

JANUARY 2013 NEWSLETTER

www.passhistory.org • Post Office Box 58, Pass Christian MS 39571 • Society Building 201 East Scenic Drive
228 452-7254 • info@passhistory.org • Building typically open: Thursday-Friday-Saturday, 10-2 p.m.
Evening meetings at 7 p.m. on the 2nd Monday • Monthly luncheons are typically on the 4th Monday of the month.

January 8, 2013

Dear Friends & Members

Happy New Year to all! As we welcome in the new year, we want to congratulate our newly elected board members Virgil Harris, Gayla Schmitt and Amy Wood.

And we want to especially thank Susan Thompson for serving as food chair for the Christmas Party and, of course, we thank all you who made the party such a success by bringing food and volunteering in other ways.

Our meeting schedule resumes next Monday at 7 P.M. Note that we are planning something new this year. A Mardi Gras Party. Details below.

Our bit of history is a recollection by the late Adele Bielenberg of Mardi Gras at the Pass during her girlhood in the early 1900s. The recollection appears in a book of photos of the 1915 Carnival parade that was presented to the Historical Society by the Robinson family several years ago.

—Tom Shellnut, & the Board of Trustees

January Events

Monthly Meeting-Monday Jan. 14, at 7 p.m.

Speaker to be announced.

January 28th Luncheon

Stacy Speas will give a talk on Ship Island. Reservations are required for this talk and the luncheon fee is \$10 for members and \$12 for nonmember. Reservations can be made by calling or emailing the society.

Oral History Project

Good news! The Society has been approved for a small grant from the Mississippi Humanities Council for a final presentation and exhibit for our Oral History Project! We will be kicking off the project at a meeting on Monday, Jan. 28, at 1:30



Community Christmas Trees on display over the holidays in the Historical Society's main meeting room.

p.m. at the Historical Society. At the meeting, we will brainstorm places and people to interview, assign interviews, provide technical training on the equipment, creating recording logs, transcription and also basic audio editing. We will split up the training into segments so you can learn just the tools you are interested in; we will try to be as efficient as possible with your time! If you are interested in participating, please contact Evelina at info@passhistory.org or 228-363-1973.

Middlegate Gardens Book

New Orleans author Lynne White (grand daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Rudolph S. Hecht) has generously donated 10 copies of her beautiful book, "Middlegate: A Japanese Garden," to the Historical Society. We will be offering nine of the copies for sale to members on a first-come, first-served basis. The book, which was privately published and chronicles the history of Pass Christian's unique Japanese garden Middlegate, are \$100, payable to the Pass Christian Histori-

cal Society. One of the copies will remain at the Historical Society, so if you would like to see it, please stop by during our regular hours or at an event. Please call 228-363-1973 or email info@passhistory.org if you would like to reserve your copy.

Mardi Gras Party Sunday February 10

The Historical Society has a prime location on the Pass Christian Parade route, so please consider coming out to our first-ever Mardi Gras parade party!

The party will be during the Pass Parade on Sunday, Feb. 10, and will be for members and their guests only. The building will be open starting at 9 am. Guests are encouraged to arrive by 10:30am because the roads will start to be closed by 11am (or earlier, depending on the crowds). The building will be open until about 30 minutes after the end of the parade.

Tickets are \$20 per person. We will need your reservations and payment

by Feb. 4 because we will need a minimum of 15 reservations to go forward. Kids are \$10. To reserve, please call 228-363-1973.

We will have reserved parking behind the building for our guests! We'll provide details when you reserve. We will also provide sandwiches, soft drinks and ice. You are welcome to bring your own food and drinks as well.

Come join us, and let the good times roll with your friends at the Society!

Building Volunteers Needed

As mentioned in our previous newsletter we continue to be in need of volunteers to help us keep the building open during our regular hours: Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Please contact Evelina at 228-363-1973 or info@passhistory.org.

Membership Renewal

If you have not already renewed your membership for 2013, we hope that you will do so now. Basic memberships are \$20 for individuals, and \$30 for families. Contributing and other memberships are available beginning at \$60. For more details about memberships, please visit passhistory.org.

Mardi Gras - Pass Christian

The Mardi Gras balls in Pass Christian preceded the street celebrations just as they did in New Orleans. They probably began in the late 1800s. Private Carnival balls were held at the Mexican Gulf Hotel for the guests.

The first Carnival all I remember was when I was about three or four years old (circa 1900). In those days children were allowed to see the first part of the festivities and were later sent home. This first ball that I recall was given at the former VFW building (Scenic & Fleitas). At that time it was owned by the Chapotels who had a plumbing business down stairs and the family lived upstairs. I suppose the plumbing equipment was moved out of the way for the "MerryMakers." In the early days of

those balls the ladies wore evening clothes and did not mask. All the men masked and wore the same kind of long robes of a shiny black material. The costume was complete with a tall black pointed hat which had been a piece of material hanging down over the maskers neck. These costumes were called *domino's*. The ladies were not supposed to know who their dance partners were until midnight when the men unmasked. I'm sure the women had many surprises.

In later years, Carnival balls were held upstairs of a Northrop building which was located at the site of the present Hancock Bank. The building housed a drugstore, a men's clothing store and a dry goods store on the first floor.

So much interest was created in Mardi Gras that by the 1913 a group of Pass Christian man organize the Pass Christian Carnival Association. This organization had a hall built on a piece of property which was owned by Mr. Louis Chapotel and was loaned to the organization. The hall was located a block behind the present VFW (on the corner of Fleitas and Second Street) ... This building became the Carnival den where the where the parade floats were built and where the ball was held on Mardi Gras night. In 1914, the men decided to have a parade. Since the organization was made up entirely of men, it was first thought that a man would dress up as the queen, but almost at the last minute a lady was selected. Mr. Louis Martin was the king of the parade and he selected Miss Elie Courtenay as his queen. There was king's float and that the other floats represented some of the states of the United States and some foreign countries. The band members rode on a float and the dukes road on horses. The parade route was along East and West Beach. East as far as Menge Avenue and west to Leovy Avenue. The king and queen were not given any special names.

The 1914 parade was such a huge success that the organization decide to have another parade 1915. This one was even better than the year before. The floats in 1915 represented a variety of subjects. One representing the Easter Season was the most out-

standing. Ladies and young girls dressed in costumes road on the floats. Julius Hayden was king of the second Carnival parade and Miss Forest Lee Springs was queen and later became Mr. Hayden's wife. A few people think there was another parade in 1916, but I believe they have the dates mixed because the floats are the same as for 1915.

The parade was held on Mardi Gras day, Shrove Tuesday, and the ball was the same night. Another interesting feature of Mardi Gras in Pass Christian years ago was that the children masked and dressed in costumes. They went from house to house visiting their friends much the same way as children do today on Halloween, but there were no treats, and the maskers on the floats didn't throw beads or trinkets. The custom of street masking on Mardi Gras in Pass Christian is no longer observed.

The 1915 parade seems to have been the last one held by the Pass Christian Carnival Association. (See Photo.) Maybe it was because of the severe storm in the fall of 1915 and the war years that followed.

After a few years the organization disbanded and the hall or den as it was called, was torn down, and that was the end of the Pass Christian Carnival Association.

-- Adele Bielenberg (1995)

