



JHS Newsletter

An official publication of the Jefferson Historical Society of Louisiana

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www.JeffersonHistoricalSociety.com

January/February 2010

A Message from Your President

As we enter 2010, we reflect upon the year now past us and look forward with anticipation to the new year. The Jefferson Parish Historical Commission and Jefferson Historical Society of Louisiana have already begun planning for another successful and exciting year of events and activities to promote and preserve the history of our parish.

In February, the two organizations celebrate the founding of our parish with the annual Founders' Day Banquet. In March, the Commission will recognize the contributions of Jefferson Parish's southernmost community, Grand Isle, with its very own Louisiana highway historical marker. Fort Livingston, on nearby Grand Terre, also will be recognized with a Louisiana highway marker. In April, the Commission and Society mark the birth of our parish's namesake, Thomas Jefferson.

In the spring, the Jefferson Parish Historical Commission releases its newest monograph, Jefferson Parish's Modern Government on its Golden Anniversary, 1958-2008. The JHS has two Jefferson History Notebooks, one on Gretna WWI hero David Walter Wiedman and the other on John B. Moisant, an accomplished early aviator who was the namesake of Louis Armstrong International Airport's Moisant Field.

I hope that I will see you at any or all of this year's exciting events. Feel free to contact me (394-0321 or fborne@cox.net) with suggestions or articles for the newsletter. Happy new year to all!

by Frank J. Borne, Jr.

FEBRUARY MEETING NOTICE

185th Anniversary

Establishment of Jefferson Parish

Saturday, February 20, 7:00 P.M.

Timberlane Country Club, Gretna

On February 20, 2010, the Jefferson Parish Historical Commission and the Jefferson Historical Society of Louisiana will celebrate the 185th legislative establishment of the Parish of Jefferson. The two groups began to annually commemorate the momentous occasion in 1982 when the parish's 157th anniversary was celebrated at the Four Columns Reception Hall in Harvey. We are now very proud to say that on February 20, the two groups will celebrate their 29th Annual Founders' Day Banquet, and you are invited to attend.

We are happy to welcome as our speaker JHS member Dr. Marc R. Matrana, author of *Lost Plantation: The Rise and Fall of Seven Oaks*, the Jefferson Parish Historical Commission's 16th monograph. His latest non-fiction work *Lost Plantations of the South* was released in September. The book chronicles the demise of more than 60 great Southern homes, including Seven Oaks of Westwego.

The new work provides more than 100 illustrations and photos and has more than 300 pages.

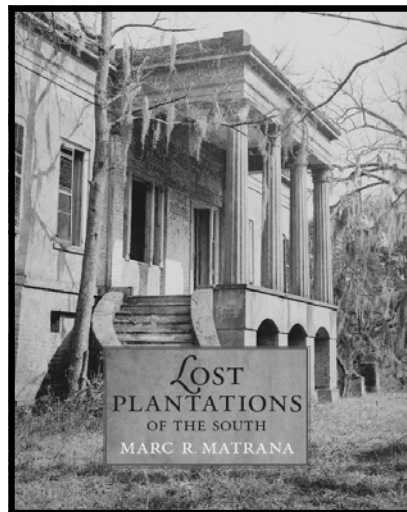


Photo of Dr. Marc Matrana (above)
and *Lost Plantations*
cover art courtesy
www.MarcMatrana.com.

Dr. Matrana, a House Officer in the Internal Medicine Department at Ochsner Medical Center, authored two Jefferson History Notebooks, *Seven Oaks: A Lasting Legacy*, and *On Cane and Coolies: Chinese Laborers on Post-Antebellum Louisiana Plantations as Exemplified on the Millaudon Plantation of Jefferson Parish*, for the JHS while he was a student at Tulane University.

Like *Lost Plantation*, *Lost Plantations of the South* was published by the University of Mississippi Press. Copies will be available for purchase and will be autographed by the author upon request at the banquet.

A separate mailing will provide you with details for making your reservation to join us on February 20.

by Frank J. Borne, Jr.

Celebrate Valentine's Day

Sunday, February 14

9:00 A.M. to Noon & 1:30 P.M. to 4:00 P.M.

