

THE LAFFITE SOCIETY

Meridian Retirement Center, 2228 Seawall Blvd., Galveston, TX 77550

Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, August 09, 2011

Board Members Present: President Ed Jamison, FVP Jack Watson, SVP Kathy Modzelewski, TVP Ginny Roberts, Secretary Carolyn Peterson, Treasurer Jeff Modzelewski, Technology Director Rob Peterson, Editor Dan Cote, Publicity Director Dave Roberts, Archivist Larry Porter

Board Members Absent: Coordinator of Research Pam Keyes, Parliamentarian Diane Olson

Advisory Board Present: Jean Epperson, Jeff Modzelewski, Kathy Modzelewski

Advisory Board Absent: Pam Keyes, Robert Vogel, Dr. Reginald Wilson, Dale Olson

President Ed Jamison called the meeting to order at 6:34PM.

Ed invited Lynette Haaga to talk about the Winter Banquet. Lynette is already busy with this year's event and says she is in need of volunteers. She is having a planning session in a couple of weeks and requested that interested persons sign up to help her.

Ed announced that the Chronicles were here and ready for the members. He mentioned the President's Page which covers the discussion of using Texas A&M as the repository for Society archives. Steve Conway, head librarian, agreed by email to the Society's conditions and so after the Board's approval, TAMU will take over this responsibility.

He talked with Steve Austin who said hello to everyone and that they will be here for some months in the near future.

Visitors welcomed to this month's meeting: John and Evelyn Keeling, Celina Guyewski, daughter of the late "Frenchy" Leblanc, Glynda Oglesby and Debbie and Chuck Morris.

Program Speakers – Jim Saye & Bill Cox

Topic – The SS Selma



FVP Jack Watson began by saying that the Selma is a true historical artifact for Galveston and thanked Helen Mooty for arranging this presentation by Jim Saye and Bill Cox.

After serving in the Korean War, Jim pursued an advertising career with a major client being the former Southwest football Conference. He later started his own firm and came in contact with A. Pat Daniels who had him set up the annual celebration for the SS Selma.

Bill, a pilot during WWII, a sixth generation Texan, and a retired CPA, has served on many historical societies' commissions. He is the sole owner of the SS Selma since Pat Daniels' passing this year.

From the ferry the Selma looks like a old ship sunk in the mud. During WWI there were shortages of steel and petroleum. To alleviate this, the US Navy commissioned the production of 12-13 experimental concrete ships by Fred May Ship Building Company in Mobile, AL. The tanker, USS Selma—named for Selma, AL, was the largest with her dimensions as follows: 420 feet in length, beam of 54 feet, fully loaded draft of 26 feet, bottom hull thickness of 5 inches, and side thickness of 4 inches. Her displacement was 13000 tons fully loaded, she cruised at 10.5 knots, and had a crew of 49. She was launched in June 28, 1919—the same day WWI ended so she began her career carrying crude oil from Mexico to the US. The success of the Selma and her sisters proved that the US ship builders could construct seaworthy ships of concrete and 104 more were constructed for service during WWII. This was not new technology since the Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans used concrete for early construction projects that are still in use

today. In 1920 the Selma crashed into a jetty in Tampico, Mexico where a quick fix was carried out and it was towed to Galveston. There were many problems in dry-dock since no one had experience with the repair of concrete ships. Then a storm threatened and she was rushed from dry-dock. She was towed to Pier 37 where she stayed until the government refused to pay the docking fees. She was then towed to her current resting place. Two Galveston captains bought her to make a fishing pier and resort and she became SS (Steam Ship) Selma. The ship was sold to the Galveston Boat Company, but no rehabilitation took place. In 1936 Frenchy LeBlanc bought the Selma for \$100. From 1948 he lived a solitary existence on the Selma and tried oyster cultivation, but was only successful at raising chickens and goats. He hosted the Hermit's convention on the Selma as a publicity stunt for Fox Movietone News. During the 1947 Texas City disaster debris from the harbor was stored on the deck of the Selma so barges could get into Texas City to help. In 1957 after gambling was closed down in Galveston, Jim Simpson used the Selma as a backdrop to dispose of slot machines in front of the press. The machines floated, much to Simpson's embarrassment.

In 1992 Pat Daniels, former editor of the Galveston Daily News, purchased the Selma, later getting it listed on the registry of National Historic Places. It is a Texas Historical Landmark and the flagship of the Texas Army. May 4 is designated as SS Selma day in Galveston. Daniels organized the annual Selma birthday party at the Austin House and it will be held on the second Saturday in May next year.

Bill Cox says that the highest point above mean sea level is about 8-10 feet now, indicating how much the Selma has sunk since it was placed in her resting place. He bought half interest a couple of years ago finding out later it was his half that is already sunk (many chuckles). He has set up a shell corporation paying property taxes on her little plot of land. He asked about possible things to do with the Selma in the future.

Questions for Jim:

What propelled the boat? A single screw engine that burned coal.

Was the Selma meant to be launched sideways? Because of a mishap in England, the US builder launched sideways to avert any possible disaster. Someone mentioned that for boat launchings in Beaumont they put banana peels on the skids to make the boats slide easily.

Miscellaneous

Ed discussed the possibility of asking William Davis as a speaker for the Winter Banquet.

Helen Mooty spoke about Pat Daniels as a driving force behind the Jane Long Festival and about his books on the local area. Jim Saye is writing a book about the 1915 hurricane. Galveston County is honoring Daniels with a proclamation on August 16 and an invitation to attend was given.

Casey Edward Greene, head of the special collections at the Rosenberg Museum, will talk on the information available about Laffite. Please give Jack Watson some input regarding your area of interest. The talk will be presented in February, 2012.

Jeff Modzelewski suggested that Jack Ramsey's book may be an easier read than Davis' book for people who are entering this field of study. Jeff finds it less intimidating for the beginner.

You can have an interesting photo taken with Captain Hook at the Ashton Village store.

Ginny Roberts thanked Lynette Haaga and the Dersheimers for bringing desserts. Ed Connor was thanked for his excellent bartending skills.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:35PM.

Submitted by Carolyn Peterson
Corresponding/Recording Secretary