

Friends

Of the Fairhope Museum
of History

Newsletter



Volume 4 Issue 2, April - May 2013

Mystic Colony Maskers make début as New Fairhope Mardi Gras Organization



By Curt Cochran

The Mystic Colony Maskers (MCM), the newly founded Mardi Gras Krewe in Fairhope, is off to a great start with its Inaugural Ball on February 1, 2013. The theme and the Tableau of the first ball, celebrated the founding of Fairhope. The MCM took the earliest available date for a Mardi Gras celebration – February First, the day before the Knights of Ecor Rouge parade and ball.

The Masquerade Ball was held at our Museum, attended by 90 charter members of the Krewe and some guests from the general public. The only rule was an often overlooked historic tradition: everyone had to wear a mask.

The *Friends of the Museum* had lots of extra masks for those who wandered by and wanted to take a look. Many of those attending were in elaborate costumes or formal clothes with their masks. The food was provided by the partygoers and proved to be an interesting eating experience. There were tastes from around the world and a great selection of wines and other drinks that were brought and shared by the partiers. Music for the evening was provided by DJ Teddy Gautney with a great selection of music for the eclectic group. There was dancing and celebrating throughout the evening. The highlight was the Tableau.



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Director's Desk

The launch of our new Pottery Exhibit was coordinated with the opening of the 2013 Fairhope Arts & Crafts Show, to the pleasure of huge crowds on each day of the show. We met several visiting potters who especially enjoyed the historical view of pottery on the Eastern Shore. Many of the guests were amazed at the depth (no pun intended) of our clay artwork in the development of Baldwin County.

It required a truly extra effort on the part of many of our docents and volunteers, to complete the exhibit on time. They deserve a *Big Thank You* for their commitment to the task; special thanks to those who carried the 250 pieces of pottery upstairs to the display area, then returned those we did not use to storage in another building. Even I did not know our Museum owned so much. Pottery is heavy; that is why historically the early artisans needed deep water for transportation. Over land, it would tear up your wagon and wear out your mules.

We have a couple of other excellent programs coming up:

“Art Works” will happen here at the Museum on Friday and Saturday, April 12 & 13. This will be an Art Show on the 12th and an Art Auction, 5:00-7:00 p.m. on the 13th, put on by the Fairhope Garden Club. The first day will exhibit donated art in the upstairs Council Chamber Meeting Room during our regular Museum business hours. They already have an impressive selection to offer.

We have another special event on Friday, May 24th. Cathy Donelson’s new Arcadia book, “Fairhope in the Roaring Twenties” will be premiered here that night, 7:00 – 9:00 p.m. We are calling it “The Fairhope Speakeasy” and inviting guests, free of cost, to come in Twenties costume. The event will feature music, food and the first viewing of this new and exciting book.

- *Donnie Barrett*

New Eastern Shore Pottery Exhibit Opens March 15th!

Pre-historic Native-Americans left shards of pottery all along the Eastern Shore, crafted from the layer of clay that stretches from Daphne to the south end of Fish River. These discoveries inspired the French in 1717 to make bricks for Fort Conde, and the U.S. military later used over 30.6 million of them to reinforce Fort Morgan and build Fort Gaines on Mobile Bay. Early Eastern Shore craftsmen learned quickly that fine clay, firewood and salt – all of which were available in the County - made appealing stoneware. By 1888, one-third of Baldwin County residents gained their livelihood “making jugs”.

Our Museum of History inaugurated an impressive new exhibit of this historical artwork, upstairs on the balcony, on March 15th. Several area artisans over the years are featured in the exhibit and their stoneware continues to be a valuable, collectable reminder of the skill, artistry and quality of their work.

Be sure to drop by and savor these pieces of our past.

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## HISTORICAL WALKING TOURS OF FAIRHOPE SLATED FOR APRIL

The ever-popular historical walking tours of Fairhope are happening every Saturday in April. Museum Director Donnie Barrett will lead the groups on one-hour leisurely walks, the first 3 being focused on historic buildings in the downtown area; the 4<sup>th</sup> will be the popular Colony Cemetery walk. The first 3 tours will depart from the Museum promptly at 10 a.m.; the 4<sup>th</sup> will meet at the Cemetery Gate at 10 a.m. NO reservations are needed and the walks are free! Donnie has also been known to sprinkle-in a few personal anecdotes of growing up in America’s best known Single Tax Colony.

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Tableaus - wordless plays that tell a story - are also a long standing tradition with Mardi Gras balls. This Tableau, the founding of Fairhope, was led by the MCM Grand Master, Donnie Barrett. He explained each segment of the Tableau as the masked partygoers descended the stairway carrying the visual displays.

It was a fun party, but more significantly, it was the celebration of a new Mardi Gras tradition in Fairhope!!

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Marietta Johnson's Organic School of Education



Have you thought about Fairhope as being an *EPCOT*, almost 70 years earlier than Walt Disney envisioned his city of tomorrow? The Fairhope founders also saw an **Experimental Prototype City Of Tomorrow** that would never be complete but would continue to grow as ideas and inventions were put into practice. This gets us to one of the most progressive and surviving concepts in our city of tomorrow – the Marietta Johnson Organic School of Education.