GRETNA GREEN BLACKSMITH SHOP

*Judge Vernon J. Wilty, III, Officiating
Ceremonial Blacksmiths*



Welcome to Our Newest Members

Bruce C. Mills, Terrytown, Family Membership. Bruce's wife, Judy, was a Charter Member in 1978.

Leonce P. Waguespack, Jr., Avondale, Individual Membership.

Happy Birthday Wishes

Happy Birthday to our JHS Board Members, Janet Sjoden Foster and Charmaine Currault Rini, our Honorary Life Chaplain and Vice President, respectively. You guessed it! They are, of course, both "39 and holding!"

Condolences Extended

Condolences are extended to the family of our Charter Member Eugene A. Wagner, Jr., of New Orleans who passed away in December.



Sheriff Harry Lee Showcased at Courthouse

Jefferson Parish Councilwoman Cynthia Lee-Sheng, daughter of longtime beloved Jefferson Parish Sheriff Harry Lee, recently donated photographs and artifacts from her father's estate to the Jefferson Parish Historical Commission for preservation and use in museum displays.

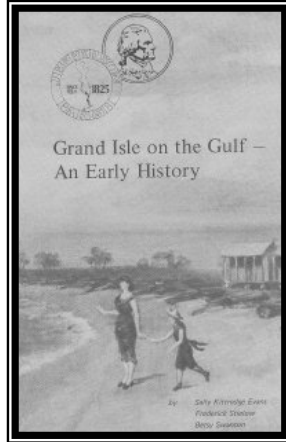
A pair of Lee's cowboy boots and a hat, Mardi Gras throws, political items, and photographs of him with national political figures and entertainment icons, have been arranged in five of the General Government Building's museum display cases. The displays will remain until at least April 1, the 30th anniversary of Lee's inauguration as sheriff. All are invited to visit the displays.

by Frank J. Borne, Jr.



Popular Grand Isle Monograph Reprinted

In late 1978, all Charter Members of the Jefferson Historical Society were offered a complimentary copy of "Grand Isle on the Gulf," if their dues were paid by February 11, 1979. The book was authored by Sally Kittredge Evans (now Reeves), Frederick Stielow, and Betsy Swanson and served as the second monograph in the Jefferson Historical Series sponsored by the Jefferson Parish Historical Commission.



Hundreds of members responded to the generous offer, and the book's first printing could soon be found on the shelves of members and non-members alike, who found the 114-page work well worth its \$4.95 price tag.

A second printing followed in 1981, and a third printing has been long overdue. However, we are now happy to announce the book in its third printing is available for \$10 at any JHS General Membership Meeting. Books will also be available at the February 20th banquet. If you would like a copy mailed to you, send a check for \$13 (cost plus shipping and handling) payable to Jefferson Historical Society of Louisiana to JHS c/o Frank Borne, 3829 Lake Arrowhead Dr., Harvey LA 70058.

by Dr. Mary Grace Curry

JEFFERSON THOUGHT OF THE MONTH



"For a people who are free, and who mean to remain so, a well-organized and armed militia is their best security."

Thomas Jefferson

Submitted by Laurie Hourguettes Ledet

GRAND ISLE AND FORT LIVINGSTON LOUISIANA HIGHWAY MARKERS TO BE DEDICATED IN SPRING

On Saturday, March 13, the Jefferson Parish Historical Commission will dedicate two Louisiana highway markers on Grand Isle, one named for Louisiana's only inhabited barrier island located at the southernmost point of Jefferson Parish, and the other for Fort Livingston, a long-since abandoned 19th century military fortification, on nearby Grand Terre.

The JHS has arranged for a bus to transport JHS members to the island for the twin dedication ceremonies on Louisiana Highway 1. Following the ceremonies, Grand Isle Mayor David J. Camardelle and the Grand Isle Community Development Team, both JHS members, will host a luncheon for the JHS and JPHC at the community center or an island restaurant.

