

Friends

Of the Fairhope Museum of History

Newsletter



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New Exhibit at the Museum

The Fairhope Museum of History proudly presents a new traveling Smithsonian Institution exhibit entitled, "The Way We Worked", for a limited engagement: February 15 to March 29, 2014. Director Donnie Barrett emphasizes that while we change exhibits on a regular basis, we are honored to be selected to show this touring display for these six weeks. Our Museum was selected as one of only six in Alabama for this exhibit sponsored by the Alabama Humanities Foundation. The Foundation makes many contributions to our state's art culture and is the state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

America is built on the hard work of its citizens. This exhibit shows a wide variety of jobs that build personal income, fuels our economy and powers our society. Work is a part of nearly every American's life.

We define ourselves by the work we do. When meeting someone for the first time, we often ask, "Well, what do you do?" pertaining to their line of work. And we all have known a new retiree who acted as though he or she had lost their identity and self-worth after retiring from work. Work is a part of us!

Whether we work at home, an office, a factory, inside, outside, in the fields, on the water, on the roads or in a city, work is performed by millions of Americans to keep the nation going. We all make great contributions to industry and our American culture.

This exhibit will focus *why* we work, *how* we work, *where* we work and how these fulfill our personal

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Director's Desk

Things have really been jumping around the Museum lately. It has taken us several weeks to design, write, rewrite and produce the pecan exhibit for the Fairhope Library. The Schermer Pecan Company once sat on that site and we are about to install an exhibit telling the nut industry story. This also tells about Fairhope's B&B Pecan company, now one of the oldest pecan companies in the South.

It was difficult pulling down the pottery exhibit. The colors, richness and variety of it were beautiful. We became very good at interpreting it to tourists. I said the same thing over and over many times, but still acted like I just thought of it. Pottery has always been one of my favorite subjects. Did you notice the Indian effigy heads in our Indian case? The really nice lady who lent them to us has agreed to put them on a long term loan; I'm thrilled!!

We are now putting up photo enlargements of Fairhope people at work for our "Tools That Don't Work Anymore" display. I know this is not the best use of English, but it is a play on words. We are hanging many of our tools from our large collection, around the large photos. Some tools are broken, some performed a task that is no longer needed (do you ever starch gloves?) and some tools will still function, but the job is done by someone in a factory or farm or by some technological advancement.

This is our supporting exhibit for the Smithsonian Exhibit "The Way We Worked" which is coming February 15 - February 29. This is a large group of displays that will fill our building - but only for six weeks. Then this all comes down and up goes "Baldwin County During the Civil War - The War Comes Home!" which opens in April.

Whew! This is a busy spring. Keep up with all our activities in this Newsletter and be sure to come enjoy all these new exhibits.

- Donnie Barrett

needs. It will explore tools and technology changes that make us work more efficiently, while sometimes placing us in a faster, more stressful work environment. The exhibit will have large graphics of Americans at work with audio and visual screens telling the workers' stories and allowing visitors to reflect on their own work lives. One question older workers may find easy to answer is "What jobs did you do that technology changes have taken away?"

The exhibit, with over a thousand enlarged photos, many video screens and interactive pieces, also emphasizes how technology itself changes our jobs. Most everyone has worked at a job that is not performed any longer, or has changed by a technological advancement.

Our local supporting exhibit will be many photographs of Fairhophians at work. Mounted on the walls around these will be tools from our large antique Fairhope tool collection. A video will also be showing with many Fairhope citizens telling "How They Worked."

The walls titled "Tools That Don't Work Anymore," will feature tools with a lost knowledge of their usefulness; tools not needed, worn out and broken tools and perfectly good tools we just don't use. Ask yourself, "How long has it been since I've hoed a row of beans?"

Don't forget to visit before Saturday, March 29!

The Touring *The Way We Work* exhibit is sponsored by:



History of Mardi Gras on Mobile Bay

By Curt Cochran, Museum Volunteer



Maids of Jubilee Float, 2013

Mardi Gras 2014 will be celebrated on Tuesday, March 4! When Gulf Coast Newspaper articles start printing Mardi Gras news and the schedule of parades for Gulf Shores and Fairhope, visitors to our area will probably think that these small towns are copying New Orleans, just trying to add a few parties in the slow winter months. The facts are quite different! Mardi Gras was first celebrated in the Gulf South when the French arrived at Mobile Bay in 1699, almost twenty years before New Orleans was a city. The parades get larger and more elaborate each year as typified by the photo of a Fairhope float in 2013. Mardi Gras in New Orleans which now overshadows all of the Gulf Coast celebrations, began in the 1840s and was initiated by a group of business men who moved there from Mobile.

