

JUNE 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.

June 3, 2013

Dear Friends & Members

As you quite likely know, Evelina Schmukler, our executive director, has accepted a new job with Mississippi Public Broadcasting (MPB). She is the new MPB reporter for the Mississippi Gulf Coast, and beyond. She will remain here in the Pass and devote her time to MPB and her family. We are sorrowful that she is leaving the society as Executive Director, and we wish her the best of success. She assures us she will continue to help with many of the tasks that she had done previously. Evelina is a unique person, and we were most fortunate to have her help the society.

With Evelina leaving, the Society is in need of assistance and work from our members in many areas. As Evelina might say numerous "volunteer opportunities" are available, and we include in this newsletter the principal committees/activities in which your help is needed. We need your help!

As we ask for more help, we want to express our very deep appreciation to all involved in this year's Tour of Homes. It was a great success, and only possible with the cooperations of many, many Society members, and friends.

Our bid of history this month is a short sketch of the history of Pass Christian written over seventy years ago by a former mayor and eyewitness to much of the history that he recounts.

—Tom Shellnut, & the Board of Trustees

June/July Events

Monday, June 10: Monthly meeting, 7 p.m.

We welcome **Thomas E. Simmons**, who gave a riveting talk to the Historical Society last year returns to speak about his latest book *The Man Called Brown Condor: The Forgotten History of an African American Fighter Pilot*.

Monday, June 24: Monthly Luncheon, 12 noon. George Thatcher,

the very popular "Scenes from the Beach" columnist at the Sun Herald, will speak on his life experiences and his work as a columnist.

Monday, July 8: Membership Meeting, 7 p.m. Bertram Hayes-Davis,

great, great grandson of Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederacy, will speak on the "lighter side" of Jefferson Davis. We expect several other descendants of Mr. Davis to be in attendance.

Monday, July 22: Monthly Luncheon, 12 p.m.

July 8 at 7:00 PM – July 22 at 12:00 noon – **Roger Shaw** will speak on his experiences in the Merchant Marine.

Put these events on your calendar. We expect you will enjoy each program, and remember, reservations are requested for the lunch meetings. The meal is \$10 for members and \$12 for non-members. Our programs in June and July have been finalized through the hard work of Virgil Harris, our Program Chairman. Thank you Virgil.

Historical Society Committees

Members are asked to review the below list of committees and chairs to see in which area you would like to help. Just call or email the society and tell us your preferences. (Listed after each committee is the chair, who will get in touch with you.)

Building Committee
Ed Macdiarmid
Membership Committee

Amy Wood
Program Chairman
Virgil Harris
Fund Raising
TBD
Archives and Newsletter
Bruce Stinson
Insurance Committee
Patrick Burke
Building & Grounds
Joy Burke
Kitchen
Cynthia Hammond
Tenant Mgt/Liaison
Patrick Burke
Program
Virgil Harris
Treasury/Finance
Keith Voigts
Docent/Duty Volunteers
Kathleen Taylor Vardal
Newsletter Prod/ mailing
Mary Helen Schaeffer
Exhibits
TBD
Acquisitions
Alicia Ellis
Brick
Vay Carboni
Oral History
TBD
Hospitality and Events
Eileen Guthrie/Joy Burke
Long Range Planning
TBD
By Laws Review/Revision
Joy Burke/Ed Macdiarmid
Capital Funds Planning

SHORT HISTORY OF PASS CHRISTIAN 1931.

“The City of Pass Christian, which is situated on the channel or pass called Christian’s Pass, discovered by one Christian, a seaman, seems to have been settled soon after Iberville settled at Biloxi in 1699.

The settlement grew gradually and finally became the village of Pass Christian.

The lands upon which the city stands were granted to two French subjects, one “Asmar” and the other “Charlot.” The dividing line between these two grants is just 157 feet west of the City Hall, being the west line of the Lang residence lot.

Some of these lands descended to colored people of the Grantees, some of whom are still living here.

These land grants were described as so many arpents (or French acres) on the water front, and extending north (or north 28 degrees west) to a base line. (40 arpents deep.)

In selling off these lands they used to sell so many feet on the front or water and run back to the base line, giving a strip of land, say 100 feet wide and 8,000 feet long, almost like a street. The lands were never subdivided or platted.

Sometime in the 1840’s a charter was granted to Pass Christian as a village. It was changed to a town, and then to a city charter.... The oldest part of the city is between the “Miramar” hotel and the home of Edgar Bohn on east beach.

The light house, to guide boats through the channel, stood on the lot now occupied by the public school building. There was a beautiful grove of trees around the “Curran home” on the beach, opposite the lot to the west of the school. Hiern wharf was opposite Hiern Avenue, but no street was there at that time. The present beach boulevard was only a country road of heavy sand. This was afterward covered with saw-dust from the mills on Wolf River and Bayou Portage. In 1870 or shortly before that, they began using

clam shells from the banks of Wolf River on Dimitry Point, making a roadway eight feet wide through the center. About 1890 we began to get oyster shells from the Biloxi canning plants and widened the road from curb to curb.

Up to this time the road was very irregular; fences not on a line and no regulations at all, but in 1894 we began to regulate these matters and took some pride in our streets, and drained the ponds in the rear and extended the city limits both east and west.

There used to be quite a number of houses on the south side of the roadway in front, under the bluff, the beach being much longer or wider than it is now. The present seawall being about where the beach was, there were some houses in some places now covered by the wall. There were very few improvements made here until the Mexican Gulf Hotel was built in 1883-4.

The water supply came from the surface wells about 12 feet deep, and rain water from the roofs, all having cisterns. In 1884, Mr. John T. Hardie owned the place between the Stauffer and Rainold places; he put down a deep well seeking artesian water, this being the first artesian well in south Mississippi. This has been followed by hundreds.

When we consider what a great blessing it was to us when the artesian water was discovered, we should certainly erect some marker to commemorate the great event. It has increased our healthfulness and banished typhoid fever entirely. No one thing has contributed so much to health. There are now 94 flowing artesian wells in and around the town.

Pass Christian has had two military colleges and two colleges for young women and girls; two before the Civil War and two since.

The Pass has always been a resort and has been visited by many renowned people, some of whom are as follows.:

President Zachary Taylor, President U. S. Grant, President Theodore Roosevelt, President Woodrow Wilson, General Walthall, Gen. George, Gen. Sumrall, Chief of Staff, Gen. Boulanger, of France, John L. Sullivan, Bob Fitzsimmons and Gen. William S. Harney, the old Indian fighter. He lived at Pass Christian for many years, first owned the place on the southwest corner of Lang Avenue, where President Wilson spent his holidays in 1913 and 1914; and many others of lesser fame.

Some of the very old homes of Pass Christian are the Rafferty place; Judge Baker’s; the Tiblier place; the Hart house, next to Dr. Robinson’s; the Bidwell Adam place, next to St. Paul Avenue; the Knost home; and the little place opposite the Bank of Pass Christian.

Up to a very few years ago the city officials served for the honor and good of their city; the Mayor’s salary was \$100.00 a year; aldermen \$24.00 a year. But the politicians got control and boosted salaries all along the line so that it cost more in thousands than formerly in hundreds, with less to do. Unless the taxpayers look to their own interests this will continue.

— J. H. Lang. From a 1931 newspaper letter to the editor, later reprinted in *Lang’s History of Harrison County*.