



Amite County Historical and Genealogical Society

Dawn Taylor, President

William G. Barron, Vice President

Marcia Gordon McLaurin, Secretary & Newsletter Editor

N. Gay Blalock, Treasurer

Allen Terrell, Council-at-large

January 2019

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WITHOUT A PAST, THERE IS NO FUTURE

WELCOME TO ALL NEW MEMBERS!

The next meeting will be a regular business meeting

Date: February 9, 2019

Time: 10:00 AM

Place: Liberty Baptist Church Family Life Center (building behind the church next to the tennis court).

Future Meeting Schedule

Note: Time and place of regular meetings is 10:00 am at the Liberty Baptist Church Family Life Center unless otherwise specified.

March 9, 2019 - Regular monthly meeting or possible trip to Mississippi College to the Leland Speaks Research Library

April 13, 2019 - Regular monthly meeting

May 4, 2019 - Heritage Days

INVITATION!

Dedication of the 20' x 30' x 83' MS State Flag!

On Sunday, April 7, 2019, the 125th Anniversary of the flag's adoption by the state, the ceremony will be held at 2:00 PM. The flag is located just north of Bogue Chitto, MS, east of and visible from I-55. Directions forthcoming.

The event is sponsored by Mississippian's to Keep the Flag of 1894 and the Mississippi 3rd Brigade of the SCV.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Membership:

The Facebook page membership list has been purged of non-members. Only society members can post and comment. Non-members will be able to view the posts.

Newsletter Change:

The newsletter has been changed from monthly to quarterly. It will be published in January, April, July, and October each year. Any contributions or submissions to the newsletter can be sent/given to any board member, mailed to P. O. Box 2, Liberty, MS 39645, or forwarded to our email address amitecohistory@gmail.com.

LRSR Hours:

The LRSR will be open regularly every 2nd and 4th Tuesday of the month from 2-4 pm beginning September 11, 2018. At this time, Greg Barron is our only volunteer for this endeavor. We welcome and encourage other members to help Greg on these days. He can teach you what you need to know about the LRSR, the Courthouse, the library, and Amite County in general, in order for you to be able to assist visitors with their research.

Thank you!

Thanks to all who have made contributions to the restoration fund for the LRSR! Progress is being made!

AMITE COUNTY HISTORICAL AND GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

Minutes of January 12, 2019 meeting

DRAFT

The meeting was held at the Liberty Baptist Church Family Life Center in Liberty, MS. There were 8 in attendance. Meeting was called to order at 10:30 AM by Dawn Taylor, President.

Invocation: Greg Barron

Minutes: The minutes were passed out for all to read by Marcia McLaurin. Virginia Zeigler made a motion to accept the minutes. Robin Elliott seconded the motion. The minutes were approved as written.

President's Report: Dawn Taylor

Open house went well and there was a good turnout.

Greg Barron and Dawn Taylor along with several other ACHGS members represented us at the Muddy Springs Open house.

The work has been started on the Little Red School House. They have dug a ditch and shored up the northeast column. We need to plan some work days which would be contingent on the weather.

Marcia McLaurin and Dawn Taylor cleaned up the membership list on the Facebook page on New Year's Eve. Approximately 1500 members who are not dues paying were removed from the page. They will be allowed to view the page and read comments and posts but will not be allowed to make posts or comments.

Vice President's Report: NONE

Treasurer's Report: NONE

New Business:

There will possibly be a field trip to Mississippi College for the March meeting to see their collection of Baptist and Methodist church records in the Leland Speed Research Library. They will open on a Saturday for a group.

Meeting was adjourned at 10:48

Program: Robin Elliott brought records from the Samuel McGehee house to look at.

A LONG Read that is outstanding.....

This is the "WILD STORY" of Rev. Robert Samuel McAllister of Bethany Presbyterian Church, Amite County...a survivor of Last Island or Isle Derniere August 1856.

The following incredible story of how the Rev. McAllister's life was almost cut short was published in the History of the Presbyterian Church of Thibodaux. The section was entitled "A minister tempered by the elements" and was written by Eddie "Bush" Bernard:

The third minister for the Presbyterian Church of Thibodaux was the Rev. Robert Samuel McAllister [1856-1859], a native of South Carolina who had attended the University of Mississippi and just graduated from Columbia Theological Seminary. Thibodaux was his first church and he was ordained by the New Orleans Presbytery in 1856.

