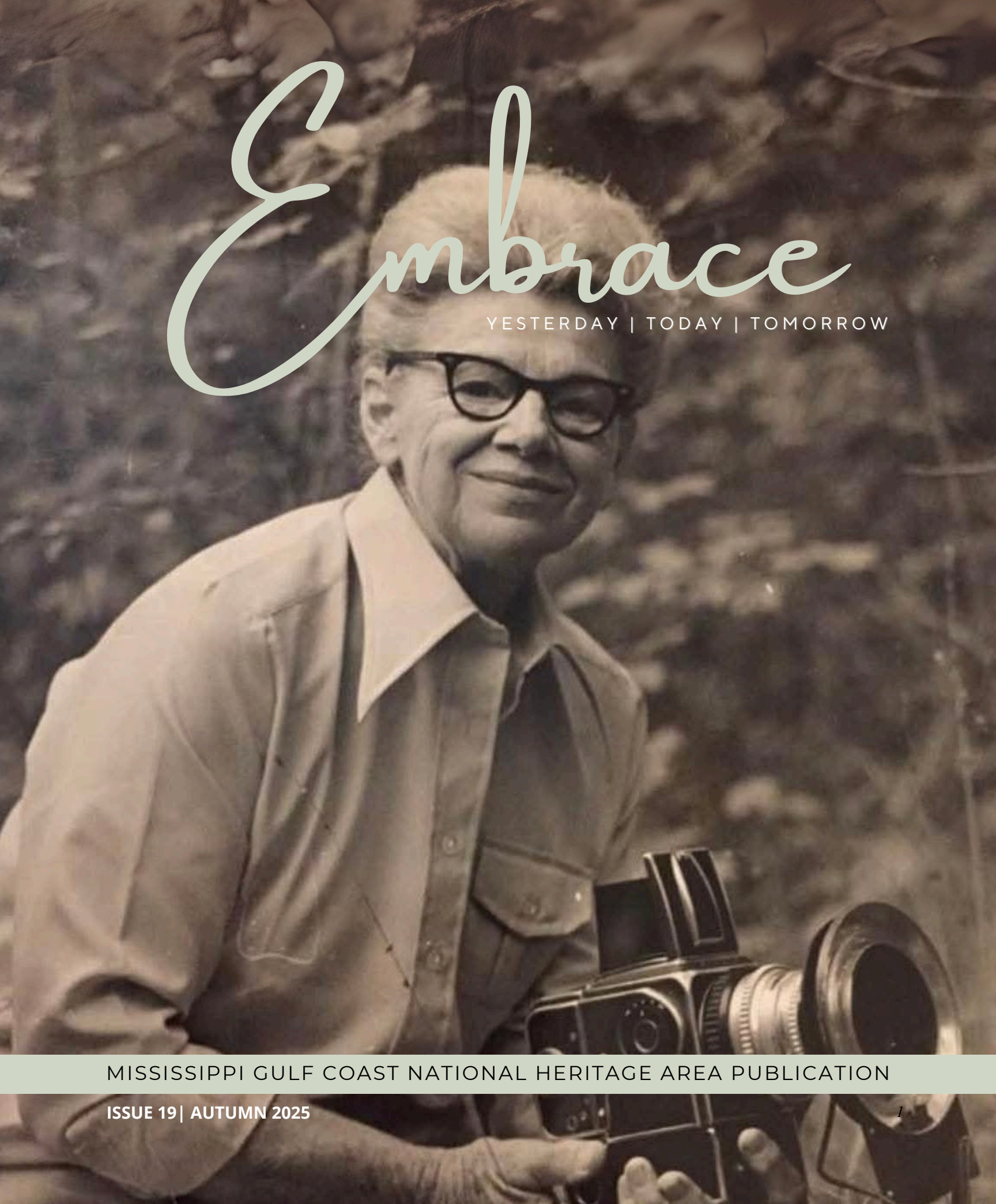


Embrace

YESTERDAY | TODAY | TOMORROW

MISSISSIPPI GULF COAST NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA PUBLICATION

ISSUE 19| AUTUMN 2025



WELCOME

From our Director

Dear Friends,

Here along the Mississippi Gulf Coast, we locals savor this time of year as autumn's golden light settles gently across our waterways and marshes. The air takes on a certain magic, crisp enough to carry the scent of backyard firepits, alive with the rustle of leaves, and rich with the murmur of stories passed down from front porches and family tables. It's the season when the past seems a little closer, and the night sky feels just a bit more mysterious.

In this issue, we invite you to wander with us into *Shadows, Spirits, and Southern Stories,* a collection where history, folklore, and Southern charm are spun together as delicately and intricately as a spider's web glistening in the morning light.

Within these pages, you'll step inside the once-grand Tate House Mansion in Picayune, where whispers of ghostly footsteps mingle with the grace of a bygone era. You'll revisit that strange and unforgettable autumn night in 1973, when two local men claimed they were swept aboard an otherworldly craft in the now-legendary Pascagoula Alien Abduction. And you'll discover how Mississippi Macabre, a daring and imaginative comic book, has breathed new life into the state's eeriest tales, from the Coast's shadowy legends to mysteries that stretch far beyond our coastlines.

But not all shadows are meant to send a chill.

You'll meet the "Spider Lady," whose love of the natural world spun a legacy far more enduring than any fear of creeping things. And, you'll stroll through gardens where the camellia, one of the South's most beloved blooms, offers a quiet beauty that brightens the cool, short days of winter.

These are stories best enjoyed as the day fades into twilight, meant to enchant as much as to intrigue. May they stir your curiosity, ignite your imagination, and remind you that history and mystery often walk side by side beneath the same golden autumn sky.

Warmly,

Rhonda Price, Director, Mississippi Gulf Coast National Heritage Area

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Cover Photo: Ann Moreton, "The Spider Lady."
Our Mission and Contents: Courtesy of Photographer, Benny Weinberg

OUR MISSION

ENHANCE, CONSERVE AND PROVIDE CONNECTIVITY
to cultural resources of a unique and defined area through identification, interpretation and promotion.

CREATE AUTHENTIC EXPERIENCES
and serve as a source of pride. Providing increased awareness and appreciation of their environment, history, culture, traditions and lifestyles.

PROMOTE ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY
of heritage resources that benefit the entire region and support the long-term enhancement and conservation of those qualities that make the six counties of the MS Coast NHA unique.

TELLING THE AREA'S NATIONALLY SIGNIFICANT STORY
to residents and visitors through activities and partnerships that celebrate the area's unique history, people, traditions and landscapes.

Your MS Coast NHA is a partnership of communities, businesses, governmental agencies, non-profit organizations and individuals who value the region's rich cultural and environmental diversity, history, natural beauty and traditions.



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CONTRIBUTORS

Do you have a story that captures the spirit of the Mississippi Gulf Coast, one shaped by memory, heritage, or a unique point of view? This is your chance to bring those voices and moments to life on the page.

If you're interested in becoming a contributor, contact RoxAnn Rankin Wicker to discuss your article submission at roxann.wicker@dmr.ms.gov.



CHASSITY BILBO

Chassity has been employed with the City of Gautier for 18 years, currently serving as the Parks and Recreation Director. Chassity attended the University of Alabama with a Bachelor of Science degree in Human Environmental Sciences and a minor in Business Administration. Chassity was selected in 2024 as 100 Successful Women to Know. She has been married for 25 years, and has three sons. She is actively engaged in community service, including leadership roles at Guiding Light Apostolic Baptist Church.



EDDIE COLEMAN

Eddie Coleman began working at the Hancock County Historical Society in 2004, now serving as Director of the Kate Lobrano House. After Hurricane Katrina, he became editor of the Society's newsletter, *The Historian of Hancock County*. He holds degrees from the University of Southern Mississippi. He taught English for 30 years at St. Martin High School and taught at MGCCC from 2003 to 2011. He also spent 20 years working for Walden Books.



PAT DRACKETT

Pat is the Director of MSU's Crosby Arboretum and an Extension professor of landscape architecture and environmental design. With a background in botany and landscape architecture, she promotes sustainable, low-maintenance gardening through the Mississippi Smart Landscapes program. Pat organizes nearly 80 educational events each year and has led native milkweed trials for home gardens. Under her leadership, the award-winning Arboretum attracts visitors from around the world.



PHILIP MANTLE

Philip Mantle is a long-standing UFO researcher and author from the UK. He was formerly the Director of Investigations for the British UFO Research Association and was the MUFON Representative for England. He is the founder of FLYING DISK PRESS.



ROD MOONEY

Rod Mooney, a Mississippi native and traveling historian, was named "Bigfoot Calling Champion of the World" by Natchez and honored by the Vancleave Live Oak Choctaw as HoLisso Na Hoyo ("Story Seeker"). Through his Wandering the Pines of Mississippi project, he explores all 82 counties with his family to preserve local history and uncover forgotten legends. Mooney also writes for the comic *Mississippi Macabre*.



ANDREW BARRETT

Andrew Barrett is a lifelong resident of Bay St. Louis and works at the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources in the Office of Restoration and Resiliency where he works on community resiliency projects and serves as the Nature Based Tourism Coordinator for the Mississippi Gulf Coast National Heritage Area. Andrew has a passion for history and nature and enjoys Mississippi stories that spotlight our coastal heritage.



CHELSEA PRINCE

Chelsea quickly fell in love with the Mississippi Gulf Coast's history and its beauty after moving to the area. She is the author of a children's book, *Carl the Rooster*, founded the Ocean Springs Mississippi Historical Archives Facebook Group and now works as the Outreach Coordinator for the Mississippi Gulf Coast National Heritage Area. She enjoys gardening, beachcombing and exploring with her husband and three children.



RANDY RANDAZZO

Randy is a ninth-generation Biloxian currently living in Arlington, Va., with his wife Ann. He has avidly collected MS Coast memorabilia for three decades. He graduated from the University of Southern Mississippi with a BS in Statistics and the University of Texas with an MBA. He spent 21 years with Accenture in Atlanta then pivoted to a second career in business development for government contractors in the Washington area, retiring in 2020. He has five children and eight grandchildren who keep him very busy in his retirement.



JANE SHAMBRA

Jane, a retired Local History and Genealogy Librarian with the Harrison County Library System, served for 20 years. A New Orleans native, she holds a BS and masters in education from the University of New Orleans. She co-authored two Biloxi history books and writes columns for *Biloxi BNews Monthly*. A founding member of the Preserve Biloxi Committee, she's appeared in PBS and TAPS features on local history. Jane is also a Biloxi Bay Area Chamber Ambassador, married to Ed for 51 years, with two sons and ten grandchildren.



DR. EDDIE SMITH

Eddie Smith is the Mississippi State University Extension (MSU-ES) County Coordinator/Extension Agent in Pearl River County. Eddie holds a B.S. and Masters from William Carey University and a Ph.D. from The University of Southern Mississippi. He was the 2014 State Master Gardener Coordinator of the Year. He is also an International Society of Arboriculture Certified Arborist. Currently, he serves as the Host for Southern Gardening.



JESSE YARBROUGH

Jesse moved to the Coast in 1991 and graduated from St. Martin in 2005. A lifelong history buff, he served five years in the Navy in Norfolk, later joining the Mississippi Army National Guard. He earned a B.S. in History from Liberty University in 2021 using the G.I. Bill. Now living in Saucier with his wife, Katie Mae, and their four children, Laney, Luke, Anna, and Bella, Jesse works as a senior technician at Stennis Space Center and recently joined the Navy Reserves.


HISTORICAL
LOW CLEARANCE

MYSTERIES OF THE MISSISSIPPI COAST COLISEUM

Contributed by Jane Shambra

Each parcel of land along the Coast has its own story to tell. The land under the Mississippi Coast Coliseum, especially, has a unique and intriguing connection to the past.

In the beginning

Highway 90, as we know it today, wasn't always busy. In 1699, when Monsieur Bienville and D'Iberville first stepped onto Biloxi's shoreline, there was no road or street to meet them. Historians believe that these French-Canadian men and their crews probably chose an area near where Edgewater Mall now stands in West Biloxi as the best spot to land after rowing due north from Ship Island. Over time, this beach route slowly developed into the main east-west corridor: initially a sandy path, then muddy and, eventually, a more solid road built with oyster shells. Today's modern Hwy. 90 is made of durable, thick concrete.

Wondering About the Past

As travelers ride along our beachfront road, there is often a question of "what used to be here?" Recent hurricanes and construction projects have certainly changed the way land north of our beach highway appears today.

Back in the 1800s, the neighborhood at the intersection of Beauvoir Road and Hwy. 90 was part of an area in Mississippi City referred to as "Beauvoir." The old Beauvoir Road was a simple dirt path to allow horse and buggy travelers to get from Pass Road (Previously called Pass Christian Road) to the sandy beach of the Mississippi Sound.

There was even a Beauvoir train depot located along our present-day train tracks.