Marietta Louise Pierce Johnson was born in 1864 in St. Paul Minnesota. Her early education was in public schools in Minnesota and even as a young girl, she dreamed of becoming a teacher herself. Upon her graduation from the State Normal School in 1885, now St. Cloud State College, she did become a teacher. Between 1890 and 1899, she observed students in practice teaching and on occasion would take over a class to demonstrate her ideas; she was an inspiring and creative teacher, full of new ideas on schooling. In 1903, she and her husband spent the winter in Fairhope, a new town founded on the single-tax theory. The progressives in town invited her to open an experimental school to explore some of her educational ideas. She accepted and in 1907 moved permanently to Fairhope where she became the director of the school. She had six students the first day at her “Organic School” and after a few years, enrolled as many as 200 students per year. With community support and her tireless fundraising, the school was always tuition free to its students, yet received no public funds. It was called “organic” in that the central aim was to “minister to the health of the body, develop the finest mental grasp and preserve the sincerity

and un-self-consciousness of the emotional life.” She believed grades, report cards and promotions created the tension of self-consciousness so they were omitted. Students were judged only for their individual abilities, and emphasis was placed on the satisfactions of learning and growth. The school incorporated in 1909.

Ms. Johnson’s vision of a new education, based on her organic school experiment, took on national prominence with the publication in 1915 of the *Dewey’s Schools of Tomorrow*. John Dewey and his daughter Evelyn after visiting and studying the school wrote extensively and positively about the experiment. Ms. Johnson established a second Organic School, following the Fairhope model, in Greenwich, CT. By the late 1920’s, she was dividing her time between Alabama and Connecticut. She became internationally renowned for progressive education. The Organic School in Fairhope progressed well at its location between School and Bancroft Streets until Ms. Johnson’s death in 1938. Then her fundraising skills became more apparent. Enrollment dropped below 100, cash flow trickled and faculty morale fell.

As with any great undertaking, there have been bumps along the road. Without Marietta there to continually inspire students and large donors, enrollment, leadership and funding have become reoccurring concerns. In the 1940’s, a Board and 3-person Executive Committee managed the school. For a time, the Organic School property was used as security to obtain a loan from the Single Tax Corporation to pay off debts and sponsor operation of the school. In the 1950’s many of Fairhope’s prosperous families rallied around the school and enrollment rebounded to 120 students. But with that effort the Corporation yielded to pressure and violated one of Mrs. Johnson’s basic tenets; teachers were instructed to grade students and issue report cards to parents. The format switched back and forth in the early ‘60’s between the classes and hand-on-training practices that Ms. Johnson had insisted upon. Enrollment ranged between 110 and 140 students.

Over the years, the Organic School continued to receive help from generous benefactors. A major bequest from the estate of longtime supporter Georgianna Ives funded a capital improvement program. The Board was able to reclaim the school’s assets from the Single Tax Corporation in 1967. In the late 1970’s, Harold Dahlgren donated funds to retool the workshop, restore the old high school building and help the school become solvent again. In 1989, the Board accepted the City of Fairhope’s offer of \$334,000 to rebuild the school at a

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new site on Pecan Street, so that Faulkner State Community College could open a branch campus downtown on the original 10-acre Organic School site. The Ives Probate Trust Fund continues to underwrite about half of the School’s budget and to offer generous scholarships to worthy students each year.

The school got negative publicity in 2004 when it used treated wood in the organic wood shop, where students were exposed to dust and treatment chemicals. This was a major contributing factor to a drop in enrollment, teachers quitting and the PTA Roundtable being dissolved. High school level classes were eliminated thereafter due to lack of funding and students. “Home School” high school was conducted for a few years, but was discontinued at the end of the 2011 – 2012 school year. Classes from Kindergarten through 9th grade are now taught at the school.

Our Museum Director Donnie Barrett was a teacher at the Organic School during the years 2003 through 2006. He says, “Teachers were required to send home report cards, but that lasted only for a short while. ‘Progress Reports’, not report cards, now go home to parents.”



The Organic School continues as a haven for creative thinking and free-spirited activities. And the School, along with the Single Tax Corporation, are the most prominent remaining vestiges of our EPCOT in Alabama!

* Portions of the text in the “Organic School” article were taken from “the Harbinger, Part II”, by Dr. Joseph Newman, professor and chair of the Department of Educational Leadership and Foundations, University of South Alabama, October 28, 1997.

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Tea for Two

Each Tuesday 2 p.m. in the Museum Council Chamber

Upcoming Programs

April 2 – Karen Wilson will talk about the recent developments in the book business and tell us the story of Page & Palette.

April 9 – Ken Niemeyer will speak on historic preservation, restoration, adaptive use, perspective and the bad old days – all off the cuff.

April 16 – Kit Caffee will tell us her old Fairhope stories and talk about her years of historic volunteering.

April 23 – Roberta Billy was encouraged to enter a career of dancing by her great uncle, Frank Stewart the Pictureman. She remembers him well and also has many stories of Fairhope. She knew everyone in town!

April 30 – Wesley Grant was the Agricultural Science teacher at Fairhope H.S. and later worked in school administration. He has good stories to tell!

May 7 – Thelma Todd is going to do a “making of” program about the Black History video being produced by the Fairhope Museum.

May 14 – Bonnie Gums, Archaeology Lab Director, University of South Alabama, is going to present her program on the archaeological digs and investigative studies she conducted on the historic potteries on the Eastern Shore.

May 21 – Jan Weiler, runs “Landmark Tours”, a growing tour company. She knows our area well and will tell us about some of her favorite landmarks and experiences.

May 28 – Jonathan Smith, City Planning & Zoning Director, will talk about recent changes in planning regulations in Baldwin County and tell us about the successful street striping program.

Fairhope Museum of History

24 North Section Street

Phone (251) 929-1471

Hours: 9 – 5 Tuesday through Saturday

Admission: Free