

THE

HISTORIAN



OF HANCOCK COUNTY

www.hancockcountyhistoricalsociety.com

Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi

JULY 2023

COMING EVENTS AT LOBRANO HOUSE

The monthly luncheon meeting will be held on Thursday, July 20, 2023, at noon at the Kate Lobrano House. The guest speaker will be Marcus Lassby, who joined the Hancock County Sheriff's Department in 2015. Today he will speak about the police work in dealing with problems along the coast such as drugs and trafficking. **Reservations are required** and may be made by calling 228-467-4090. **Please call by noon on Wednesday, July 19**, 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 chicken stew with biscuits, green salad, vegetable medley, and strawberry trifle.



These are the last Missionary Sisters of the Holy Spirit who taught at St. Rose School before it closed.

(photo courtesy of Society of the Divine Word Archives, Techny, IL)

HISTORY OF ST. ROSE SCHOOL

By
Jim Schott

On the last Sunday of January, 1995, the three remaining Missionary Sisters of the Holy Spirit addressed the congregation at St. Rose de Lima Catholic Church in Bay St. Louis. They searched for words to express what was in their hearts as they announced they would be leaving and no replacements would follow them. They invited the audience to celebrate the years of service recognizing it would be filled with memories of joy, surprise, grief,

and the shedding of tears.

The Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters first arrived in Bay St. Louis in September, 1924 to take charge of the St. Rose school for Black children. However, the history of the school goes back to 1867, well before their arrival. The earliest records recorded twenty-four students attending a no-name school attached to the east side of Our Lady of the Gulf (OLG) Church on Second Street. One room served as a school room and the other as a home for the teacher, Joseph Lavigne. When the school prospered, Fr. Henry LeDuc, pastor of OLG, built a small school at the rear of the OLG Church property which consisted of grades 1-6.

By 1885, the school had grown to eighty-five boys and girls. The Sisters of St. Joseph who ran St.



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MAILING ADDRESS:

P. O. Box 3356
Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi 39521

PHYSICAL ADDRESS:

108 Cue Street
Telephone [228] 467-4090

Email address:

hancockcountyhis@bellsouth.net

Website:

www.hancockcountyhistoricalsociety.com
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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.”

Joseph’s Academy for girls (established in 1854 on the current OLG church and rectory location) took charge and served both St. Joseph’s and the separate school for Black children which had now come to be called the St. Rose School. Until 1890, when a Black public school was opened, St. Rose was the only school for Black children in Bay St. Louis.

The St. Rose School attached to Our Lady of the Gulf persevered through many years of difficulties. Segregation laws prevented White and Black children from attending classes together. Finance for upkeep was not prioritized, and the nuns were often absent from the St. Rose School because of their double duties at St. Joseph’s. By 1918, the number of students had dwindled, and Black Catholics began to press for changes.

In 1923, St. Rose School was handed over to the care of the Society of the Divine Word Missionaries. It was at this same time that the Society was establishing St. Augustine Seminary as the first seminary for the training of Black men to be Catholic Priests. Dedicated at Bay St. Louis in the fall of 1923, the order had overcome op-

position from within the church and larger society to gain approvals and financing to build St. Augustine.

The Society of the Divine Word Missionaries and the Missionary Sisters of the Holy Spirit, both founded by St. Arnold Janssen, together formed an international missionary partnership and had ventured into Africa, China, and Oceania. They came to Mississippi in 1905 and gained approval from the Bishop of Natchez to take on a special mission to Black communities in central and northern Mississippi. They successfully built schools in Vicksburg, Jackson, Meridian, and Greenville that filled with Black children eager for education. But they struggled to reach parents and grow their churches. Recognizing that the Catholic Church remained closed to people of color because of segregation and the lack of Black priests and leadership, they overcame numerous barriers to establish St. Augustine Seminary.

Given the work of the SVD and Holy Spirit Sisters across Mississippi, Bishop Gerow assisted them to lead the new St. Rose School in 1923. Fr. Francis Baltes, a professor at the new St. Augustine

PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

Thanks to Mayor Mike Favre and the public works department, we now have two very attractive signs at both ends of Cue Street directing folks to the Kate Lobrano House. On Main and Cue the arrow points down the wrong way of a one-way street so driver discretion is advised.

Plans are in the making for the installation of a sidewalk star in front of the Society recognizing Charles Gray’s many contributions to the success of the Hancock County Historical Society—proof that one person can make a difference. Stay tuned for additional details.

Mercy Train: Next Stop Bay St. Louis. Please check page 4 of the newsletter for further information.

“It is not worthwhile to try to keep history from repeating itself, for man’s character will always make the prevention of repetitions impossible.”
Mark Twain

Chris Roth
President



This photo shows the first St. Rose de Lima School on 2nd St. where Holy Trinity is now.

Seminary, became the first administrator of the school. Our Lady of the Gulf turned over property for the purpose of establishing a new school building on Necaise Ave. Baltes quickly laid plans, hired Joseph Labat to construct, and campaigned for funding for the school. **He received \$4,000 from Sr. Catherine Drexel, who was later canonized by the Catholic Church, had established funds and services for missions to Indian and Black communities across the United States.**

Fr. Baltes then turned to the SVD's sister congregation, the Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters, to come to Bay St. Louis to run the school. The first five nuns arrived in 1924 to what they described as the bare minimum of a school— "Look up and you see the stars, look down and you see the ground." They were joined by three lay teachers (Clothilde Cospelich, Portia Labat, and Mary Bloom) and together they persevered to grow the school. Describing their pride in the school that they built as a "flagship for Catholic education..." standing "...tall and proud for many years weathering the bumps and grinds of progress."