Decades Ago

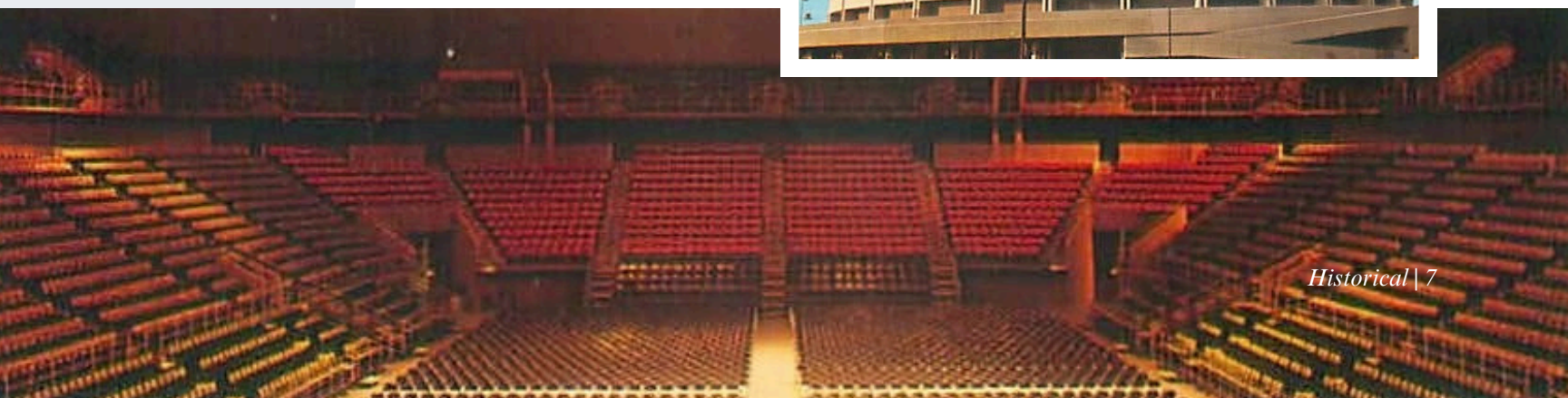
In 1877, Reverand William Leacock and his wife bought a summer home on where the coliseum is currently located. They named it "The Anchorage," a name that has stayed through time.

In 1896, Reverend Alfred Clay (1852-1900) opened the Waif Industrial Home on that property. In those days, a "waif" was considered a homeless, neglected, or abandoned person, usually a child. Today, the term "orphan" is utilized.

Rev. Clay was a native of Chester, England, and was a Methodist minister. He was also the president of the Louisiana Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children.

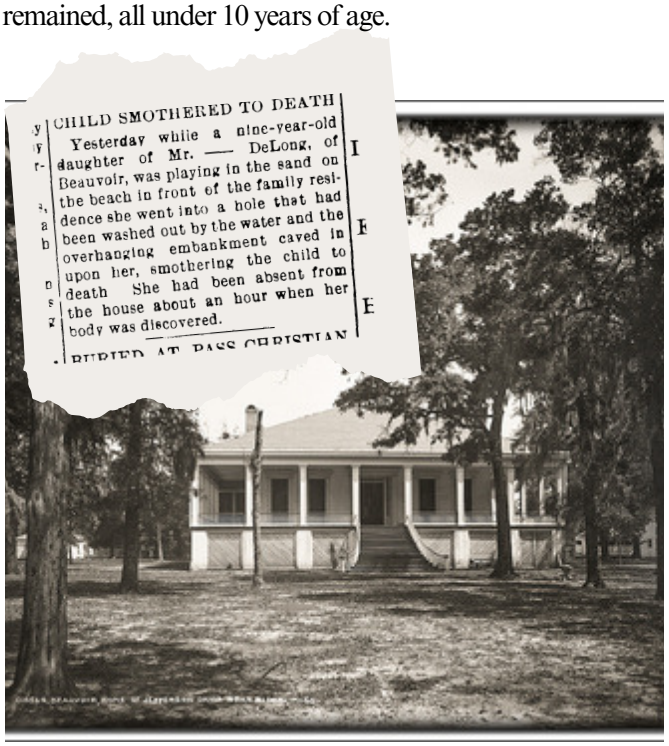
The orphanage had several buildings on its property, which were constructed at a safe elevation from the high tides. The campus included a school, a chapel, and a dormitory. Area businesses were most generous, providing needed provisions for the children. Mr. Nimrod Henley and his son, William, were proprietors of the Biloxi Bakery in downtown Biloxi and delivered bread to the orphanage regularly via horse and buggy. The seafood factories donated ice, and the community graciously contributed additional food and gifts.





The United States Census of 1900 lists about 65 orphan youngsters residing at the waif home. The census lists each as an "inmate."

Rev. Clay died in 1900. After a financial struggle, the waif home began the closing process. By 1903, only ten children remained, all under 10 years of age.



A Tragedy Near Beauvoir

Many other families resided in the neighborhood of Beauvoir. Mr. Fred Delong, a laborer from Wisconsin, resided nearby with his family.

In January 1902, his young daughter, age nine, disappeared while playing near the beach. After a frantic search, she was found. She had died, having fallen into a nearby hole in the sand, pushed inward by the force of the water's current. The local newspaper sadly reports her demise and lists her place of burial as the nearby "waif cemetery."

This cemetery is and was unmarked on maps, but was located behind the orphanage property. Mr. DeLong and his family moved out of the area soon after this devastating occurrence.

What Lies Beneath

Decades later, in the early 1970s, planning was underway for the construction of the state-owned Mississippi Coast Coliseum. During the process, it was discovered that one of the original orphanage buildings was still standing.

After many pleadings, it could not be moved and salvaged, and construction began. One day, in July 1976, a curious report was published in a local newspaper. While preparing to cement the foundation for the structure, workers announced that human remains had been discovered. When reporters revisited for additional information, neither the bones nor the knowledgeable workers could be found. Local legend tells us that the remains were reinterred under the cemented foundation. Could it be that of the little girl who died in 1902? No one knows for sure.

Fast Forward to the Present

A few years ago, coliseum workers were continually baffled by unexplained sights and sounds within the building. Could the spirit of the little girl or others interred in the waif cemetery still reside on the old property?

The Atlantic Paranormal Society (TAPS), a national investigative team of Ghost Hunters, was contacted. With all permissions in place, the team and all their sophisticated electronic technology converged inside the facility and set up equipment to begin their quest. They spoke with coliseum employees who had experienced "visitations" from unseen persons therein.

The Ghost Hunters crew was also provided supportive research materials in vertical files from the Local History and Genealogy Department of the Biloxi Library. The Ghost Hunters (TAPS) even interviewed with (then) Local History Librarian, Jane Shambra, who explained the findings about the unmarked cemetery there through the years.

Soon, thereafter, the investigative video from the TAPS crew was released through the Travel Channel. Thus far, the online video has reached over 16,000 viewers.

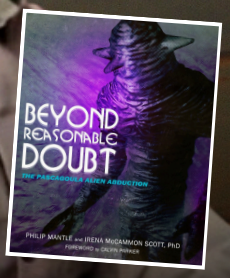
Sometimes, ghost stories leave us with more questions than answers!



Photo Credit: (Top): Mississippi Gulf Coast Museum of Historical Photography. William Henry Jackson Collection. (Center): Daily Herald, January 2, 1902, page 8. Newspaper Archive. Credit: Jane Shambra.

WITNESSED:
THE PASCAGOULA ABDUCTION

Contributed by Philip Mantle



(L): Charles Hickson, (R): Calvin Parker, 1973.

On the night of October 11, 1973, one of the most extraordinary alien abduction cases on record occurred along the Pascagoula River in Pascagoula, Miss. Charles Hickson, 42, and Calvin Parker, 18, co-workers at a local shipyard, were fishing from a pier on the river's west bank when their quiet evening took a chilling turn.

The two men reported hearing a strange whirring sound and saw two blue flashing lights. An oval-shaped craft, about 30 feet long and 8–10 feet high, appeared and hovered roughly two feet above the ground. A door opened, and three strange beings emerged. These entities were around five feet tall, with pale grey, wrinkled skin. Their heads seemed to connect directly to their shoulders, with no visible neck. Instead, they had three carrot-like appendages, one where a human's nose would be and two where ears would normally sit.

Their limbs ended in lobster-like claws, and their lower bodies appeared fused, ending in large, flat feet. The creatures moved in a stiff, mechanical way and levitated the men into the craft.

Hickson later recalled being suspended above the floor and examined by a football-sized, mechanical eye-like device. Parker fainted and had little recollection of what happened, though he later shared fragmented memories under hypnosis. After about 15–20 minutes, the beings returned them to the riverbank, visibly shaken and terrified.

Initially, they attempted to report the incident at Keesler Air Force Base in Biloxi but were referred to the local authorities. Around 10:30 p.m., they arrived at the Jackson County Sheriff's Department. Sheriff Fred Diamond found their fear convincing, especially Parker's distress. Calvin also later described being laid out on a transparent table, with a painful object inserted into his foot, and a card-sized, clicking device scanning him from above.



The young couple, Maria & Jerry Blair



Maria Blair during regressive hypnosis



Maria & Jerry Blair at the Pascagoula Pier

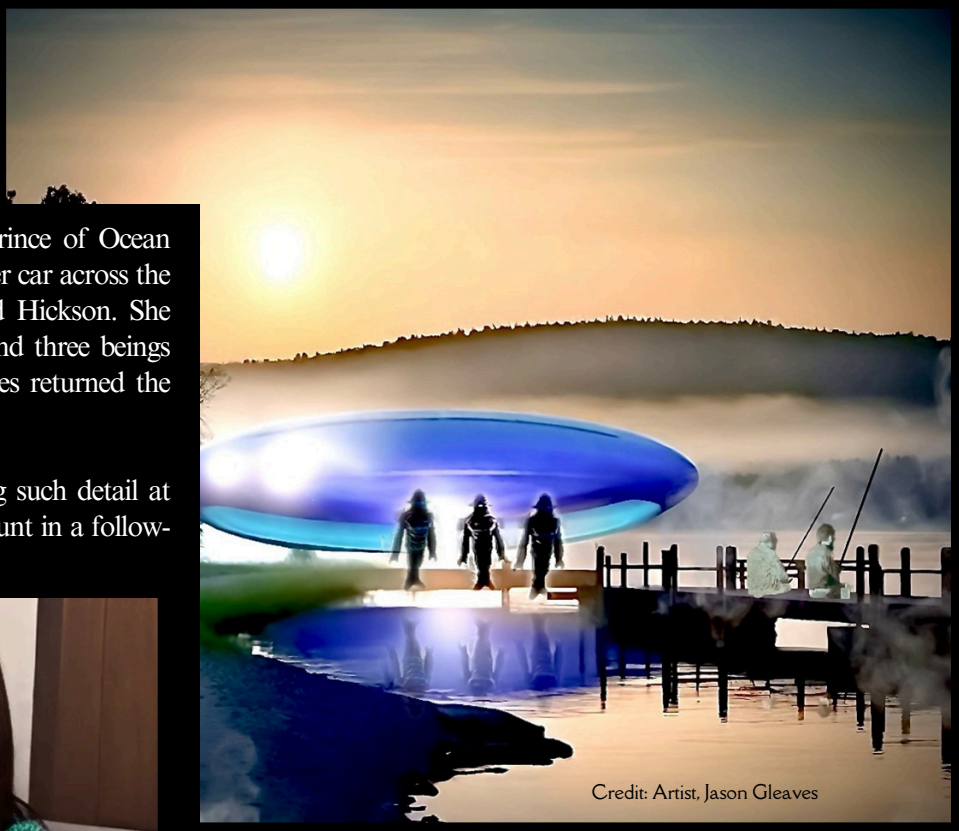
ADDITIONAL EYEWITNESSES: MARIA AND JERRY BLAIR

Decades later, new testimony emerged that added another layer to the story. In 2021, Maria Blair came forward after her daughter saw a video about Parker's experience on YouTube. She revealed that she and her husband, Jerry, had also witnessed unusual activity from the opposite side of the Pascagoula River that same night.

Jerry, who worked offshore, was waiting for his supervisor before departing. While sitting in their car, Maria saw a blue aircraft flying erratically over the river. They walked down the pier to load Jerry's clothes onto the boat when Maria witnessed a "grey man" leap from the water and disappear again.

Frightened, she ran back to the car. A puzzling three-hour time gap followed, with no memory of what had occurred. Before his death, Jerry made a startling confession: he, too, had been abducted that night. Maria later underwent regressive hypnosis at Calvin Parker's home in 2022. Emotional and detailed, she described how the beings took her eggs for use in creating human-like hybrids capable of blending in with society.

A DIRECT VIEW OF THE ABDUCTION


Credit: Artist, Jason Gleaves

In a 2023 interview conducted by Chelsea Norton Prince of Ocean Springs, Maria shared even more. She said that from her car across the river, she actually saw the craft approach Parker and Hickson. She described the flashing blue lights, the door opening, and three beings descending toward the men. She watched as the figures returned the men, noting that Calvin appeared slumped over.

Though some have questioned the possibility of seeing such detail at night across the river, Maria firmly confirmed her account in a follow-up message: "Yes, I did."


Maria Blair interview with Chelsea Prince, 2023.