The bus will depart from the Sears parking lot at Oakwood Mall promptly at 8:00 a.m., and arrive on the island by 11:00 a.m. Following lunch, the bus will return to the West Bank, likely by 5:00 p.m. If you are interested in riding with the JHS down to Grand Isle, please call Frank Borne at 394-0321. *It is important for the JPHC to get an accurate count of anticipated passengers. The ride and luncheon are free, and the event is open to the public.*

Katrina Stories Wanted

With 2010 comes the 5-year anniversary of Hurricane Katrina. While the last thing any of us wants to consider right now, in the midst of winter and Mardi Gras, is memories of hurricanes, the JHS is planning a Jefferson History Notebook to commemorate the half-decade since that terrible storm.

Every resident of Southeast Louisiana, regardless of whether their home was affected in any way by Katrina's winds and water, experienced the most traumatic era in modern history. The storm was one in a decade of intense hurricanes that threatened or otherwise scarred the region. Many of us were without work and displaced for more than a month, came home to catastrophic flooding, no government or commercial services, and felt unprecedented insecurity and uncertainty.

The JHS wants to publish your experience in a notebook written by JHS members. We want to document for future generations the experiences of the worst natural disaster in American history. The JHS had just completed a compilation of Hurricane Betsy experiences at the time of that storm's 40th anniversary when Katrina struck.

Send your story via e-mail to Frank Borne at fborne@cox.net or Mary Curry at mgcurry1@juno.com, or mail it to Frank at 3829 Lake Arrowhead Dr., Harvey, LA, 70058. The notebook will be published in August in time for Katrina's 5th anniversary.

by Frank J. Borne, Jr.

A New Year: A Time to Ponder Milestones

The new year provides a chance for us to reflect on the year gone by. We look back and remember the friends and loved ones lost during the year, the personal achievements and failures which shaped our lives, and the national events which affect us and our future as a nation. The new year also brings a host of milestone anniversaries, which will cause us to reflect throughout the year on the events and people that have been important to us. Below is just a sampling of events that many of us will remember as important milestones in Jefferson Parish history.

5 years ago, in 2005, Hurricane Katrina, one of the deadliest and costliest storms in United States history, devastated Southeast Louisiana and the Mississippi Gulf Coast. The storm's surges broke inadequately constructed levees in New Orleans, causing catastrophic flooding, while Jefferson Parish suffered massive flooding, mainly on the East Bank, due to a drainage system left inactive because of a flawed emergency operations plan.

10 years ago, in 2000, the Louisiana Marine Fisheries Museum in Lafitte and the Westwego Historical Museum in Westwego opened in late August.

20 years ago, in 1990, banking pioneer and popular parish philanthropist, W. Richard "Dick" White of Gretna, died on June 1. He was former President and Chairman Emeritus of the First National Bank of Jefferson Parish, and a former member of the Mississippi River Bridge Authority, the Jefferson Parish School Board (3 terms), and the Louisiana Highway Commission.

25 years ago, in 1985, the older portion of the City of Gretna was listed on the National Register of Historic Places as a district through the efforts of Dr. Mary G. Curry. With over 550 contributing elements, it is the nation's largest National Register Historic District outside of the City of New Orleans.

30 years ago, in 1980, David C. Treen of Metairie was the second resident of Jefferson Parish and the first Republican since Reconstruction to become Governor of Louisiana (1980-1984).

35 years ago, in 1975, the newly established Jefferson Parish Historical Commission embarked on a year-long celebration commemorating the sesquicentennial of the legislative establishment of Jefferson Parish. Events included the publication of *Historic Jefferson Parish: From Shore to Shore* by Betsy Swanson, and the erection of the Thomas Jefferson statue in front of the courthouse in Gretna.

40 years ago, in 1970, the total assessed valuation of property in the parish was \$319,733,910. The assessor's annual salary was \$19,000.

45 years ago, in 1965, Hurricane Betsy roared up the Mississippi River on September 9-10, devastating New Orleans and Jefferson Parish. The area was heavily flooded, and the storm remains a bitter memory for many older Jefferson residents.

50 years ago, in 1960, West Jefferson General Hospital in Marrero (now West Jefferson Medical Center) was dedicated in April with Nat B. Night, Jr., of Gretna, as Master of Ceremonies. The hospital has undergone many expansions in its history, and opened with 150 beds. In 2010, WJMC had 451 beds. Also in 1960, Terrytown, Jefferson Parish's first planned community, was established. It was named for Terry Kapelow, the daughter of real estate developer Paul Kapelow.