McAllister, who was born Dec. 4, 1830, in Abbeville, South Carolina, had come from a long line of Presbyterians. His grandfather served as a Ruling Elder for his home church for 50 years and his mother had always wanted him to go into the ministry. He was frequently sick in the seminary, suffering "frequent and copious hemorrhages from the lungs," according to the memorial in the Louisiana Presbytery's minutes published after his death on Feb. 5, 1892. It led to doubts that Rev. McAllister would have a long career. But "through extraordinary care, which after a while became second nature and to his friends an amusing trait, he managed to outlive most of his classmates."

He almost didn't make it however. Shortly after coming to Thibodaux, Rev. McAllister, who was still single at the time, took a vacation in August 1856 to one of Louisiana's barrier island resorts, Isle Derniere, also called Last Island. He was there when the great storm of Aug. 10, 1856 struck, killing 190 of the 400 people vacationing on the island, about 30 miles from the coast. He recalled the storm in the Southwestern Presbyterian in an article published April 9, 1891, under the pen name of "Sea-grit."

The seas started churning, giving a magnificent show in the days before the storm, he wrote. The wave show left people mesmerized by their intensity and form. "Each breaker extended to the right and left as far as the eye, straining its vision, could reach," he said. "We stood upon the shore nearly all the time, loath to be called even to a sumptuous repast. We did not know then as we did afterwards that the voice of those many waters was solemnly saying to us, 'Escape for thy life.' "

Rev. McAllister was staying with the Lingard family. In all there were 12 people at the home including Mr. and Mrs. Lingard, their three children, three "ladies, young, single, cultured and beautiful," another man, Rev. McAllister, the cook and the cook's son. The sky started to cloud on Saturday, Aug. 9, "a roaring noise was heard in the distance, and the cattle continued for hours walking nervously to and fro around the enclosure, and lowing in a plaintiff way."

On Sunday, Aug. 10, the weather got worse and by noon, it was dark outside with rain coming in torrents. The noon meal was served as usual but there was no talking at the table. "For while we all had a certain measure of misgiving, no one was yet willing to give expression to his fears."

At 3 p.m. the wind was howling. Lightning illuminated the sky and thunder rocked the island to its core. He likened it to the sound of distant guns. "We were shut up with no possibility of flight, on a narrow neck of land twixt two unbounded seas. In a strife of

the elements like this, there would have been disaster even in midland; here on this sea-grit sand-bank it would be tame to say that we were in extreme jeopardy."

Everyone moved to the hall in the middle of the house. "In any other position we would have perished," he wrote. The roof blew off first and while they were still trying to absorb the shock of that, the walls began to peel away, with the southern wall being blown away first, followed by the walls on the west, north and east. Then the inner walls of the house began to fly away. "Ordinarily, we would have been crushed by the falling timbers, but, paradoxical as it may seem, the extreme violence of the storm gave us protection." The strength of the wind overruled gravity and instead of falling in on the occupants, the building's parts were tossed to the wind. "Nothing could fall. Everything that was in motion went horizontally."

"Whatever of restraint we had previously put upon ourselves, we now dismissed, and in varying ways gave vent to our feelings. Bending, cowering at times prostrate on the floor, we gazed into each others' faces with looks of despair. Some began to pray, and I can even yet distinctly recall their posture and words as they plead with many entreaties, that God would spare them for that time, as is, with anguished features they uttered vows of greater fidelity in the future."

The cook, who had vehemently denied Mrs. Lingard's accusations earlier in the week that she was stealing from the household, began to confess "in a voice the howling tornado could not drown, a full and itemized confession of the coffee, lard, sugar, hams etc., which she proclaimed so publicly. This long and damaging indictment against herself was ludicrous enough to provoke even then and there, not perhaps a laugh or a twitter but certainly a sardonic grin."

Sand and rain blasted them as they lay on the bare floor of what once was their house. And if that wasn't bad enough, they noticed that the water from both the sea to the south and the bay to their north was closing in on their refuge "where, though horribly storm-beaten, we had hoped to hold our own." Luck was on their side however. Near the home was a levee which extended about 100 yards. Someone had built a "whirligig" for the children's amusement several years before. Although the windmill was gone, its wooden frame remained, bolstered by the windmill's shaft which had been driven deep into the ground, holding the frame in place. The group of 12 inched its way to the "whirligig" crawling along a wooden walkway which was fast being lapped by water. "Few men walking erect could have made the passage. Most of us got down on all fours and slip forward as best we could. To anyone afar off looking at us, we must have presented the appearance of a number of overgrown monkeys marching single file along a half-submerged pole."

Not all of them crawled. One of the men had fallen in love with one of the young ladies during their vacation. Things had not gone well in his efforts to woo her but as the group made its way from the bare floor to the windmill she balked at the thought of crawling 100 yards so the man, identified as Roland Delaney, picked her up and carried her to safety. McAllister heard him say, "I am unconscious of all else but this one thought: I hold close to my heart the one being, who, of all the world is dear to me; it may be possible I will save her life; if this must be done at the expense of my own, I am more than willing here and now to die."