The origins of Mardi Gras can be traced to ancient times with the earliest being the Egyptian goddess Hathor, a cow deity, associated with joy and feasting. A second origin is taken from the Old Testament with the story of the Israelites and the golden calf in which Aaron said "Tomorrow there will be a festival to the LORD." These are ancient traditions of feasting. The more modern tradition of Mardi Gras began with the Renaissance in the 1600s when the Catholic Church allowed some feasting before the fasting for Lent. The French term *Mardi Gras* translates to Fat Tuesday in English. The Mardi Gras season in other countries, especially South American is called "Carnival," which in Latin means goodbye to the meat. Mardi Gras was well established in Europe when it

was first celebrated in the US in 1699, when Brothers, Pierre Le Moyne d'Iberville and Jean-Baptiste de Bienville, first came to the current Alabama Gulf Coast. By 1703, the Le Moyne brothers had established a settlement at 27 Mile Bluff, north of Mobile and held a Mardi Gras celebration there which was the beginning of the American Mardi Gras tradition. These early celebrations involved a fatted ox which was probably paraded as well as cooked. The 1704 Mardi Gras celebration included a masked ball [*sic*] (bull) and was called the "Boeuf Gras" (fatted ox). This Boeuf Gras celebration held the first known parade in Mobile when the city moved to its present location in 1711 with the parade going down Dauphin St. with 16 men pushing a cart carrying a large papier-mâché cow's head. The Mardi Gras celebrations continued in the French tradition for some fifty years until the British took over West Florida, including Mobile, in 1763. The outlandish French Mardi Gras celebration became the somber Shrove Tuesdays. Mardi Gras ceased to be celebrated on the Gulf Coast until well after the entire area became part of the United States in the Nineteenth Century.

The rebirth of Mardi Gras in Mobile began in 1830 when a Mobillian named Michael Kraft and some of his friends were having an inebriated New Year's party and decided to raid a hardware store taking rakes, hoes and cow bells and paraded through Mobile to the Mayor's house. The Mayor liked the party and joined in. The Mayor decided to make it an annual affair, but had it moved to Fat Tuesday. This group of revelers organized themselves into the Cowbellion de Rakin Society, which was the first formally organized masked mystic society in the United States to celebrate with a parade. The idea of mystic societies was exported to New Orleans in 1856 when six businessmen, three who were formerly from Mobile, gathered at a club room in New Orleans's French Quarter to organize a secret society, inspired by the Cowbellion de Rakin Society. The Mardi Gras grew from this start and by 1840 the Fat Tuesday parade included floats with images of heathen gods and goddesses. These Mardi Gras celebrations continued to grow until the start of the Civil War in 1861. At the conclusion of 1861 parade, the Cowbellion de Rakin Society symbolically sacrificed their lead float, a paper-mache bull to the war effort. There were no more Mardi Gras parades or celebration until after the war was over.

The revival of Mardi Gras in Mobile after the Civil War is credited to another remarkable man, Joe Cain, who

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drove (paraded) a coal wagon through downtown during Mardi Gras season in 1866 to taunt the occupying Union Soldiers in a relatively safe way. The next year, 1867, the Order of Myths Society was established and organized a Mardi Gras parade choosing as their emblem the South’s defeat in the War (Folly chasing Death around the broken pillar of life). This was quickly followed with the Infant Mystics Society in 1868 and the Royal Court with King Felix, the King of Frivolity, in 1872.

Mardi Gras continued to grow and become integrated with the other social events in Mobile. The Social season began as early as November. Much of the social elite in Mobile were planters who moved into their winter houses in Mobile after the cotton crops were sold. The winter months made for a very active social season with holiday parties, Debutante Balls, the Camilla Ball, and the many dances and celebrations associated with Mardi Gras, and has continued into the modern era although the social makeup of Mobile has changed.

The first Mardi Gras parade by a Black Society was in 1938 which has led to enormous growth of Mardi Gras organizations in the Black community. The Mobile Area Mardi Gras Association organizes all the parades and oversees the crowning of the King and his court.

In 1967, The Joe Cain parade was scheduled on the Sunday before Fat Tuesday to honor the man credited with bringing Mardi Gras back after the Civil War. The lead float traditionally, is the coal wagon and the parade leader is Chief Slacabamorinico, a fictitious Indian chief who escaped the Indian removal, which represented Southern resiliency.



Museum Director Barrett with the emblem of the Knights of Ecor Rouge, Fairhope’s oldest Krewe

Fairhope, as well as other Eastern Shore cities, joined in the seasonal celebration with parades and balls. The Fairhope Knights of Ecor Rouge Society was organized in 1985, the Maids of Jubilee in 1989 and the Order of Mystic Magnolias in 1992. All have grown into large organizations that sponsor elaborate parades during the Mardi Gras season.

There are several traditions of Mardi Gras that are part of most parades and balls:

Jesters: This is the most common costume for the parades and dates back to the 1600s when court jesters were popular figures and participated in most public events.

Masks: The masks date back to Greek plays when masks were held up to show the emotions of the actors. They became part of the European Balls to add anonymity to the revelers who were often inebriated and exhibited outrageous behavior.

Throws: Throws are a relatively recent addition to Mardi Gras parades with doubloons being the first throw in 1965. Of late, beads and moon pies are the most popular, with stuffed animals, cups, frisbees and a few other items close behind.

Colors: Gold and Purple are royal colors and were always part of Mardi Gras, with Green (from New Orleans) added as a third royal color of the Russian Monarchy.