60 years ago, in 1950, the Korean War began; many young Jeffersonians gave their lives for the cause beginning on June 25.

70 years ago, in 1940, the population of Jefferson Parish was just over 50,000 at 50,427.

75 years ago, in 1935, the Huey P. Long Bridge, the world's longest railroad bridge (length from abutment to abutment, 4.36 miles), across the Mississippi River was dedicated on December 6. It is listed in the *Guinness Book of World Records*. Governor Long, for whom the bridge was named, was assassinated in the state capital in Baton Rouge earlier that same year on September 5.

80 years ago, in 1930, John Ehret, for whom the high school in Marrero is named, died ending his 34-year career as an elected official in Jefferson, where he served as Jefferson Parish Police Juror, First Mayor of the City of Gretna, and Jefferson Parish Assessor. The parish's population at that time was 40,032.



West Jefferson Medical Center
ca. 1960

Continued on page 5.

Continued from page 4.

85 years ago, in 1925, Hope Haven, an orphanage for young boys and known as "Jefferson Parish's million dollar boys town," was founded in Marrero by Monsignor Peter M.H. Wynhoven.

90 years ago, in 1920, Harahan, which grew from the yards and shops of the Illinois Central Railroad, was incorporated as a town with Frank W. Mayo as first Mayor. It was named for James T. Harahan, former president of the railroad (1906-1911).

95 years ago, in 1915, a hurricane impacted Grand Isle and other low lying areas of Jefferson Parish including Bucktown, where it demolished most of the original settlement, and Grand Terre, where it partly destroyed Fort Livingston on September 29.

100 years ago, in 1910, John Bevins Moisant, a daring young French-Canadian aviator of international fame, was catapulted from his plane at the site of the present-day Louis Armstrong International Airport. The site of his death was initially converted to stockyards and named Moisant Stockyards. The airport was first called Moisant Field, hence, the call letters MSY.



Aviator John B. Moisant with sidekick Sparkplug, ca. 1910.

110 years ago, in 1900, an ice house was built on Sala Avenue in Westwego by Louis Paysse. The use of ice revolutionized the parish's shrimping industry by prolonging the freshness of the catch.

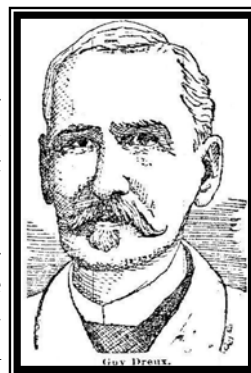
120 years ago, in 1890, there were 29,000 acres under cultivation in the parish, where the population was 13,221.

125 years ago, in 1885, Gretna's busy riverfront was depicted in a lithographic view of New Orleans by Currier and Ives.

130 years ago, in 1880, the U.S. census listed 249 people on Grand Isle. Half were under the age of 20.

140 years ago, in 1870, in response to the critical shortage of agricultural workers in the parish, A.B. Merrill imported 140 Chinese laborers to work on the West Bank at the former Millaudon Plantation.

150 years ago, in 1860, the Jefferson Mounted Guards, a unit of 70 Jefferson Parish men, was organized on December 13 through the efforts of Captain Guy Dreux of Gretna (Jefferson Parish Sheriff, 1857-1861), who served until the company surrendered at Meridian, Mississippi, in 1865. The unit served as a cavalry escort for General Pierre G.T. Beauregard.



Jefferson Parish Sheriff Guy Dreux



John McDonogh cenotaph, McDonogh Cemetery, Gretna

160 years ago, in 1850, the McDonogh Cemetery was established in Gretna by John McDonogh for his slaves. He was the first white person to be buried there, when, on October 26, he died on his plantation, "Monplaisir," in McDonoghville (later part of the City of Gretna). He was the richest man and largest landowner in Louisiana at the time of his death.

170 years ago, in 1840, the Police Jury passed a resolution prohibiting horse races on public roads under penalty of a "fine of \$10.00 for a white person or free person of color."

175 years ago, in 1835, Nicholas Noel Destrehan opened a canal for small boats in what is now Harvey.