He didn't die. All 12 made it to the windmill tower. They placed three people on each of the wooden frame's four sides. They put taller people next to shorter people so that the taller could help hold up the shorter if the need arose. They grasped the wood and waited for the storm to blow over. "There, then, we stood; a little knot of human beings stretching our hands aloft and clutching for dear life the edge of a thin plank overhead!

Such a picture this planet has rarely presented since the days of Noah."

Night came. "Our faith was staggered; our hopes sunk; we were at our wits end." Nightfall also gave them time to think and McAllister's thoughts turned to why he was there. "If only we had been martyrs," he wrote. "If we could have been conscious that we were about to die for adherence to some great principle, then we would have been upheld by the thought that we were leaving footprints on the sands of time, for the encouragement of some forlorn and shipwrecked brother. But alas, not one of us was at the post of duty; not a soul on the island had any business there."

"We said not a word, there was no outcry. Alarm there may have been, but if so, it was of that sort which is voiceless." He attributed the silence to several reasons. It could have been that they had reached a level of indifference through exhaustion. Or it might have been that they had faced so many perils in the past 10 hours, "and, after looking death steadily in the face at every instant of that long period, we had become familiar with his awful features." Then again, it could have been that they were too busy paying attention to the water lapping against their bodies to talk. "The brain, concentrating for the time being all its powers in the sense of touch, had gone into the darkness where the surface of the water laved the unusually susceptible skin, and was reporting to the soul every hair's breath ascent of the remorseless deluge. Upward and still upward it rose and every infinitesimal measure as it transpired was dispatched to the inner spirit in such quick succession that no space was left for vocal comment."

There were other things to worry about too. "During that awful night every object seemed armed for our destruction. For an hour or two large logs, which had been washed from their moorings on the mainland were driven past us by the seething current. We were liable to be struck off by this flying driftwood, even as squirrels are smitten from the trunk of a tree by bullets, or else of being smashed as flat as flat can be. Here was artillery practice upon a vast scale; the engaged seas for propelling force, trees for missiles, and the twelve miserable mortals for a target."

At another time a waterspout churned the water in a circular motion and undercut the sand which held the windmill frame in place and the frame began to momentarily rotate around the center pole. "Of course we were made to spin mildly around with it. The twirling and twisting, the dashing and splashing, the heeling and toeing, the flapping and floundering which ensued would at any other time have produced a first-class comedy."

Then the water stopped rising and stabilized for what Rev. McAllister said seemed like forever. "To my excited imagination it seemed that the elements were sitting in solemn council and engaged in debate as to what should be done with us." Then the water level started to fall. It was as if "the angel of the waters brought a reprieve from the high court of Heaven, and with a shout which echoed throughout the dark, unfathomed caves of oceans commanded the release of the prisoners."

The water dropped before daylight leaving the group on dry land once again. But their plight wasn't over. A blast of cold air came in from the north sending a chill to their bones. Mr. Lingard found a red quilt among the debris. "This, when wet, was as impervious as rawhide to the outside air." They sat in a circle with their feet pointing toward the center and covered all twelve with the quilt, tucking its sides in to keep the cold air out. "We were therefore quite comfortable, and made the useful discovery that a few persons similarly equipped can keep warm in any place this side the frozen zone."

Soon they were warm and decided to head for the village, which was about a quarter

of a mile away. The death and destruction they saw along the way burned in their memories.

"The jeweled and lily hand of a woman was seen protruding from the sand, and pointing toward heaven; farther, peered out from the ground, as if looking up to us, the regular features of a beautiful girl who had, no doubt, but a few hours before, blushed at the praise of her own loveliness, and again, the dead bodies of husband and wife, so relatively placed as to show that constant until death did them part, the one had struggled to save the other. And, more affecting still, there was the form of a sweet babe even yet embraced by the stiff and bloodless arms of a mother. Sights like these suddenly presented, gave a shock never to be forgotten, and called up certain feelings which no language can describe.

"There were about one hundred houses on the island; not one was left, nay not a sill nor sleeper, not any part of their foundations to indicate that buildings had once been there."