FINAL REFLECTIONS

I've spent decades investigating UFO encounters around the world, but nothing has haunted me quite like what happened on the banks of the Pascagoula River that night in 1973.

Two men came forward. Two more stayed silent for years. Now, the pieces are falling into place through interviews, hypnosis and confessions made just before the final breath.

In *Beyond Reasonable Doubt*, which I co-authored with Dr. Irena McCammon Scott, and in 'Pascagoula Uncovered,' I've documented everything: the evidence, the witnesses, the long-buried truths. The docuseries 'Pascagoula 73' brings those voices to light, but I believe there's still more to uncover.

If you were there that night...if you saw something, felt something, lost time...I need to hear from you. Because they didn't just come and leave. They took. They watched. And maybe...they still are.
Email me directly at philip.mantle@gmail.com.


Credit: Alberto Forgione



Pearl River County Historical Society, Thigpen Hardware Collection, 1923.

A young E.F. Tate. Courtesy of Pearl River County Historical Society, Napier Collection.

TATE HOUSE MANSION

The Misunderstood Majesty

Contributed by Jim Luke, Mayor of Picayune
Author of Gateway to Picayune's Prosperity

There are some who know of a Picayune far before my time. But if you grew up here, if your roots tangle with the earth along Goodyear or North Main, then you've heard of the Tate House. She wasn't just another old home. No, she was *the house*. The mansion. The myth. Eastman Francis (E.F.) Tate built her on four sprawling acres near the railroad, a location that hummed with prosperity and purpose. At a time when most homes in Picayune were modest wood-framed, the Tate House rose in defiant elegance, three stories high, wrapped in an ornate veranda, topped with dormers glinting with stained glass, and cloaked in cast-concrete blocks shaped like Weathered stone. She borrowed her style from the grand homes of St. Charles Avenue in New Orleans, part Queen Anne, part heavy Victorian, stately, whimsical and slightly asymmetrical in a way that made her even more intriguing.

She was a landmark of ambition. A gateway, if you will, to Picayune's own chapter of prosperity. But over time, the Tate House became something else, something quieter and, some would say, more mysterious.

My friend and classmate, Kay Helen, remembers that mystery well. In the early 1960s, when she was just a schoolgirl riding the quiet streets of Picayune on her bicycle, the Tate House stood empty. Not yet ruined, but no longer kept.

It had been left behind, not because no one cared, but because the heirs couldn't agree on how to let her go. Offers came and went, but no consensus could be reached. And so, the grand house sat. Waiting. Watching. Decaying slowly in silence.

To the younger generation, it became a place of myth and curiosity. Parents warned their children to steer clear, which only deepened its allure. Some claimed it was haunted, though no one could name the ghost. The house had simply become a place frozen in time, and in stillness, imaginations filled the gaps.

Kay told me about the Sunday afternoon she and two of her friends finally worked up the courage to explore the mansion. She remembered the creak of the swollen front door with its stained glass panels and carved wood.

Inside, the air was heavy but not hostile. The reception hall stretched wide and dignified. They saw evidence of fires in the hearth, burned cans, ash, the kind of leftovers that hinted at travelers from the nearby tracks. Hoboes, perhaps. Hungry, cold and looking for a moment of warmth.

The house seemed to hold its breath as they climbed the grand staircase, its mahogany banister polished by time. The floor groaned beneath them, echoes of the past, not warnings. And then, a sound, small, sudden, enough to make them scatter like startled birds, shrieking out of the house in a flurry of nerves.

They were proud to have gone in. Braver, somehow. Marked by the memory.

But the Tate House never meant to scare them. She wasn't a place of malice. She simply held too much memory. Too many Sunday suppers. Too many births, too many goodbyes.

Laughter. Loss. Love.
She had grown lonely.
And then, the real tragedy came.

In May of 1968, vagrants, those same souls who may once have sought only warmth, set fire to the house. Whether by accident or disregard, it doesn't matter. By the time the fire was extinguished, it was too late. The Tate House was gone.

The mansion that once promised a new era for Picayune was reduced to ashes and sorrow.

It had stood empty for years, not out of neglect, but because of disagreement. Her future was locked in stalemates and uncertain hands. And when the fire took her, it didn't just burn wood and glass, it burned possibility. It burned stories that had never been told.

I often think about what it would be like to still see her standing today, how she might have been restored, how she might have welcomed visitors or inspired preservation.

But even in her absence, the Tate House remains. In stories whispered. In the dreams of preservationists. In the quiet ache of those who remember her grandeur.

She was never truly haunted. Just misunderstood. And perhaps that is the gentlest kind of ghost, a memory that stays, not to frighten, but to remind.

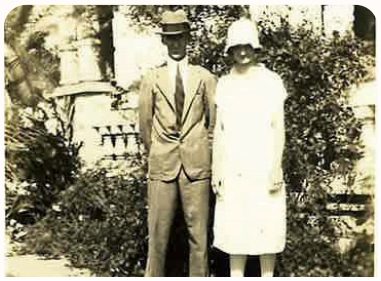
She asked only to be remembered.
And we do.



The adolescent Tate children, 1912. Courtesy of Pearl River County Historical Society, Napier Collection.



The Tate Family, 1926. Courtesy of Pearl River County Historical Society, Napier Collection.



Courtesy of Pearl River County Historical Society, Napier Collection.



E.F. & Paul Allen Tate, 1912. Courtesy of Pearl River County Historical Society, Napier Collection.



Lena Mae Tate. Courtesy of Pearl River County Historical Society, Napier Collection.

THE RING IN THE oak

CONTRIBUTED BY EDDIE COLEMAN

In the quiet rectory yard of Biloxi, nestled between timeworn pathways and weathered benches, there stands an old oak tree.

It draws little attention from those passing by, unless they happen to look up. There, high in its branches, a perfect ring curls through the limbs like a secret. It's not carved or hung, but grown, twisted into shape by something older than memory, and more enduring than a storm.

The story begins many years before Biloxi was etched onto maps, when the land was home to native tribes who lived by the rhythm of the tides and the hush of the pine woods. Among these people was a young woman, strong-willed and graceful, the only daughter of a powerful chief. Her father, respected and proud, ruled with a certainty that left little room for questions.

She had grown up beneath the shadow of this oak, often escaping to its roots for quiet moments and dreams. It was there, beneath its wide green canopy, that she met the boy.

He was the son of another chief, one whose tribe had long been at odds with her father's. The tension between their families was bitter and unspoken, a silence heavier than words. But love, as it always does, found its way. Quietly, at first, then all at once. A glance turned into a conversation. A conversation into a shared rhythm. And soon, the girl and the boy were meeting beneath the oak, trading stories and smiles and imagining a life beyond the weight of their fathers' histories.

When they finally stood before her father and asked for his blessing, they believed, perhaps naively, that love would be enough to sway him.

It wasn't.



"The creation of a thousand forests is in one acorn." Ralph Waldo Emerson



The chief said nothing at first. He turned his back on them, walked slowly across the yard, and raised his arm toward the young oak. Then, without looking back, he spoke, not in fury, but with the kind of finality that leaves no room for hope. “The young fawn can never be the light of your wigwam until a ring grows in yonder branches.”

The words struck like thunder. It was not just a refusal, but a sentence. The lovers said nothing, only returned to the place where it had all begun. They sat under the oak in silence, holding hands as the sky began to darken.

That night, the storm rolled in. It wasn’t unusual for the coast, storms came often, sudden and wild, but this one was different. Winds tore through the trees like unseen hands. Rain fell in torrents. And lightning streaked the heavens with a fury that shook the very ground.

By dawn, the storm had passed. The world seemed softer in its wake. The old chief stepped into the yard to survey the damage, and his eyes lifted, almost absently, to the oak.

There, in the branches, a ring had formed. Not broken limbs or fallen branches, but a circle, clean and distinct, as if the tree had bent to cradle something invisible. Something sacred.

He stood frozen. A man not easily swayed by superstition, he could not explain what he saw, but in his heart, he knew. Something had spoken. Not through thunder, not through fear, but through the gentle force of love that had refused to bend until the world bent for it.
He called for them, his daughter and the boy, and without ceremony or apology, gave them his blessing.

They were married beneath the tree. And ever since, the oak has kept its quiet watch. The ring in the branches hasn’t faded, even as decades have softened the bark. It remains an echo of a love that endured silence, storms and stubborn hearts. A reminder that even the hardest truths can be softened by something as simple and as profound as love.

And the tree endured more than just the storms of the heart. When Hurricane Camille struck the coast in 1969, one of its opposite limbs was torn away, yet the ring, impossibly, remained intact. Years later, during the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, the oak stood tall once again, weathering winds that toppled buildings and history.

The neighboring Church of the Redeemer, once a spiritual companion on the grounds, did not survive. Now, in a twist of fate both ironic and beautiful, a high-rise hotel rises from that sacred soil. Yet the oak still stands. The developers, recognizing the silent legacy written in its limbs, preserved the tree and the ring, an enduring circle of love, loss and resilience, cradled in the arms of an ancient oak. *This story was derived from a legend as shared in “Way Down South,” Vol. 5 No. 6 – March-April 1928.*



MEMORIES WITH RAY L. BELLANDE

"I Heard The Whistle." The 'whistle' refers to the canning factory's signal to its laborers that a catch of wild GULF of AMERICA seafood has arrived for processing.







Top: Ray L. Bellande as a baby
Below: Ray L. Bellande as a Boy Scout

Introduction

Greeting folks! ***RAY L. BELLANDE*** *here to share some of my Biloxi lived history. Many thanks to Director, Rhonda Price for allowing me this opportunity. Kudos to RoxAnn Wicker and Chelsea Prince for their love and tenacity in creating EMBRACE.*

Memories of Back Bay [1947-1961]

The social life of a youth growing up on Back Bay was rather meager. There was school, a city park, sports, church, scouting, clubs, and an occasional birthday party or dance. Very few teens had automobiles, but the fortunate were charitable and drove the less fortunate to weekends wasted at the many clubs, drive-inns and other 'hangouts' between Rodenburg Avenue and Pat Harrison, now Veterans Boulevard.

A Catholic Education

The Back Bay section of Biloxi had five schools, two were public and three parochial. Gorenflo and M.F. Nichols, both, black institutions, were public while St. John's, Notre Dame, and Our Mother of Sorrows [also black] were our Catholic educational facilities.

My academic career commenced in September 1949 with a memorable fall down the front steps of our small bungalow on Lameuse Street. This was a time when most schools began the day after Labor Day, or the first Monday in September. As I recall, schools in the rural areas of Harrison County ended their school year in the spring a few weeks prior to their urban counterparts. This allowed students in these agricultural areas to assist in the spring planting and other agricultural chores.

My first-grade teacher was Sister Nathaniel at St. John's Catholic School. The building was old, wooden and virtually not insulated. Our misery didn't last long as the following year the new St. John's Elementary School was built in 1950-1951. Bishop R.O. Gerow dedicated the six-class room, brick structure on May 6, 1951. This parochial school was situated north of the parish rectory on Bradford Street between Lameuse Street and Main Street, it no longer exists. St. John's parish is now called Blessed Francis Xavier Seelos. [The Daily Herald, May 6, 1951, p. 10]

At St. John's we were taught by the Sisters of Mercy [interesting name for educators]! This holy order had come to Biloxi before 1888 as they were operating the "Convent School" on Reynoir Street. It was the predecessor of the Sacred Heart Academy. Notre Dame High School began in September 1943 in the Dantzler House on West Beach near Porter Avenue and the Biloxi Lighthouse. The "new" Notre Dame High School near Keegan's Bayou opened in September 1953 in a new $220,000 building with a $40,000 residence for its male teachers. Brother Rex, C.S.C. was principal. [The Daily Herald, August 21, 1943, p. 6, September 2, 1943, p. 7, and September 1, 1953, p. 1]

Today, Saint Patrick's, although no longer in Biloxi, but a satellite of The Tradition, a 4800-acre, real estate development in north central Harrison County, functions as a co-educational, Catholic academy with similar goals as its predecessors: Sacred Heart, Notre Dame, and Mercy Cross. These schools were renown for: small classes, high academic and moral standards, a familial cohesiveness and school pride. Coincidentally, St. Patrick's opened in 2007 on land donated by Joseph Canizaro [1937-2025], a 1954 graduate of Notre Dame High School, and successful NOLA banker and realtor. Mr. Canizaro has also been proactive in the development of William Carey University-Tradition Campus and the Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College Bryant Center, a nursing educational facility, which will vastly increase its current programs.

Games We Played

I would attend St. John's for six years, although not consecutively. My best memories are on the playground. The acme of recess was to gather on the lawn of the rectory on Bradford Street and 'play king of the hill.' This area of Biloxi lies in the drainage basin of Bayou Auguste and is relatively low-so what in Biloxi isn't topographically low you ask? Well, there is a low ridge that runs in front of the rectory that is about three-feet higher than the street. This was our 'hill.' Sides or classes were chosen to defend and others to attack. It got rough at times getting pushed or shoved off the hill-but fun for school kid!

