintained as a outdoor museum. The farm is preserved in much the form that existed when the family raised sheep. It demonstrates vividly the world of these pioneer farmers who are the ancestors of many citizens of Hancock and Pearl River counties. When the Shaw Homestead announces the next time it will be open to the public in the fall of 2023, this information will be presented in a future publication.

SOURCES

- Hariel, Doris. "John Smith and Hannah Smith." *Vertical Files*, Hancock County Historical Society, Bay St. Louis, MS.
- Jones, Charleen. Personal Interview. April 13, 2023.
- Jones, Joseph. Personal Interview. May 21, 2023.
- Rosenberg, Jeff. "The Shaw Homestead." *Embrace Your Cultural Story*. Spring 2023. Mississippi Gulf Coast National Heritage Publication.
- "Shaw Homestead: Homestead Life." Mississippi State University Gulf Coast Community Design Studio, Gulfport, MS, 2011.

WHAT FLOATS YOUR CARDBOARD BOAT

The Hancock County Historical Society hosted its third annual boat race on Saturday, May 13, 2023. Held in conjunction with Pirates Day in the Bay, the races had participants in Youth Individual, Youth Team, Adult Individual, and Adult Team with first, second, and third place finishers getting trophies.



Mississippi Gulf Coast Historical and Cultural Exposition

The City of Biloxi and Preserve Biloxi teamed up to present the Annual Mississippi Gulf Coast Historical and Cultural Exposition. The event was held on Friday and Saturday, May 5 and 6, 2023, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. each day at the Biloxi Visitor's Center.



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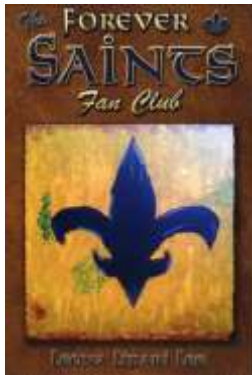
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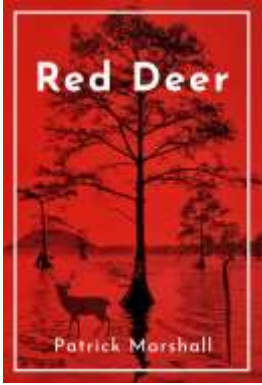
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