Their problems didn't end with the storm. The seas were rough for several days afterward preventing rescue efforts. "The rain, slacking only at intervals, beat pitilessly upon us. We had no food and but scant clothing." The pangs of hunger were partly relieved by butchering a cow. "Every animal, of every sort had been swept away excepting this one and she had managed to keep herself hidden for several days. She was young, vigorous and almost as fleet as a doe, but knowing that we had to out-run her or die, we made the charge in splendid style, the poor beast was soon parceled out in alarmingly small rations." The hull of a wrecked steamer, wedged deep in the sand, provided shelter for some. McAllister said it was full of mud and "the dripping of commercial produce and other filth, the accumulation of many years. Into this duplicate of Jeremiah's dungeon some of us, the frail and delicate crept, and occupied it for a lodging during each night."

Help finally did come and as the steamer which picked up the survivors neared the dock Rev. McAllister said he saw a scene more touching than any other he had seen in his life. "Great crowds lined the shore; the silence was as if every pulse had stopped; every eye strained to catch the forms of some loved ones, concerning whom for days there had been tremblings of distress, and when the stage plank was lowered, Oh! it was pitiful to hear the heart-broken sobs of many who came speedily to know that the face of father or sister or wife or child, they were never again to see.

"My attention was more particularly arrested by two persons; a mother and a daughter fell upon each other's necks and for some minutes wept convulsively. Tears of joy and grief were wrung from the same hearts at the same moment. Joy that one was found and grief that others were lost."

Rev. McAllister stayed in Thibodaux until 1859, when he left to become pastor of the Presbyterian church in Shreveport. He stayed there until 1861, when he started working with the Home Missionary division of the Synod. He served as stated supply of several churches in Mississippi and returned to Thibodaux after the Civil War, acting as stated supply in Thibodaux from 1867-69. He moved to Amite County, Miss., in 1870 and remained pastor of the churches there until his death in Liberty, Miss., on Feb. 5, 1892.

"The sermons of Mr. McAllister were above the ordinary, and delivered with earnestness and power, and were awakening and edifying," his memorial in the Synod minutes shortly after his death said. During his career, Rev. McAllister wrote a pamphlet, "Talk

on a Railroad Train," which gained a degree of notoriety. He was "the hearty conductor of both Pulpit and press," the memorial said. His funeral was attended by hundreds of people. "Old and young, male and female, black and white, filed by the coffin of the dearly departed." He was buried between two trees in Amite County in a site he selected.

Rev. McAllister married Catherine Jeannet Smylie (1848–1925) on October 26, 1870 and they had the following children:

Mary S. McAllister (1875–)
Margaret McAllister (1878–1942)
Robert William McAllister (1878–1939)
Fannie McAllister (1880–1959)
Helen Katherine McAllister (1883–1973)
Katelle McAllister (1884–1913)
Sarah A. McAllister (1888–1977)

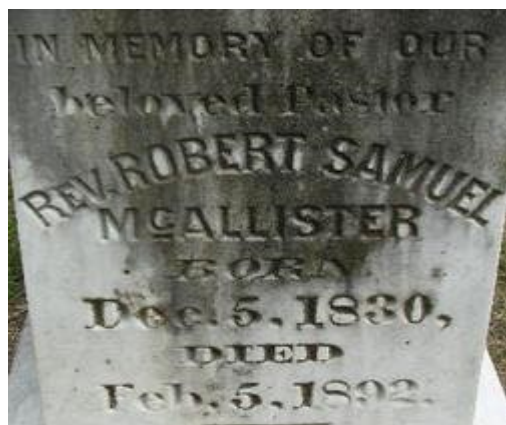
Rev. McAllister died in Amite County, Mississippi on February 5, 1892.

Amite County, Mississippi Archives
Bible Records Caston - Dixon

Memorial Service:

The funeral of Reverend R. S. McAllister, at Bethany Presbyterian Church, Sunday last, was an occasion long to be remembered by the people of that community. The services were conducted by Rev. M. B. Shaw of Centreville, assisted by Rev. Mr. Lewis of Clinton, Louisiana, and Dr. R. Q. Mallard of New Orleans, who delivered an eloquent and impressive sermon. The casket was borne by elders of the church, as pall bearers, to the grave, a spot near the church building, which had been previously selected by the deceased....."

This article was posted on January 9, 2019 on the Amite County Historical & Genealogical Society's FaceBook page by William Barron.



Annual Membership Contribution
Amite County Historical and Genealogical Society
PO Box 2
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amitecohistory@gmail.com

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Thank you for joining the Amite County Historical and Genealogical Society. Your contribution helps us continue to collect and preserve historic treasures from Amite County's past, as well as to promote family history. Membership also provides an opportunity to attend programs and participate in special events.

I am interested in helping with:

Archives Membership Programs Newsletter Other (specify):

Please let us know if you would prefer to receive the newsletter via email instead of snail mail. This would allow us to save money on postage which would in turn allow money to be spent more prudently.

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