It was also common to have several marble games in progress before classes, during recess, lunch and after school. Marbles was a big deal. One could play 'boxzese' or 'ringzese.' Ringzese was more difficult as the marbles were placed in the center of a circle drawn in the dirt. Shooters had to fire at a marble and hit it with enough force to propel it from the ring. If you weren't happy, you could always 'pick up your marbles and go home.' Dodge ball was fun. The girls played hopscotch and jumped rope. The playground was relatively small, and it wasn't unusual to break a window in the old wooden school, which then served as an auditorium and meeting hall.

UNTIL THE NEXT WHISTLE BLOWS,

AU "RAY" VOIR!






INNOVATIVE

MAKING



Mississippi Macabre, Jackson Comics.



(L): Steven Butler, (Center): Blake Barnes, (R): Rod Mooney

Contributed by Rodney Mooney,
Mississippi Macabre Historian

What stirs one's spirit…encourages one's eyes to light with wonder, one's body to lean as if to listen to something secret or sacred…is folklore. *Mississippi Macabre* is for all who grew up reading *Tales from the Crypt* or sharing spooky stories around campfires. It's for Mississippians who "swore" they'd seen Bigfoot, looked to the Pascagoula skies for aliens or listened to the Singing River for the siren's call. Like the Brothers Grimm, who once traveled across Germany collecting and preserving their nation's oral fairy tales, *Mississippi Macabre* endeavors to breathe life into Mississippi legends, immortalizing them for future generations. As the historian for *Mississippi Macabre*, out of the 153 historically and culturally significant tales I've discovered so far, some have never before been recorded.

No one from Friar's Point, Miss., seems to remember the Mud Monster who once terrorized half the town by rising out of the Mississippi River, throwing mud until they ran away. Many don't know Bigfoot is thought to have been first spotted in Natchez, Miss.

I spend countless hours researching, traveling and interviewing locals to get to the bottom of every story, leaving no stone unturned. From reviewing old Spanish journals from the 1500's to interviewing mayors and Native American chiefs, I've collected a Mississippi menagerie of tales from the other side.

Notably, for each story, we include a historical prose page sharing where the known facts end and, when necessary to fill in the gaps, how the comic takes creative liberties to conclude the tale.

After discovering Mississippi folklore, I added it to a shared document with artist coordinator, Steven Butler (famous for Sonic the Hedgehog, Spider-Man, Archie, Disney/Marvel) and Blake Barnes of Mississippi Public Broadcasting (Owner of *Jackson Comics* and Editor/Writer for *Mississippi Macabre*), which is used to decide which stories to write for an issue. After choosing a story, the writer uses the research to write the first draft.



With guidance from Butler, the artist then follows the writer's script, using photos and notes from our travels and research. Character design is first on the agenda. Like the famed Headless Horseman of Sleepy Hollow, the Yazoo Witch is a beloved town figure celebrated through countless town events, so this character's representation is important. Though author Willie Morris once described the witch, 'she'd never been immortalized with an illustration.' Thanks to Butler, those in Yazoo now have an image to haunt their nightmares.

The cover is hand-painted on canvas by artist Brian LeBlanc, then transposed digitally, giving it a very unique, personal attention to care and detail. Though LeBlanc paints, some of our other artists use traditional methods, and others go the digital route or a mix of both.

Next, an artist will begin creating the layouts, rough sketches of each page, in pencil. After much creating and erasing, layouts help ensure the page flows well through action, dialogue, etc., asking, "Is there enough room for the text? Should we have fewer panels on a page?" It's fascinating to see an artist take an original sketch of a character running, but at the suggestion from another team member, slightly change the direction of an arm to better fit a scene. After penciling the final layouts, inks are added to the original draft with further shading, depth, texture and improvements into something more permanent. Typically handled by Lily Butler, lettering sometimes includes adding the text via handwriting or fonts from a digital device. This is a massively important part of any comic, as the story will fall flat if it's unclear.



The creative design process of Neshoba chasing Christine.



Artist, Brian LeBlanc is creating the cover.

Colors can make or break a story. In *Bigfoot on the Bluffs*, I wanted stark contrasts in color to represent Bigfoot's dual nature: the scary monster and the elusive creature we've come to adore. Thus, an imposing red would create a sense of dread and fear for a scene portraying the battle at Fort Rosalie; whereas gentle bright greens and blues would contrast a more relaxed Bigfoot as he walks with a new friend, a child, through the majestic Natchez Trace. There are many different art styles in *Mississippi Macabre* to offer variety, fit the mood of a tale and provide opportunities for other Mississippi artists to showcase their unique skills. In our first issue, John Jennings of Clarksdale, Miss., (#1 New York Times bestselling author, Harvard Fellow, Eisner and Hugo Award Winner) chose a black and white color scheme for his story "Crossroad Blues" to provide depth, contrast,and a "classic" look.

At this stage, we organize the order of the comic's pages. Adjustments such as shifting an ad page earlier in the comic, forcing the following story to fall on different pages, may improve the pacing of a story. Now, a reader might encounter an off-page "ROAR!" at the end of a page's last panel, creating suspense because they now must physically turn the page to discover the source of the "ROAR!" In this case, the dramatic 1st appearance of a werewolf! Finally, after all revisions are complete, we send it to Mississippi native, Thomas Florimonte, at Ka-Blam, a digital printing company that specializes in short-run comic book printing, another art form that consists of attention to detail.

Mississippi Macabre is more than a comic; its writers and artists passionately delve into the murky swamps and shadowy corners of old haunts to capture and bottle Mississippi's most sacred folklore, one eerie tale at a time, to share and preserve, adding it to our rich Southern cultural roux. So…the next time you're sitting on that old squeaky glider on your mother's gray porch or fishing with your dad in his rusty boat… take a moment and ask them about the old, haunted house way up on the hill. Ask them for their stories… We're full of a lot of things in Mississippi, but one thing tops the list in glorious abundance… Boy! Have we got a story to tell?!

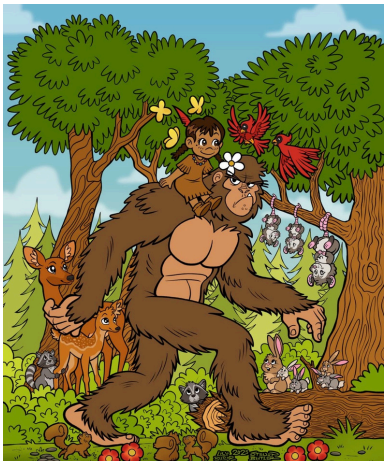


Various stories in the creative process, from sketching, to ink, to lettering.











Digging into the Past

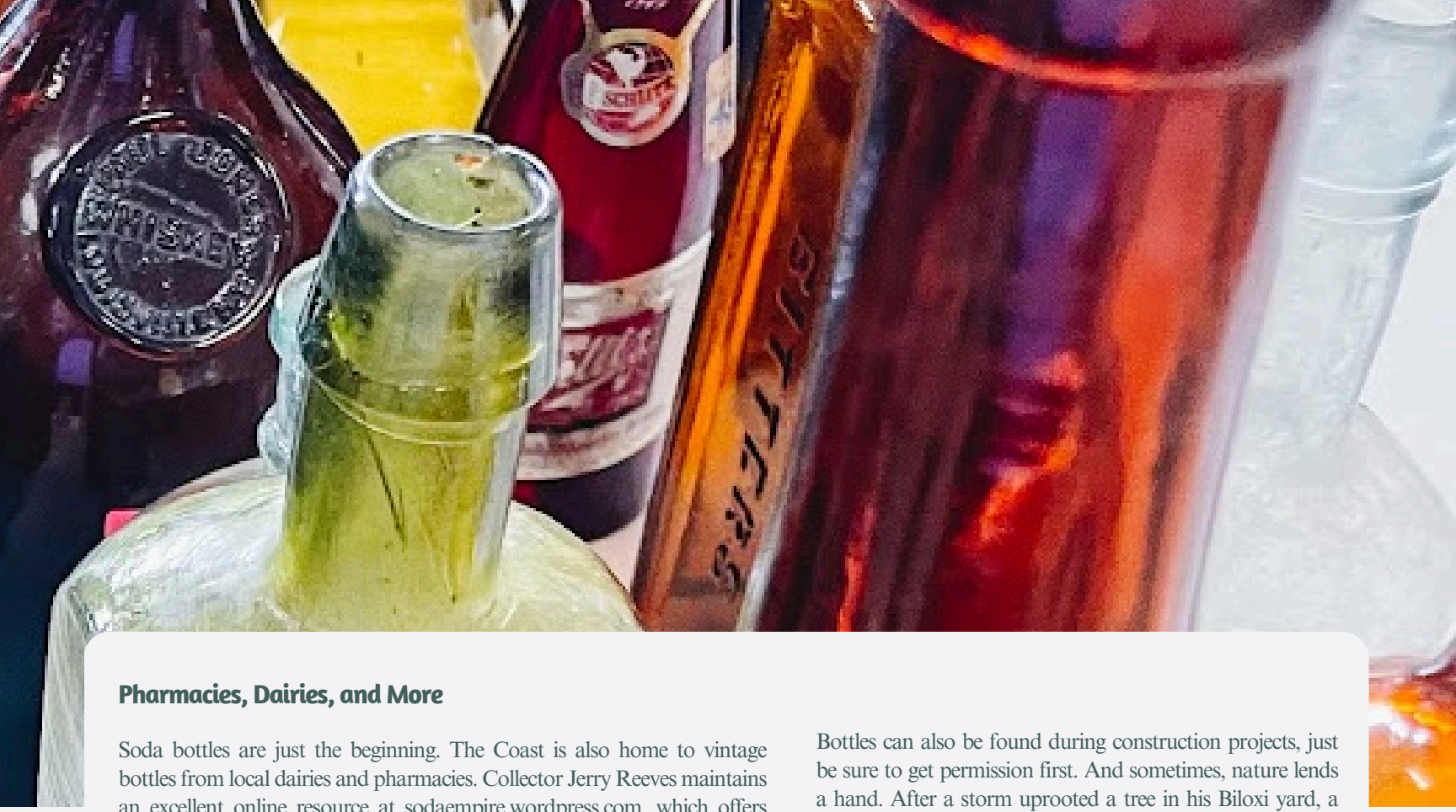
ANTIQUE BOTTLE COLLECTING ALONG THE MISSISSIPPI GULF COAST

Contributed by Randy Randazzo

Coastians are increasingly drawn to their heritage, seeking meaningful ways to connect with our rich commercial and cultural past. One fascinating path into that history is the world of antique bottle collecting, a hobby that uncovers the everyday artifacts of our ancestors, from soda and medicine bottles to dairy containers. Each bottle tells a story, and on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, those stories run deep. New collectors are often surprised by the wide variety of vintage bottles available in our region. Whether it's a soda bottle from a long-gone bottling works or a rare medicine bottle from a local pharmacy, these glass treasures are tangible pieces of history.



Chelsea Prince at a dig site in Biloxi, MS



Pharmacies, Dairies, and More

Soda bottles are just the beginning. The Coast is also home to vintage bottles from local dairies and pharmacies. Collector Jerry Reeves maintains an excellent online resource at sodaempire.wordpress.com, which offers background information and imagery for collectors of all levels.

Vintage bottles turn up in three main places: underground, underwater, or inside old buildings, such as attics, sheds, or crawlspaces. This makes bottle collecting a hobby, part history, part archaeology.

Where to Find Vintage Bottles

Most bottles are buried, and digging is often the best way to find them. The most promising dig sites are near old buildings. These can be identified through word of mouth, remains of foundations, or historic records like the Sanborn Insurance Maps—many of which are accessible online at loc.gov.

Get permission before digging on private property

One success story involves Pass Christian detective and bottle collector Mike Burkett. In 2017, Mike and his team found over 300 soda bottles from the early 1900s in a brick-lined cistern in Gulfport. In a *Sun Herald* article, he stressed the importance of patience and getting proper permission, sharing how he once struck gold at the former Mirimar Hotel in Pass Christian, a site others had already explored.

Essential Tools of the Trade

Once you've located a promising site, the most important tool is a bottle probe, a thin, spring-steel rod with a T-handle. When inserted into the ground, it emits a ping when striking glass. For more on digging tools, check out Adventure Archeology on YouTube.

Bottles can also be found during construction projects, just be sure to get permission first. And sometimes, nature lends a hand. After a storm uprooted a tree in his Biloxi yard, a cousin discovered a pristine Barq's Coca-Cola bottle sitting on the exposed roots.

Water Finds and Winter Treasures

The Coast's salt and freshwater bodies hold many treasures. Winter low tides expose shorelines that are often littered with historical debris. I once found a hand-blown wine bottle from the 1800s on a marsh island in Biloxi Bay and another early Barq's bottle in a dredged-up mud pile. Creek and river walks can also be productive, especially after a heavy rain.

Antique Shows and Online Markets

In addition to digging, collectors can find bottles at estate sales, antique shops, and online through platforms like eBay or AmericanBottle.com. The Annual Antique Bottle Show is another highlight—this year, it will be held on Saturday, October 4, 2025, from 9:00–4:00 at the Joppa Shrine Temple, 13280 Shriners Blvd., Biloxi.