180 years ago, in 1830, the U.S. census reported a total parish-wide population of 6,846, with 12 households and a population of 107 on Grand Isle.

185 years ago, in 1825, Jefferson Parish was officially created by legislative act on February 11. Come to the Founders' Day Banquet on February 20, 2010, and celebrate with us. *See page 1 for banquet details!*

by Frank J. Borne, Jr. & Dr. Mary Grace Curry

Compiled from "Jefferson Parish Events 1825 – 2000," a publication by the Jefferson Parish Historical Commission, and other records. "Jefferson Parish Events 1825 – 2000" is available for only \$5.00 and contains 175 historical events of note. Call Mary Curry at 834-2145, or Frank Borne at 394-0321, to obtain a copy. Get yours today!

Picture from the Past Needs Help!



This photo was taken in the late 1950s by Ritzmann's Photo Service, which was located at 564 Gaudet Drive in Marrero. The inscription at the bottom center of the photo reads "To my friend Lem W. Higgins with every good wish from Russell B. Long."

Seated (L-R): John A. Ritter (labor-union organizer, later worked for the Jefferson Parish Clerk of Court's Office, and maternal grandfather of our JHS President Frank J. Borne, Jr.), Unknown, Walter Schneckenburger, Ed Stevens, Frank J. Ehret, Jr. (JHS Charter Member, long-time educator, and Father of the Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve).

Standing (L-R): Loney J. Autin (veteran politician), Lemuel W. Higgins (long-time Superintendent of the Jefferson Parish Public School System), Unknown, Unknown, William J. White (long-time Gretna Mayor), Russell B. Long (U.S. Senator), Alvin T. Stumpf (Louisiana Senator), Unknown, Unknown, and Lloyd Clancy.

If you are able to identify any of the five "unknown" gentlemen in the photo, please let us know. Call or e-mail Mary (834-2145 or mcurry1@juno.com).

Special thanks to Jane Higgins Baker (Lem's daughter) for generously sharing this photo. If you have an old photo you would like to share with us, please e-mail it to mcurry1@juno.com along with all information you have relative to date, place, event, and people.

by Dr. Mary Grace Curry

Political Profiles:

Influential Figures of Our Past & Present

Oliver V. Waggoner

Oliver Vincennes "O.V." Waggoner was born on February 29, 1840, in Baltimore, Maryland. He was the son of Francis Waggoner and Charlotte Dawson. Waggoner's ancestors were said to have fought in the Revolutionary War, some of his father's relatives having served on the *Constitution*. His family came to New Orleans in 1857, when he was 17. At that age, he worked as a jeweler and, later, became the proprietor of one of the first and largest steam brickyards in Jefferson Parish.

When the War Between the States commenced, Waggoner enlisted as a private in Sumter's Regiment. Later, he was promoted to the rank of quartermaster in Tracey's Brigade.

Waggoner was elected to the council of the City of Carrollton in 1869 and served on the parish school board from 1872 to 1873 and as police juror before his tenure as sheriff. He was very active in democratic politics, but became disenchanted with the Democratic Party following a Congressional election in which he supported E. John Ellis. He then switched his party affiliation to Republican and ran for sheriff. He served as sheriff from 1883 until 1890, when he was removed from that office by Governor Nicholls, who appointed Austin Rountree to replace him.

In 1893, Waggoner married Louise Marie Bartels of Gretna, where they made their home. Although the two had no children of their own, they are credited with helping to raise several needy children.

Waggoner died in his wife's arms on November 5, 1911, the victim of cirrhosis of the liver, a disease that he had fought for 3 years. Waggoner was interred in the Carrollton Cemetery in New Orleans.

Arthur S. Lawson, Jr.

Arthur Sebastian Lawson, Jr., was born on June 1, 1954, in Gretna, the son of June Claire Barnett and Arthur S. Lawson, Sr. Lawson married Brenda Macera, with whom he had two sons: Brett J. and Arthur S., III.

Lawson has an extensive career in law enforcement, having worked in the Gretna Police Department under Beauregard H. "B.H." Miller, Jr., and his father for more than 30 years, as a patrol officer, road lieutenant, assistant watch commander, and as deputy chief. In 2005, when Miller retired after 26 years of service as chief of police, Lawson ran for the position. He was unopposed that year and for reelection in 2009.