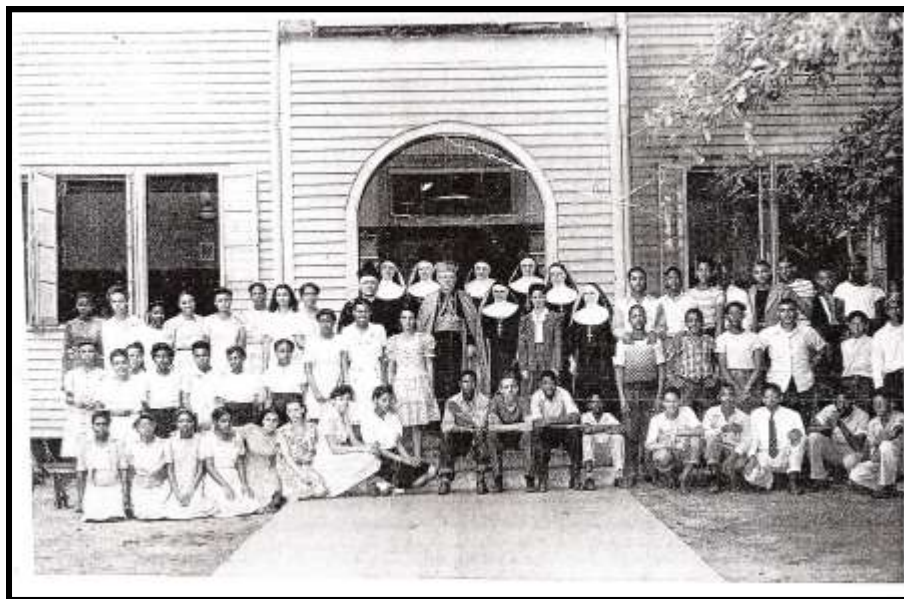
The new St. Rose School grew rapidly in the first year. Black Catholics, however, were still attending OLG Church when the Apostolic-Delegate of the United States (the Vatican's Ambassador to

the US) visited in 1924. Recognizing that Our Lady of the Gulf was too small for the congregation and that segregation restriction in mass and parish life continued to distance Black families from the church, he recommended that the church approve a new parish. Bishop Gerow applied for permission to establish a new parish, and Rome granted permission. The church was finished in November of 1926, and St. Rose de Lima was officially dedicated as a new parish that included the St. Rose school.

The new parish community of St. Rose de Lima committed itself to the school. Parents and

friends organized fund raising. Many organizations such as the Knights of Peter Claver, Alter Society, and Holy Name Society were formed to support church and school. By 1935, there were 236 students, a gymnasium, enlarged playground and a new sanitary system. By 1943, a high school had been added, and the total enrollment was nearly double that of the "separate but equal" public school for Black children which continued to be neglected by state and local White government. During the 1950s, diocesan school boards and accreditation standards were established for Catholic schools. Teacher requirements were raised, more teachers were hired, and St. Rose continued to prosper until the late 1960s.

However, by the 1970s a number of social and economic changes led to the closing of the St. Rose School. During the 1960s, it began losing students as desegregation and civil rights progress improved public school performance and availability. Hurricane Camille's devastation of the region in 1969 brought new financial challenges to the church and the larger Bay St. Louis community. In 1975, the schools were



Cardinal Tien visits St. Rose de Lima School.

combined and given the name Bay Catholic Elementary. Originally, St. Rose housed grades 1-3 while grades 4-6 were held on the OLG campus. But in 1981, the St. Rose School was closed and the elementary campus consolidated at OLG.

When the last Missionary Sisters of the Holy Spirit gave their farewell to the congregation of St. Rose de Lima on that January day in 1995, they recognized that their history was filled with joy, grief, and a proud legacy. For a hundred years, the St. Rose School provided some of the only quality education available to Black children in the Bay St. Louis area. Established before there were schools available to Black children, they continued to provide quality education when segregation and separate but equal laws starved Black public schools of necessary resources. St. Rose School slipped into history when social and economic change came enabling others to serve its former role. But the school's legacy remains an example to future citizens and educators.

MERCY TRAIN:

Next Stop Bay St. Louis, MS

An original one-act play which outlines the history of Orphan Trains and tells the life stories of five children who found homes in Bay St. Louis in the early 1900's.

Saturday, September 9

One performance at 2 pm., another at 7 pm, and the final performance on Sunday at 2 pm.

ADMISSION IS FREE. * DONATIONS ARE GRACIOUSLY ACCEPTED.

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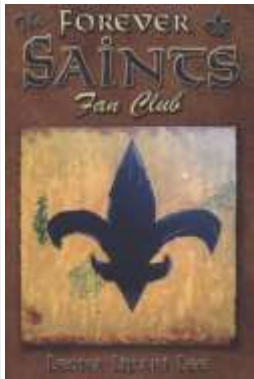
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Mardi Gras Specials

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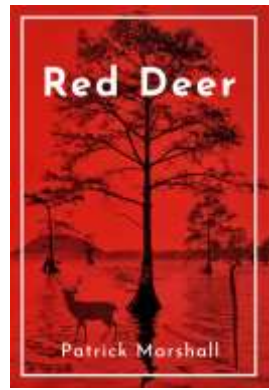
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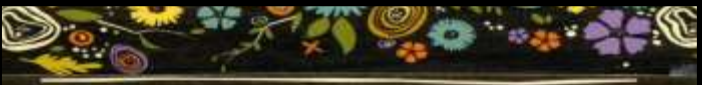
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