A helpful online community is the Mississippi Antique Bottle & Advertising Collectors group on Facebook. During a group poll, one collector shared their rarest piece: a small cobalt blue medicine bottle from D'Acquin Pharmacy in Biloxi, believed to be the only one in existence.

KNOW YOUR BOTTLES



Fig. 2: Blown Wine Bottle Crude Hand Applied Lip



Fig. 3: Barq's Bottle Found in Dredge Mud



Fig. 4: Barq's Coca-Cola



Fig. 5: J Pablo, Biloxi



Fig. 6: Earliest Barq's Bottles



Fig. 7: Barq's Moon Glo

Other Coast rarities include:

- Biloxi Pablo (Figure #5)
- Bay St. Louis Coca-Cola
- Scranton C.H. Hudson (Figure #15)
- Barq's Moon Glo (Figure #7)
- The legendary Barq's Coca-Cola hybrid (Figure #4)



Fig. 8: Gulfport Coca-Cola



Fig. 9: Gulfport, Barq's Bottling



Fig. 10: Gulfport: Barq's & Hardtner Bottling



Fig. 11: Gulfport: F. Margiotta Bottling



Fig. 12: Long Beach: J.O. Farrar



Fig. 13: Pascagoula: Valverde Bottling



Fig. 14: Pass Christian Bottling



Fig. 15: Scranton, CH Hudson



Fig. 16: Waveland Geyser

A Hidden History in Glass

Take soda bottles, for example. Throughout the 1900's, towns up and down the Coast were home to dozens of small bottling companies, some operating for decades, others for just a few short years. Here are just a few notable examples:

Bay St. Louis

Bay St. Louis Bottling (1920s–1930s); Coca-Cola (1915); Peerless Bottling Works (1910s); Big Jim Beverages, O-So Grape, Cheer Up (1950s)

Biloxi

Barq's (1898–present, originally Biloxi Artesian Bottling Works); J. Pablo & Co. (late 1800s) Corso Cefalu Bottling (1940s); NuGrape, Coca Cola, Pepsi Cola, Thriller (1950s); Big-O Beverages (1960s)

Gulfport

Barq's and Hardtner Bottling (early 1900s–1920s); Frank Smith, Gulfport Soda Water, Simms, French, Consumers Bottling (early–mid 1900s); Coca-Cola (1906–present)

Other Cities

Long Beach: Long Beach Bottling, J.O. Farrar (early 1900s); *Pascagoula:* J.W. Jegel (1910s–1920s), Twin Cities Bottling (1930s), Barq's (1940s); *Pass Christian:* Pass Christian Bottling (early 1900s); Scranton (now Pascagoula): Valverde, C.H. Hudson, Progressive Bottling Works (early 1900s); *Waveland:* Geyser Bottling (1920s)



The Barq's Coca-Cola Mystery

Around 1910, Barq's reportedly sold an unofficial version of Coca-Cola using modified Barq's bottles embossed with the Coca-Cola logo (Fig. #4). Coca-Cola officials objected, and most of the bottles mysteriously vanished. After Coca-Cola later acquired Barq's, collectors clamored for the elusive bottle, driving up its value substantially.

To Clean or Not to Clean

Bottles buried underground for decades often develop mineral stains. While some collectors use tumbling or other methods to clean their finds, I personally prefer gentle washing with soapy water to avoid damage.

A Quick Guide to Bottle Design

Over time, bottle design has evolved significantly:

- Free-blown bottles – Handcrafted, often from the 1800s (Fig. #2)
- Blob top bottles – Machine-made starting in the mid-1800s (Fig. #5)
- Hutchinson bottles – Introduced in the late 1800s, with a spring stopper (Fig #6)
- Crown top bottles – Came into use around 1895, offering a better seal. Barq's Bottle found in dredge mud (Fig. #3)
- ACL (Applied Color Label) bottles – Introduced in 1931 using silk-screen printing (Fig. #7)

Coast Bottling Milestones

The oldest known soda bottler on the Coast was J. Pablo & Sons, a New Orleans company with a Biloxi plant next to the old City Hall on Main Street. Their bottles are scarce and highly sought after (Fig. #5).

Ed Barq Sr. launched his Biloxi Artesian Bottling Works in 1898, using Hutchinson-style bottles (Fig. #6), including the rare "Double Biloxi" variant. Around 1910, Barq's transitioned to crown tops (Fig. #3), and in 1939, introduced Moon Glo (Fig. #7), one of the earliest ACL designs. Unfortunately, Moon Glo bottles are hard to find today due to the rapid deterioration of their painted labels underground.

More Than Bottles

Digging for bottles often yields more than expected, including vintage dairy and drugstore bottles, as well as unexpected relics of daily life. Mike Burkett even constructs and sells shadow boxes made from his finds in the French Quarter. You can view his work at Derek Doyle Designs in Pass Christian.

Disclaimer: Do not dig on private, state, Indian, or government property without permission. Understand the Antiquities Law of 1906 as well as the Archaeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA) before digging.

"Whether you're drawn to history, treasure hunting, or simply preserving the stories of the Mississippi Gulf Coast, bottle collecting offers an exciting and rewarding adventure, one glass relic at a time."

Randy Randazzo, 2025





Photo Credit: Benny Weinberg

MYSTIC BOAT RIDES

Contributed by Jennifer Johnston

The Pascagoula Alien Abduction isn't the only haunted waterway on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. Westbound near the end of the coast lies Bayou Caddy, a fisherman's bayou. I began my tours in 2020 on the Haunted Bayou Cruise, and in June 2021, while setting out props for the tour, my boat captain, Justin, spotted a UFO in the sky. My customers couldn't believe it; it wasn't one of my props, nor was it from The Mystic Ghost Ride Company. I've long been fascinated with reptilians and aliens, even writing a story about reptilians on the bayou. Perhaps that fascination draws them to Bayou Caddy. I dream of a future device that can reveal parallel worlds among us, let's check back in 2050 to see if it becomes reality.









By the summer of 2023, two years after the first sighting, we experienced sightings of large bird-like beings in the bayou. These entities often appear when black birds are around, especially during a full moon or an eclipse. We've also observed green, traveling, orb-like entities, seemingly forming to acknowledge our presence. I believe abductions occur, and Mississippi is far from alone in UFO sightings. Customers have sent photos confirming these experiences, echoing what the Pascagoula abductees described fifty years ago. On the "Haunted Bayou Cruise," besides ghosts, aliens occasionally make an appearance; sometimes, you cannot unsee what's out there.

The Mystic Ghost Ride Company has been touring the Mississippi Gulf Coast for over five years. I invite you to join The Haunted Bayou Cruise for an evening of Halloween thrills and chills: www.mysticghostrides.com. If history and ghost stories aren't your thing, we also offer "The Bay Saint Louis Discovery Boat Tour," full of history and mystery at: www.gulfcoastecotour.com.

MISSISSIPPI GULF COAST NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA BLUEWAYS

ESCATAWPA RIVER

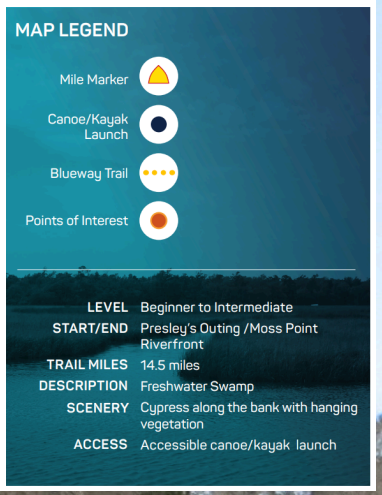
Words by Andrew Barrett

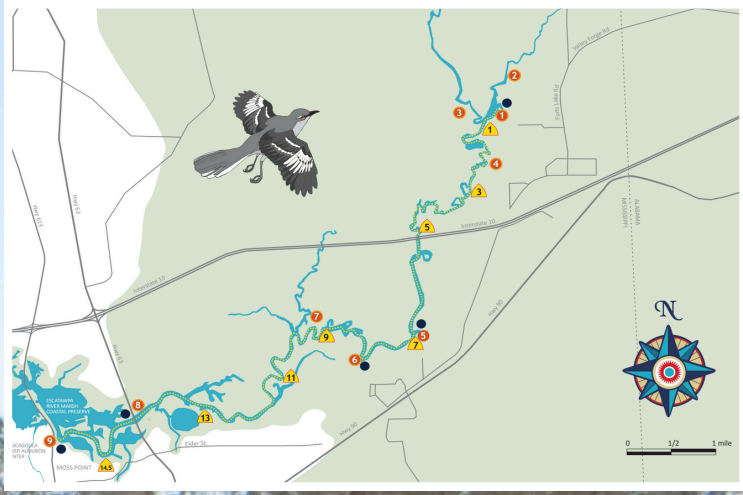
To float the lower Escatawpa River is to experience exquisite natural scenery within one of the most biologically diverse watersheds in the country. One of three major tributaries of the Pascagoula River, the Escatawpa is unique in its proximity to the coast and its rapid transition between fresh and brackish waters that make up the lower reaches of coastal rivers. This 14.5-mile trail begins in a large freshwater lake within the bottomland hardwood forest portion of the river, where giant Bald Cypress, Water Tupelo and Atlantic White Cedar dominate the scene and dark, tannic (tea-colored) waters flow downstream around numerous “oxbow” bends in the river.

From this upper third of the float, and still within the tannic water reach of the river, the influence of tides shifts the scenery to open, Sawgrass-dominated marshes with numerous, yet scattered, majestic Pond Cypress trees.

The final third of the float transitions to more tidally influenced marshes, where higher salinity shifts plant life to Black Needlerush and more brackish water conditions. Along the way, a rich diversity of bird life can be observed across this transition, including bottomland species such as Prothonotary Warbler, Northern Parula and Swallow-tailed Kite, Osprey, Bald Eagle and a rich diversity of wading and marsh birds adding to the diversity that makes this watershed and region a premier destination for nature enthusiasts who want to see nature as it should be.

MISSISSIPPI GULF COAST NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA BLUEWAYS





The Escatawpa River Blueway encompasses the lower 15 miles of the Escatawpa River. The river originates in Alabama and meanders near the Alabama and Mississippi border for much of its length. The Escatawpa is known for its dark water and white sand beaches. The dark water comes from tannin which makes the water look like weak tea. The water is completely fresh at the upper end of the Blueway and becomes slightly brackish to brackish in its lower half.

The scenery along the Blueway section of the river, starting at the upper end, includes Cypress and Tupelo swamps, with numerous cedar trees. The river is of medium width at that point. The river widens in the lower section, and the scenery transitions to salt marshes.

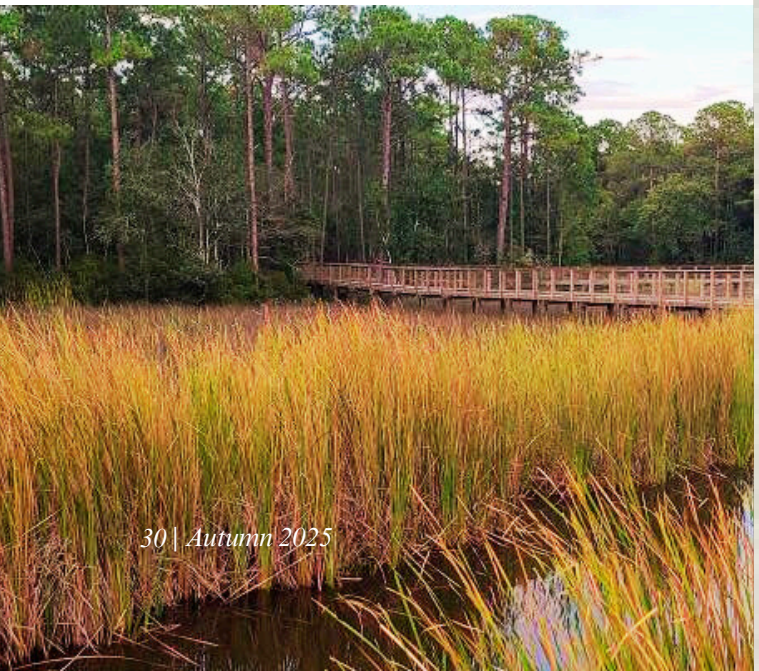
There are several unique and very interesting side trips that can be paddled from the Blueway. The three best side trips start with Jackson Creek, which flows into Goodes Mill Lake at Presley's Outing. Jackson Creek can be paddled for a distance of approximately two miles from its entrance at Presley's Outing. The time required to make the round trip from Presley's is one to two hours, depending on paddling speed.

Another side trip is Franklin Creek, which enters the Escatawpa River at a point about a mile downriver from Presley's Outing. Franklin Creek can be paddled for a distance of approximately three miles from its mouth at the Escatawpa River. Total paddling time for the round trip from Presley's is two to four hours, again depending on paddling speed. The scenery in Franklin Creek is very similar to that of Jackson Creek, and is some of the most fascinating in Jackson County. Both creeks are mostly narrow, but deep. Both start with beautiful Cypress swamps on their banks, then narrow up such that the trees reach completely across the waterway. making it seem like you're in a tunnel. When the leaves are shed in the winter, this stretch begins to look very spooky, giving one the feeling of a haunted forest. Quite a sight to see.