King Cakes. Sweets were always part of the feasting, but the Mobile tradition of the King Cake, which has a small figurine baked in the cake, began in the 1950’s by Mr. Polman. The person who gets the piece of cake with the figurine is supposed to hold the next Mardi Gras party.

The Mardi Gras parades and parties in the small towns around Mobile Bay are carrying on the traditions that began here in 1699 and are having a great time!

Helping us tell Fairhope’s Story!

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The Hall of Mayors

By Curt Cochran

Everyone who visits the Fairhope Museum of History walks through the Hall of Mayors. Most are amazed that Fairhope has these professional oil paintings of the mayors of such a small town. Mayor Greeno, the first mayor, and first on the left in the photo, was elected by a margin of two votes out of forty cast. For Fairhope, the artist colony, such a collection of art works is not unusual at all.

The paintings were done by Elizabeth Box who had a commanding presence in Fairhope for almost 40 years. Elizabeth was a beautiful and talented person, gifted painter, sculptor, and talented musician. Coming to Fairhope to visit her sister in 1945, she fell in love with the artist colony and decided to stay. Two years later, she married Sam Box and



settled into life in Fairhope. Water Color was her favorite medium for painting and she was always fascinated by the struggle between man and nature and would often spend much time painting an abandoned building that was being overcome with vines and weeds. She was a founding member of the Eastern Shore Art Association in 1952 and began teaching art at the Fairhope Elementary School as a volunteer when her son, Sam entered first grade in 1956. Everyone who went to Fairhope Elementary School from 1956 to 1981 participated in one of her art classes and the lucky ones have a pastel portrait of themselves that she would have done as part of the class - a treasured possession today.

Donnie Barrett and Dacri Labrato loved her art classes.

Elizabeth was one of the first artists to paint Christmas decorations to be put on display downtown and for years, painted the large 4 x 8 foot plywood panels with Christmas scenes that were a famous part of Fairhope's Christmas celebration. She accepted the challenge to paint portraits of all the Fairhope mayors as part of Fairhope's 75th anniversary celebration in 1969. This was something that she wanted to do and worked very hard at it. She studied each of the mayors by searching through *Fairhope Courier* archives, library sources and interviewed family members and friends of the mayors to develop her image of what the portrait should look like. For most, she was able to find black and white photos and from that she could get a sense of their features and hair styles, but depended on interviews to determine complexion color and appropriate facial expression. She often used the technique of a forensic artist, as she would do a painting and then asked people who remembered the person if it was a good image. In the end, all agreed that they were very good. The paintings were completed by the end of 1973 and delivered to the city. They were on display in the City Hall from 1973 until sometime after 2000, when they were taken down and put into storage. Donnie Barrett retrieved them from storage and had them ready to go on display in the Museum for everyone to enjoy when it opened in 2008.

In 1982, Elizabeth and Sam moved back to his native Mississippi. Not long after, all of her stored paintings and studio were destroyed in a fire. This was a terrible loss, but she started over, continuing her art work until the end of her artistic career. In failing health, she returned to Fairhope in the 1990s and died in 2001. She is buried in the Colony Cemetery. The Hall of Mayors in the Fairhope Museum of History is a lasting tribute to her and the city that she loved. ~~~

Tea for Two

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

Upcoming Programs

February 4 – **Mary Lois** – Mary will talk about and read from both *Fair Hope of Heaven* and *That Was Tomorrow*. She will discuss Upton Sinclair and how to write a book about Fairhope.

February 11 – The Smithsonian exhibit, “The Way We Worked” is being installed. No *Tea for Two* today.

February 18 – **Ben Raines** – “Underwater Forest” Ben is the Exec. Dir. of Weeks Bay Foundation, Inc. He will tell us of the continued success of environmental programs at the Weeks Bay Estuary Research Reserve and present a slide show on the 10,000 year old forest out in the gulf.

February 25 – **Nancy Anderson** – Nancy is the chairperson for the Fairhope recycling committee and will share with us the city’s new recycling programs.

March 4 – **Donnie Barrett** – Donnie will present his History of Mardi Gras on this Fat Tuesday. He has done some work on Eastern Shore organizations that he will share.

March 11 – **Nancy Milford** – Nancy is with the Fairhope city planning department. She will tell us about her environmental background and her interest in heirloom gardening.

March 18 – **Dr. John Kvach** – A charismatic history professor at the University of Alabama-Huntsville, Dr. Kvach will address us with “The Way Alabamians Worked – Charting Change Over Time”.

March 25 – **Bob Mannich** – Bob grew up in Fairhope as the son of Arthur & Betty Mannich who operated the City Market & Grocery. “It’s fun to be nice to people”. He later took over his father’s real estate business and he will tell us his Fairhope story.



Assistant Director Jim Bates and Director Donnie Barrett reconfiguring exhibits at the Museum

Photo by Curt Cochran

Upcoming Friends Meetings

The Next meetings of the Friends will be February 18 and March 18, 2014, 3:30 p.m. in the Council Chamber Room upstairs at the Museum. Non-members are invited to attend and participate in Exhibit and Event planning with us.

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The Newsletter

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Fairhope Museum of History

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Hours: 9 – 5 Tuesday through Saturday Admission: Free!