Lawson received his police training from the Jefferson Parish Sheriff's Office Basic Training Academy, the University of North Florida, the U.S. Department of Justice, and the University of Louisville, Kentucky.

Lawson's professional affiliations include the Louisiana Association of Chiefs of Police, the International Association of Chiefs of Police, the FBI National Graduate Association, the Southern Police Association Alumni, the Fraternal Order of Police, and the Municipal Police Retirement Board.

Lawson is a member of the David Crockett Volunteer Fire Co. No. 1, the Gretna Economic Development Association, the Knights of Columbus Post No. 1905, and the Lions Club. He also is a Life Member of the Jefferson Historical Society of Louisiana.

by Frank J. Borne, Jr.

Next issue: Parish President M. Daniel Hogan & 24th JDC Judge Robert M. "Bob" Murphy, Sr.

Jefferson's First Mardi Gras Parades

Gretna's first daytime Mardi Gras parade rolled through the streets in February 1948, when the Gretna Carnival Club sponsored the Krewe of Grela's first parade. Gretna's royalty for that Mardi Gras season, Queen Katherine "Kate" Spahr (Ward) and King Leicester L. "Ces" Trauth, reigned supreme.

The following year on February 27, 1949, the Krewe of Jelfa provided Gretna with its first night parade. The lavish Sunday night spectacle rolled with flambeaux carriers and 11 floats. King Louis Badalamento and Queen Norma Calzada (Ehret) ruled the momentous occasion!

The Grela and Jelfa parades were also the very first Mardi Gras parades to roll anywhere in Jefferson Parish. This is, of course, often a fact not acknowledged by New Orleans area Mardi Gras "historians" who often give that credit to Metairie's Krewe of Zeus that paraded for the first time (at night) in 1958.

Just in case you don't already know, the word "Grela" is a contraction for Gretna, Louisiana. Likewise, "Jelfa" was a contraction for Jefferson, Louisiana. And, of course, "Alla" stands for Algiers, Louisiana, where that krewe originated more than 75 years ago. Today, Alla also rolls into Gretna.

by Dr. Mary Grace Curry

JHS Newsletter Staff

Frank J. Borne, Jr., Editor

Dr. Mary G. Curry, Associate Editor

Laura Jane Swilley, Production Manager

BECOME A MEMBER OF THE SOCIETY

The Jefferson Historical Society of Louisiana was founded in 1977 to foster the history of the people, places, and events that are the history of the Parish of Jefferson. There are no requirements for membership, other than timely payment of annual membership dues. Membership categories are Individual, \$10; Family (2 or more persons at same address), \$15; Contributing, \$25; Institution, \$25; Organization, \$25; Sustaining, \$100; Life, \$250 (per individual). Annual events include February Founders' Day Banquet, April Thomas Jefferson Wreath Ceremony, April Meeting, June Meeting, August Anniversary Meeting, October Meeting, and Christmas Party. There are also 1-2 tours per year. All functions are open to members and their guests, including the banquet and tours which are admission by fee only. The bi-monthly JHS Newsletter is distributed and irregularly published issues of the *Jefferson History Notebook* are available free to the membership. The official web site may be visited at this address: www.jeffersonhistoricalsociety.com.

JEFFERSON HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF LOUISIANA

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**Jefferson Parish Historical Commission*

The JHS Newsletter succeeds the Bulletin of the Jefferson Historical Society of Louisiana and the Jefferson Historical Society Newsletter as the official source of news for the general membership of the Jefferson Historical Society of Louisiana.



Jefferson Historical Society of Louisiana

3829 Lake Arrowhead Dr., Harvey LA 70058

POSTAGE

Upcoming Meetings

Board of Directors

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 1

East Bank Regional Library, Metairie, 7:00 P.M.

General Membership

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 20 – Founders' Day Banquet

Timberlane Country Club, Gretna, 7:00 P.M.

Board of Directors

MONDAY, MARCH 1

Gretna Historical Society Complex, Gretna, 7:00 P.M.

ADDRESS LABEL