The third side trip is the longest. Little Black Creek empties into the Escatawpa River at a point two miles downriver of Shingle Mill Landing. Little Black can be paddled approximately 10 miles up from its mouth, making it a 24-mile round trip if the entire length is paddled from Shingle Mill Landing. Paddling times will vary depending on what point the paddler turns around. Little Black Creek also has the Cypress swamps and overhanging trees where it narrows about halfway up, but it also has some marsh grasses.







GOLDEN TRAILS &
COASTAL TALES

SHEPARD STATE PARK

Contributed by Chassity Bilbo
Parks and Recreation Director,
City of Gautier

As autumn arrives in Gautier, Miss., affectionately pronounced “Go-SHAY,” Shepard State Park transforms into a peaceful, golden retreat. Located along the banks of the Singing River and spanning 395 acres, this coastal park is more than a natural getaway; it’s a vital part of the community’s identity and a key piece of the Mississippi Gulf Coast’s Greenways and Trails Program, supported by the Mississippi Gulf Coast National Heritage Area.

Managed by the City of Gautier since 2013, Shepard State Park is a reflection of the city’s commitment to conservation, education and outdoor recreation.

The park offers nearly eight miles of scenic trails, where pine forest and marshland stretch in every direction. These paths invite visitors to enjoy the vibrant colors of fall, breathe in the cool bayou air and slow down with the rhythm of nature.

The 1,100-foot Marshwalk Pier, the longest of its kind in Mississippi, extends across Lamotte Bayou and provides an ideal perch for birdwatchers and nature photographers, especially during the golden hour.

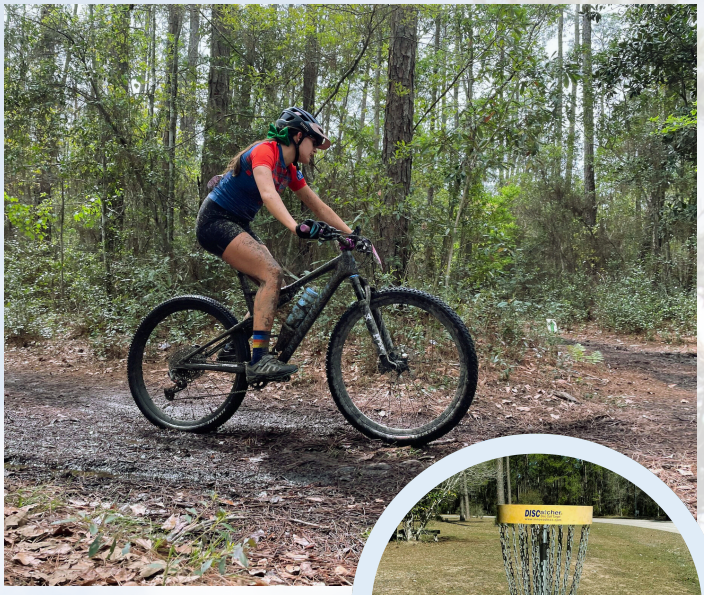
Shepard State Park's landscape also holds deep historical roots. According to local legend, members of the Pascagoula tribe sang as they entered the river in a final act of unity, a story that gave rise to the name "Singing River." This legacy is honored through storytelling, signage and restored structures on the property. The Cox Family log cabin, nearly a century old, now serves as the park's welcome center and the headquarters for the Parks and Recreation Department. Additionally, through recent federal funding, the park is restoring the old ranger house into a community center and interpretive space, a place where residents and visitors can learn more about the natural and local heritage of the Gulf Coast.

Outdoor activities abound at Shepard State Park. An 18-hole disc golf course, archery range, fishing pier and boat launch offer a variety of ways to engage with the landscape. Families enjoy time at the playground, dog park and shaded picnic shelters, while kayakers paddle through the quiet backwaters of the bayou. Autumn provides the perfect backdrop for all these activities, offering cool temperatures and colorful foliage throughout the park.

Camping options range from primitive tent sites to full-hookup RV spaces, allowing visitors to extend their stay under the stars. Whether it's a weekend family reunion, a scouting trip or a solo escape into nature, Shepard State Park offers the peace and comfort of a true retreat.

As part of the Greenways and Trails Program, the park contributes to a broader vision connecting communities through nature, heritage and accessible outdoor experiences. Shepard State Park plays a leading role in that vision, offering not just recreation, but restoration of the soul.

This autumn, whether you're looking for adventure, quiet reflection or a little bit of both, Shepard State Park welcomes you to experience its trails, tales and timeless beauty.











Shepard State Park
Nature's Playground
Gautier, MS

1034 Graveline Road
Gautier, Mississippi 39553
(228) 497-2244


COMMUNITY

Camellias

an autumn gift that blooms with Southern Grace

Contributed by Dr. Eddie Smith

I had the pleasure of exploring Mr. Jim Smelley's impressive camellia collection with some of the Pearl River County Master Gardeners two years ago. I began thinking about how these beautiful plants with their gorgeous blooms could be the perfect gift for plant lovers.

Mr. Jim, who is in his 90s, proudly showcased his collection of more than 500 varieties of camellias he has been growing and propagating for more than 60 years. He even bred his own variety of camellia and gave it his name, the *Jim Smelley* camellia.

You don't have to become a master of camellias like Mr. Jim to enjoy them in your own yard or give them away. *Camellia japonica*, or Japanese camellia, is the perfect gift that keeps on giving. This camellia has large, romantic blooms in hues of red, pink or white that can turn any winter garden into a living work of art. There are even camellia varieties with variegated blooms that come in combinations of pink, red or white on one bloom.

As the days grow shorter and the crispness of fall sets in, the camellia rises to the occasion. While most plants retreat into dormancy, camellias are just getting started, offering color and life when we need it most. Their elegant blooms brighten southern landscapes through late fall and into the coldest months of the year.

If your loved one has a green thumb, they'll appreciate the care and attention camellias need. These beauties shine their brightest when given some TLC. Find a cozy spot with partial shade, camellias thrive when they catch a break from the intense sun. Make sure the soil is well-draining and slightly acidic, and you've got the perfect setting for your camellia to flourish. Water them regularly, especially during dry spells, and toss some mulch around their roots to keep them happy.

With thousands of camellia varieties out there, you've got a smorgasbord of choices. Imagine presenting your loved one with a camellia like *Cile Mitchell* that has double-layered pink blooms that resemble a fancy rose. Or *Lauren Tudor*, a showstopper with its massive, soft pink blooms that have dark pink flecks and stripes.

My personal favorite is *Burgundy Rose*. This camellia has deep burgundy-red petals and a hint of regal purple on the edges of the petals. It's like a piece of botanical art. And if your loved one is a bit of a rebel, go for a multihued camellia like *Magic City*, a 1960s creation with bright red, funky variations in its flowers.

If you're looking for a unique and thoughtful gift for your loved one, consider surprising them with a stunning camellia plant this year instead of the usual bouquet of flowers.

A living plant is not just a gift; it's a living reminder of your love that will continue to bloom and bring joy for years to come, even in the quietest seasons.

Burgandy Rose Camellia

SOUTHERN ROOTS

Camellias in Mississippi's Garden History

Though native to eastern and southern Asia, camellias have long been at home in the American South, where they arrived in the late 1700s through port cities like Charleston, South Carolina and New Orleans, La. Their evergreen foliage and elegant, winter-blooming flowers made them a natural favorite in southern gardens.

In Mississippi, particularly along the Gulf Coast, camellias have become a mainstay. Our mild winters and acidic soils provide an ideal environment for both *Camellia japonica* and *Camellia sasanqua*, another species known for its earlier blooming season and smaller leaves.

Although the magnolia blossom has held the title of Mississippi's official state flower since 1952, camellias have carved out a beloved and widespread presence in landscapes from Ocean Springs to Picayune. They are cherished for their winter resilience and timeless beauty.

Many Gulf Coast homes still shelter towering camellias planted generations ago, their blooms lighting up gray December skies and bringing color to otherwise bare gardens.

BREEDING & HYBRIDIZATION

A Bloom of Innovation

Hybridizing camellias is a tradition of both patience and passion. By crossbreeding different camellia species or cultivars, growers aim to improve flower form, color, cold hardiness and bloom time, making them even better suited for the southern garden.

Mr. Jim Smelley's own namesake camellia stands as a testament to this work, joining a long lineage of carefully developed cultivars. The Gulf Coast, with its dedicated garden clubs and camellia societies, has long played a key role in advancing hybrid development for regional conditions.

Crosses between *Camellia japonica* and *Camellia sasanqua*, for instance, have led to hybrid varieties that retain the showy flowers of japonicas while incorporating the early blooming and compact growth habits of sasanquas. These hybrids are perfect for southern landscapes and often begin blooming in late fall, just as other blooms fade away.

Well-known hybrids, such as *Winter's Charm*, *April Remembered* and *Autumn Spirit,* demonstrate how modern breeding continues to bring fresh life to this centuries-old plant.



Mr. Jim Smelley with his massive camellia collection

"Propagating camellias isn't just about multiplying plants, it's about continuing a story, season after season. It allows gardeners to preserve legacy blooms like the Jim Smelley camellia for the next generation."
Dr. Eddie Smith

PROPAGATION

Sharing the Beauty

For gardeners who wish to grow or gift their own camellias, propagation is a rewarding practice. Camellias can be propagated through **cuttings, air layering or grafting**, each offering a way to preserve and pass on favorite varieties.

A Gift for the Quiet Seasons

There's something especially comforting about a flower that chooses to bloom in the colder months. Camellias remind us that life doesn't stop when the leaves fall. Instead, it quietly gathers strength, preparing to unfold when we least expect it.

In a season defined by stillness, camellias whisper beauty into the landscape. Whether you're strolling past a neighbor's yard in bloom, enjoying the colors outside your window or gifting a new plant to someone you love, these winter wonders are a source of warmth.

So, this fall or winter, give something more lasting than a bouquet. Give a camellia. Give something rooted, meaningful and enduring, just like the love and legacy it represents.

And if you ever meet a grower like Mr. Jim, take the time to listen. Because sometimes, the most beautiful things bloom quietly, in the cold, in the stillness and stay with us long after the season has passed.



Cuttings:

Taken in midsummer from semi-hardwood stems, dipped in rooting hormone, and planted in moist potting mix, they will eventually grow into clones of the parent plant.



Air Layering:

A section of a branch is wounded, wrapped in moss, and left to root while still attached to the plant. After a few months, it can be cut and planted.



Grafting:

Often used for more delicate or rare varieties, this involves combining a scion from the desired camellia with a hardy rootstock.

Rooted in Resilience

The Oaks of the Mississippi Gulf Coast

Contributed by Jesse Yarbrough

Along the Mississippi Gulf Coast, where the sun melts into the Sound and magnolia-scented breezes drift across front porches, beauty is found not only in the landscape but in the stories that live within it. From the iconic Biloxi Lighthouse to the timeworn shrimp boats bobbing in our harbors, symbols of identity and strength are everywhere. But perhaps none stand as quietly powerful or as deeply connected to the soul of this place as the live oaks.

These majestic giants, *Quercus virginiana*, have lined our shores for centuries, bearing witness to all the storms, natural and otherwise, that have swept across the region. Bent by wind but not broken, they have stood resolute through hurricanes, human development, and the test of time. In many ways, their resilience mirrors that of the Gulf Coast community itself: weathered, rooted, and unbreakably strong.

Live oaks are more than trees; they are landmarks in our lives. Anyone who's spent time here likely has a personal story tied to one. They appear in our family photographs, local artwork, ghost stories, and sun-dappled memories. In summer, they offer shade; in times of loss, a solemn shelter in our cemeteries. Their moss-draped limbs form archways over country roads, where beauty and mystery meet. In daylight, they paint a portrait of grace. At night, their silhouettes can stir the imagination with eerie tales passed down for generations.

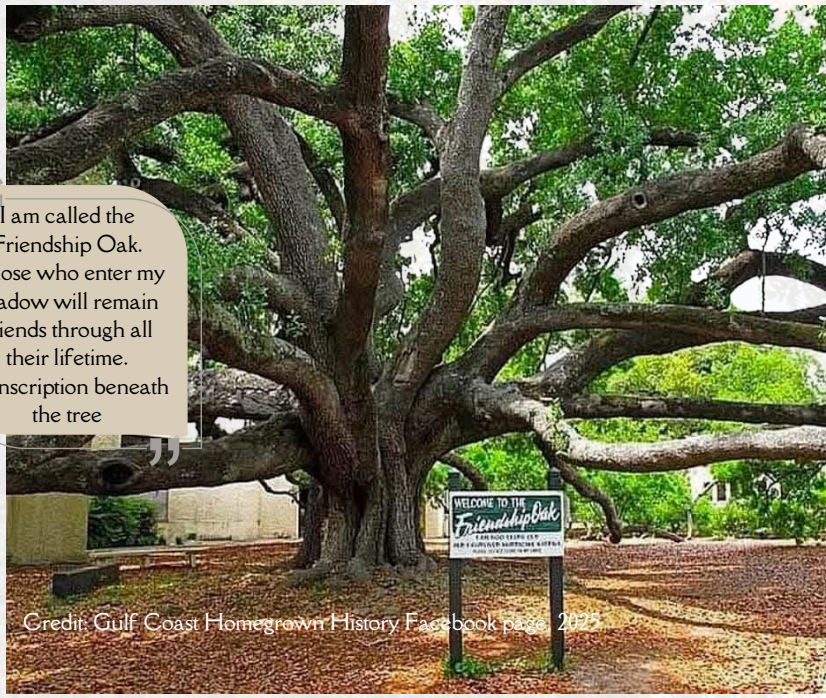
While our coast is blessed with many of these timeworn trees, a few oaks in particular have captured the hearts and histories of those who know them.

The Friendship Oak

On the Long Beach campus of the University of Southern Mississippi stands one of the oldest live oaks in America. Believed to be over 500 years old, the *Friendship Oak* predates French colonization and would've been just a sapling when Spanish explorer Hernando de Soto crossed the Mississippi.

- 59 ft. tall
- 19 ft., 9.5 in. trunk circumference
- 155 ft. foliage spread
- Lateral roots stretch 150 ft.

According to local lore, anyone who steps into its shadow will remain friends for life. Despite its massive size, the tree offers more comfort than awe, a gentle elder rooted in kindness.



"I am called the Friendship Oak. Those who enter my shadow will remain friends through all their lifetime."
—Inscription beneath the tree

Credit: Gulf Coast Homegrown History Facebook page, 2025

The Shoo Fly

If you've lived on the Gulf Coast long enough, especially before Hurricane Katrina, you might remember another unique pairing of tree and tradition: the Shoo-Fly. While the term might conjure images of pie for our Pennsylvania Dutch friends (my own grandmother passed down a mean recipe), here on the Coast, it means something entirely different.

In the days before bug spray and citronella candles, folks believed that sitting higher up off the ground would help keep the biting bugs at bay. And so, they built gazebo-like platforms called shoo-flies, often around the trunks of large live oaks. Typically perched about 10 feet off the ground and shaped in octagons or squares, these structures offered an elegant and practical solution for enjoying warm Southern nights.

According to the *Mississippi Encyclopedia*, the shoo-fly is "a unique form of Mississippi architecture." Though Hurricane Camille destroyed the originals, several were rebuilt, most notably on the Biloxi Town Green, encircling a beloved old oak. That one, too, fell victim to Katrina, but once again, it was rebuilt, another nod to our culture of restoration and resilience.

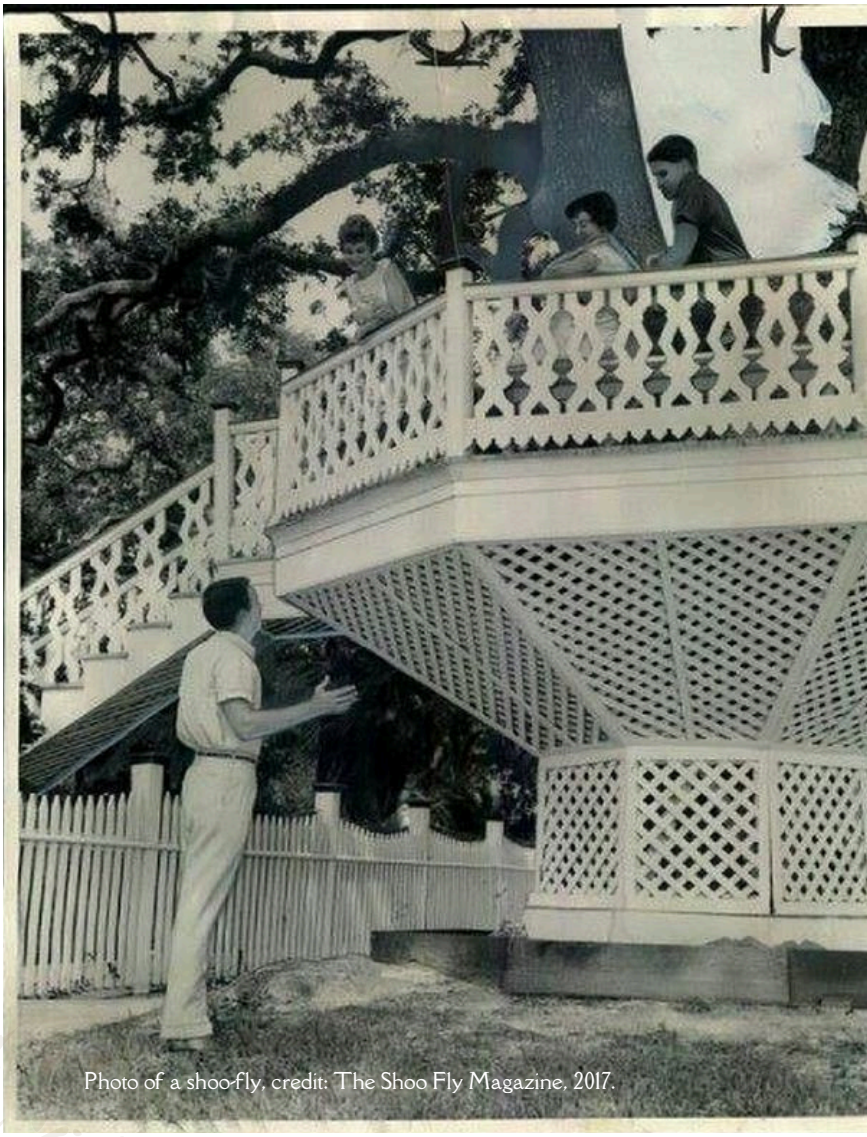


Photo of a shoo-fly, credit: The Shoo Fly Magazine, 2017.

Living Legacies

Our oaks have endured the worst of nature's fury. They've stood as silent sentinels over centuries of change, bearing witness to history with limbs outstretched and roots anchored deep. They hold stories of romance, loss, superstition, and survival, and they remind us of who we are.

The next time you're driving down Highway 90 at sunset or coasting beneath the canopies of Tucker Road, look up. Let their branches speak to you. Maybe you'll hear a love story. Maybe a warning. But certainly, you'll feel their presence, and know:

They are still here.
So are we.
Unbroken.



Oaks at War Memorial Park



Credit: Pat Drackett, The Crosby Arboretum, MSU Extension

The Spider Lady

Contributed by Chelsea Prince

Ann Moreton

After working as one of the first air hostesses for Eastern Airlines, Ann DePriest married Frederick Perkins Moreton, a Brookhaven, Miss., native and air-line executive. in 1941. The couple settled on the picturesque 62-acre property in Ocean Springs, naming it Chinquapin Farm. It was there that her husband, Fred, grew "the most beautiful camellias in the world." Fred grafted thousands of camellias in Ocean Springs and many are still thriving today. During these years, she "dabbled" in photography and freelance writing while raising her two children.

A WIDOW, A WEB, AND AN IDEA

Years later, after Ann's husband passed away, she made her way to Powhatan, Va., in 1961 to be with her family. She was a 51-year-old widow who found herself unexpectedly captivated by a spider while it crawled across the book she was reading. Later, the beauty of a dew-covered spider web intrigued her, she tried to photograph it but was disappointed with the results. She eventually captured a good image by spraying the web with artist's paint. Determined to take truly excellent spider-web photographs, she resolved to learn everything she could about spider behavior.

Her dedication was further sparked by neighborhood children in Powhatan, who inspired her to form a local club. That small group grew into the National Arachnid Society, which expanded to 1,000 members across 49 states.

THE NATIONAL ARACHNID SOCIETY

Because only three states, Mississippi, Arkansas, and Connecticut, had formally surveyed their spiders, the society's purpose became conducting an informal nationwide spider survey through science classes and individual naturalists.

Annual dues for the society consisted of six spiders, collected, preserved in alcohol, and shipped each year to Harvard University.

She spent a year mastering close-up techniques at National Geographic Magazine, and then bought a camper and devoted five summers to traveling, photographing, and studying spiders. As founder of the National Arachnid Society, Mrs. Moreton sent out newsletters to members, detailing her recent experiments and observations on spider habits.



Ann Moreton with her pet named Linda.



RETURN TO CHINQUAPIN FARM

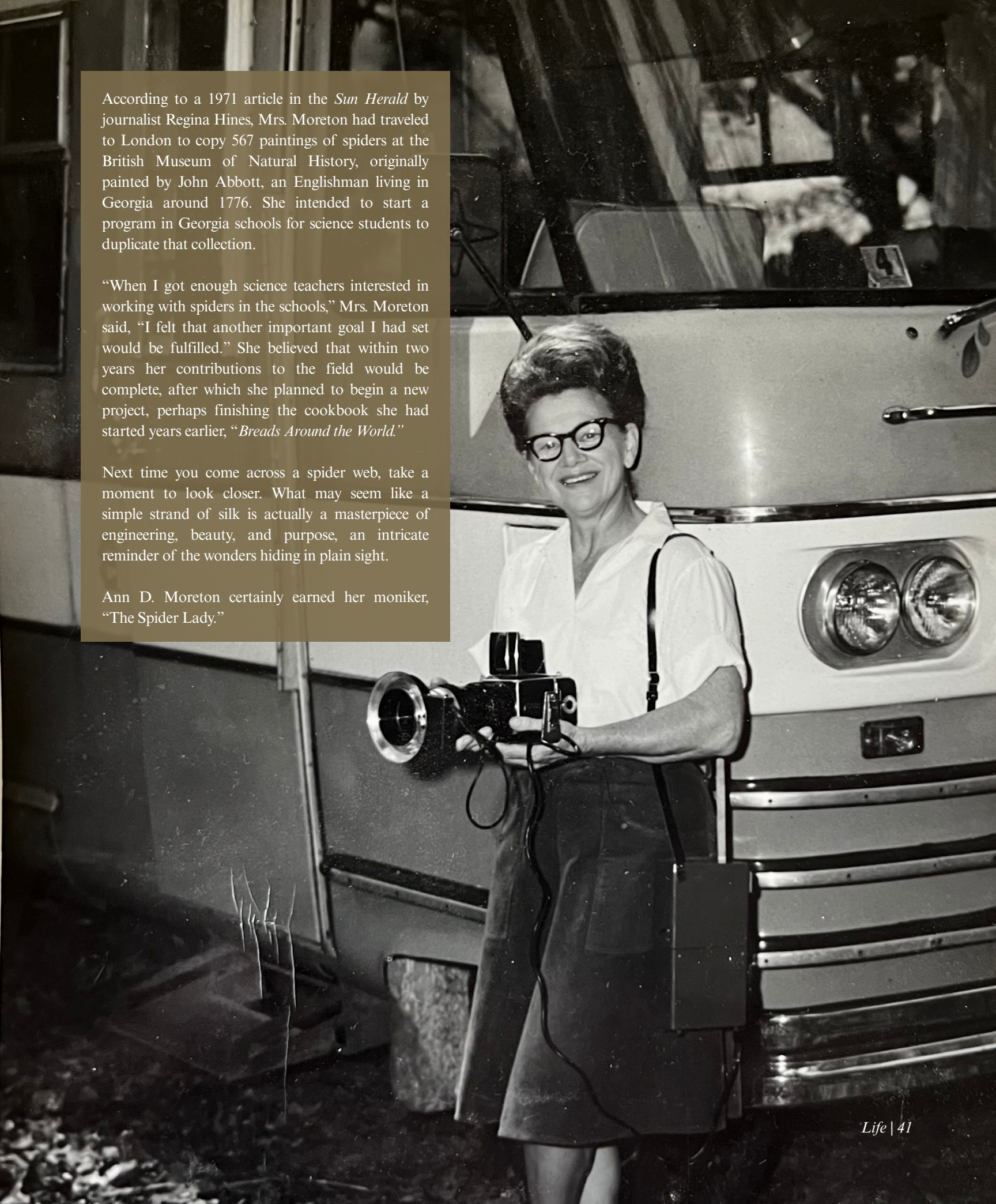
In the late 1960's Ann returned to Chinquapin Farm in Ocean Springs as her home base for operations. She delighted in being near her children and grandchildren while continuing to capture spider webs on paper. She sprayed webs with various colors of paint on contrasting paper, creating unusual prints that she sold at local gift shops. Many homes on the coast still have her work on display.

In her cheery living room, she displayed several spider artifacts she had collected. Her most unusual acquisition was a Chinese spider-fighting cage she had purchased in London from naturalist and author Dr. W. S. Bristowe, who first calculated how many spiders inhabited an acre of ground.

To encourage spider studies, she lectured to over 100,000 students in various states. She later became one of the world's leading authorities on spiders. Ann owned and operated the world's only Spider Museum. She later donated the museum and its contents to the State of Virginia. She donated her collection of spider photographs, thought to be the most comprehensive in existence, to the Smithsonian Institute and her collection of live spiders to Harvard University.

She was an internationally known writer and photographer whose photographs were exhibited at the *American Museum of Natural History* in New York City, *National Wildlife, Ranger Rick, Audubon*, and the *Smithsonian*. Even *National Geographic* had brought her pet orange-kneed Mexican tarantula, named Linda, onto "What's My Line?" and "To Tell the Truth" in New York.

Photos: Courtesy of Lisa Howell, granddaughter of Ann Moreton, Ann Moreton Family Collection



According to a 1971 article in the *Sun Herald* by journalist Regina Hines, Mrs. Moreton had traveled to London to copy 567 paintings of spiders at the British Museum of Natural History, originally painted by John Abbott, an Englishman living in Georgia around 1776. She intended to start a program in Georgia schools for science students to duplicate that collection.

"When I got enough science teachers interested in working with spiders in the schools," Mrs. Moreton said, "I felt that another important goal I had set would be fulfilled." She believed that within two years her contributions to the field would be complete, after which she planned to begin a new project, perhaps finishing the cookbook she had started years earlier, "*Breads Around the World.*"

Next time you come across a spider web, take a moment to look closer. What may seem like a simple strand of silk is actually a masterpiece of engineering, beauty, and purpose, an intricate reminder of the wonders hiding in plain sight.

Ann D. Moreton certainly earned her moniker, "The Spider Lady."



Golden Orb Weaver

Spiders of the Gulf Coast

Contributed by Pat Drackett

The Crosby Arboretum

Spiders are not insects, but are arachnids, having eight legs rather than the six that are characteristic of insects. An interesting spider common in the Savanna Exhibit is the Green Lynx spider. Their green coloration allows them to blend in easily. They lie in wait for insects visiting flowering plants for nectar. Lynx spiders are well named because they have cat-like, fast reflexes and pounce quickly upon their prey.

When children visit the Crosby Arboretum on school field trips, it is a delight to see them experience what they find along our pathways. I imagine the lasting memories that may be forming that day. Years ago, a student discovered a strand of silk from an orb weaver spider's web and was astonished to see that it was not white, but gold. Did you know that cloth can be spun from this spider silk, yielding fabric with the same beautiful golden hue? Try your favorite Internet search engine to find a photo of this cloth.

Some students bring along nature notebooks and begin making observations and sketches as soon as they arrive. One day, I peeked over the shoulder of a child after talking about the bog planter on our Visitor Center deck and saw she had written, "We saw a pitcher plant display." Occasionally, we receive bulky packages of thank-you letters from the classes after their visit, including facts they have learned on their visit. These are treasures indeed!



Garden Spider



Jumping Spider on Beautyberry



Green Lynx Spider preying on a Monarch

MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION

Rock and Roll Graveyard

13 Curves in... 12 curves out...

CONTRIBUTED BY RODNEY MOONEY

13 curves in… 12 curves out… Perhaps, we lose something when visiting William Seymour Memorial Cemetery in St. Martin, Miss.

13 curves in… 14 curves out… Perhaps, other times, we gain some…*thing*. Besides the evolving road, there are also reports of a ghost lady in white rocking in her chair, shadow people and dark cars giving one chase, and even albino cannibals in the woods. Recently, I set out to research and investigate the legends surrounding what locals call "Rock 'n' Roll Graveyard."

To begin, historians say the cemetery likely gained its "Rock 'n' Roll" moniker from being "the place to go" in the 1960s to play one's music loud enough to, well… *wake the dead*. As for the evolving number of curves in the road, it's easy for the mind and eyes to play tricks.

When I visited, I can report no unusual activity on the ride there or back, but perhaps the road itself is *alive*. After all, some argue there are certain locations in the world where there is more energy than others, where strange things do happen. In the past, I was invited by the endearing Alice Jackson to visit her home in Florence, Miss., infamously known as *The House in Between.* The subject of two documentaries, her home is said to be a "place between worlds," where the most esteemed paranormal investigators "test their instruments" because "something is bound to happen." While visiting, I can attest to numerous strange occurrences, from lights turning off and on to objects falling, all by simply requesting it from the *ghosts*.

In the graveyard, our lady in white rocks back and forth in her rocking chair. Some attribute this ghost to being a past relative, now buried in the cemetery, who, while alive, was known to sit in a chair on her porch welcoming passersby. Perhaps, she still does beckon visitors, only… now from her new *home*. It is a common custom for many to be buried with their favorite things, but in Aberdeen, Miss., another was buried *doing* her favorite thing. In Old Aberdeen Cemetery, Alice Whitfield was entombed, still sitting in her rocking chair, with her knitting at rest in her hands. While visiting the tomb, I listened carefully to hear the *CREAK! CROCK*! of her chair to no avail, but the sound of the howling wind around her tomb was still terrifying. The jury is still out whether or not she's finished her knitting or if she's on tour, visiting Rock 'n' Roll.



Shadow figures and dark cars are also prominently heard experiences when visiting Rock 'n' Roll. Through one interview, I learned of one such terrifying experience. A few friends went to investigate these legends for themselves, only before arriving at the cemetery, their car stalled. The headlights began to blink before shutting off; then, highlighted by the full moon's glow, all witnessed a shadow man appear. As the spirit moved closer and closer towards their vehicle, one friend began to pray for protection until the car started again. Leaving in a hurry, all vowed never to visit the graveyard again. There are also reports about an albino family that once lived near the graveyard, who played tricks on visitors. Sometimes, however, truth is stranger than fiction.

In Fort Mountain State Park in Georgia, travelers come from all over the world to learn of the legend of the "Moon-eyed People." Their name "Moon-eyed" comes from the belief that they lived in caves due to blindness brought on by any kind of light, including moonlight, causing them to only come out during nights when there was no moon. Because of this, they evolved into appearing "albino-like." After learning that the Moon-eyed were cannibals, the Cherokee expelled them from their caves, driving them west. No one knows for certain where they came from or where they went. Thomas Jefferson himself asked Lewis and Clark to look for the Moon-eyed during their travels. Once driven out of their caves to the west, did the Moon-eyed arrive at Rock 'n' Roll?

In fact, people have enjoyed visiting cemeteries for centuries; it was even once common to "take a stroll" on dates to introduce past relatives. Though, it's important to understand where visiting cemeteries crosses the line.

Hailing from the Mississippi Gulf Coast, the fabulous paranormal investigating group, Mississippi Hauntings and Paranormal Society (MSHAPS), explains that they choose not to investigate cemeteries. However, no matter if you are seeking the paranormal or only visiting, they argue the rules remain the same: "You're going into THEIR space; they aren't coming into yours. The same rules should apply…as any polite Southern Momma would teach their kids down here: 'Always ask permission before doing anything, politely acknowledge your host [*alive or dead*], remember your 'pleases' & 'thank yous,' and for the love of God, don't take or break anything that doesn't belong to you."

Please heed my advice if visiting Rock 'n' Roll Graveyard. There are signs posted saying "off limits after dark" and "under surveillance;" therefore, ask for permission and only visit during daylight hours.

And, if you do find yourself in the graveyard, don't delay; for once the sun goes down and shadows creep in, you might find yourself trapped as the gate is known to mysteriously lock itself behind you. I cannot promise there will be albino cannibals, rockin' grannies, or dark cars there to chase you, but BEWARE! While there's always a grain of truth to any good scary story, sometimes, things are meant to stay buried.

MSHAPS




FLAVORFUL

Devil's Food Cake



Every year on my birthday, without fail, I'd beg my mama for one thing and one thing only, her Devil's Food Cake. Rich, dark, and downright decadent, it wasn't just cake…it was tradition. That icing? To die for. Silky, sweet, and just haunting enough to stick with you long after the last bite. And while the name might raise a brow, *Devil's Food,* don't let that fool you. There's nothing evil about it. Just a little bit of mischief and a whole lot of love baked in. Here is her recipe for you to enjoy

Words by | RoxAnn Rankin Wicker

Recipe by JoAnn Thompson

Ingredients

- 1 cup unsalted butter
- ½ cup whole milk
- 1 cup water
- ¾ cup Dutch-process cocoa powder
- 1 tsp instant coffee (optional)
- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 cup granulated sugar
- 1 cup packed light brown sugar
- 1½ tsp baking soda
- 1 tsp baking powder
- 1 tsp salt
- ¾ cup sour cream
- 2 large eggs, preferably at room temperature
- 2 tsp vanilla extract
- 1 batch chocolate frosting (or your favorite frosting)

Directions

Preheat oven to 350°F. Line the bottoms of two 8" pans with parchment paper and lightly grease the sides (or grease and flour the pans thoroughly). Set aside. In a medium saucepan, combine butter, milk, water, cocoa powder, and instant coffee. Heat over medium-low, stirring frequently until the butter melts.

Increase to medium heat and bring to a gentle boil, stirring constantly. Once boiling, remove from heat and let it cool for about 15 minutes.

In a large mixing bowl, whisk together the flour, granulated sugar, brown sugar, baking soda, baking powder, and salt.

Give the chocolate mixture a quick stir, then pour it into the dry ingredients. Stir until smooth. Stir in the sour cream until incorporated. Add eggs and vanilla and mix well until the batter is completely smooth.

Divide the batter evenly between the prepared pans.
Bake for 30-35 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out with moist crumbs (a clean toothpick may mean it's overbaked).

Allow cakes to cool in the pans for 15 minutes.
Carefully run a knife around the edges, invert onto a cooling rack, and cool completely.

Frost:
Once fully cooled, frost with chocolate frosting or a frosting of your choice.

Funeral Potato Casserole

Growing up on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, potatoes were always a staple at our family table, mashed, fried, baked, and prepared every way you can imagine. But I never realized just how magical they could be until my dear Mormon friend (a transplant to the south) introduced me to funeral potatoes. The name alone gives you a little chill, fitting for this time of year, but it actually comes from their status as a beloved comfort dish, often served at gatherings after funerals. | RoxAnn Rankin Wicker



Ingredients

- 2 cups sour cream
- 1 (10.5 oz.) can cream of chicken soup
- 1/2 tsp kosher salt
- 1/4 tsp freshly ground black pepper
- 1/4 tsp garlic powder
- 1 (30 oz.) package frozen shredded hash brown potatoes, thawed
- 2 cups shredded Cheddar cheese (about 8 oz.)
- 3/4 cup finely chopped white onion
- 2 heaping cups cornflake cereal, coarsely crushed (about 2 1/2 oz.)
- 1/4 cup unsalted butter, melted

Directions

1. Warm up the oven and prep your dish: Set that oven to 350 degrees and lightly grease a 9x13-inch baking dish. I like to use butter, but a good nonstick spray works too.
2. Mix up the creamy base: In a large bowl, I whisk together sour cream, cream of chicken soup, salt, pepper, and garlic powder until it's smooth and ready to work its magic.
3. Fold in the good stuff: Next, I gently fold in my thawed hashbrowns, sharp Cheddar cheese, and those finely chopped onions that bring a little sweetness and depth.
4. Spread it out: Pour the whole mixture into your prepared dish and smooth it out into an even layer. It's starting to look like the perfect comfort casserole already.
5. Make that golden topping: In a small bowl, I stir together crushed cornflakes and melted butter until every flake is coated in buttery goodness. Then I sprinkle that over the top, like a crunchy, golden blanket.
6. Bake to bubbly perfection: Pop it in the oven for 35 to 40 minutes, until the top turns crispy and golden brown, and the edges are bubbling with cheesy, creamy warmth.

Bless Her...

BLOODY HEART



I'll be honest, I was never the type to stand in a dark bathroom and summon Bloody Mary. I don't play around with mirrors and spirits. But the folklore? That's always pulled me in.

The version that stuck with me isn't the one kids whisper at sleepovers, it's the one where a girl in the 1800s was buried too soon. A bell was tied to her finger, just in case she woke up.

She did. No one heard her.

By the time they dug her up, she'd clawed through that coffin trying to escape. That's the part that lingers, the panic, the silence, the mirror she's said to haunt.

So I turned that story into a cocktail. This isn't your average Bloody Mary. It's bold, briny, a little haunting and it doesn't go down quietly.

RoxAnn Rankin Wicker

Ingredients

- 2 oz top shelf vodka
- 4 oz tomato juice
- ½ oz fresh lemon juice
- ½ oz pickle brine (from a jar of garlic dills—no substitutions)
- 2 dashes Worcestershire sauce
- 2 dashes hot sauce
- 1 pinch celery salt
- 1 pinch smoked paprika
- Cracked black pepper to taste

Directions

1. Rim a chilled highball glass with lemon juice and dip it into black lava salt.
2. In a shaker filled with ice, combine the vodka, tomato juice, lemon juice, pickle brine, Worcestershire, hot sauce, celery salt, paprika, pepper and optional charcoal. Shake like you're clawing your way out of a coffin.
3. Strain into your prepared glass over fresh ice.
4. Add your garnish skewer and place the singed rosemary across the top like a charm.
5. Say her name (optional, but don't say I didn't warn you).

Garnish

A skewer of pickled okra, spicy green bean and a cherry tomato (aka the blood bell), black lava salt rim, one rosemary sprig, singed with a lighter before serving, to awaken the spirits!





MISSISSIPPI GULF COAST NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

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