

JCHC JOURNAL

J E F F E R S O N C O U N T Y H I S T O R I C A L C O M M I S S I O N

UPCOMING MEETINGS

- November 20, 2024

4TH ANNUAL HISTORIC MAGNOLIA CEMETERY TOUR

Once again, the Jefferson County Historical Commission, in partnership with the board of directors of the Historic Magnolia Cemetery have had a successful tour! We sincerely thank all those who volunteered their time in planning and/or presenting, as well as all of our attendees! We shared some stories this year that we've not shared previously. For those who were unable to attend, we've included those stories here.

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1. Sibbie K. Mills and Max Holmes

At least two separate Van Wormer plots in the cemetery are marked by large monuments. This one contains the grave of S.H. Van Wormer, who owned a large tract of land south of the William McFaddin homestead (near Liberty street) known as “Van Wormer’s Pasture.” Downhill (to the east) from the Van Wormer monument, note the stone naturally embedded in a tree, indicating the tree’s age. There is another gravestone (probably a replacement marker) which reads, “Annie Lee Fitzenreiter, d. 1892.”

Sibbie Van Wormer was born in 1869 to Jacob and Catherine Van Wormer. Compared to many other women of her time, Sibbie was strong-willed and independent. In 1884, at the age of 15, Sibbie married John W. Holmes, who was 28. Together they had three children: Archie, Sadie, and Max. We don’t know what happened to Sibbie’s husband; no record of his death has been located. We do know that Sibbie was married to Samuel P. Kelley by 1910.

Samuel worked as a grain broker/buyer in Beaumont after moving here from Galveston. Later, he became head of the Standard Warehouse Company. Unfortunately, in February 1917, Samuel took his life with a shotgun. The obituary from the *Beaumont Enterprise* stated that he had been “feeling badly” before the incident, but no more details surfaced in the following days as to the possible reasons for the suicide.

As a mother, Sibbie seemed to be very protective of her children. According to one story from her descendant Mary Oxford Englander, which is found in the 1991 *Texas Gulf Historical & Biographical Record*, when Max joined the US Army, his first detail was along the Texas-Mexico border, “fighting Pancho Villa.” Of course, Sibbie did what any other mother would do—she “rented a room in a hotel at

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the border for the duration of the conflict.” A few articles that mention a lady on the border feeding information to reporters covering the conflict have surfaced, so one cannot help but wonder the identity of the lady...

With the United States’ involvement in World War I, Max was inevitably sent to France. Away from his mother’s protection, he became ill (possibly with Spanish flu) and died in St. Nazaire, France. His remains were brought back to Beaumont by his mother and laid to rest at Magnolia Cemetery.

Eventually, Sibbie married a third time to John B. Mills. He would die of a heart attack in 1931. He is also buried in the Kelley plot, along with Sibbie, who passed away in 1937.



CLEVELAND NISBY

Photo of Cleveland Nisby, from the 1974 Jefferson County Pct. 4 Commissioner campaign

2. Cleveland Nisby

Born on July 24, 1919, in St. Landry Parish, Louisiana, Cleveland Nisby was a prolific Civil Rights leader in Jefferson County. Mr. Nisby served as a Deacon at Starlight Missionary Baptist Church for more than 50 years, as President of the Beaumont Branch of the NAACP, as a founder and charter board member of the Economic Opportunity Commission of Southeast Texas, as President of the Jefferson County Citizens Committee and on the Planning and Zoning Commission for the City of Beaumont.

Mr. Nisby studied at Paul Quinn College and Lamar University and started fighting for civil rights within the petrochemical plants in 1943 as an employee of Magnolia Refinery. He began the process of unionizing the African American workers so they could collectively bargain for working conditions and pay that were commensurate with that of the white employees. He also lobbied for the end of separate promotion and hiring tracks for African Americans and white workers at Magnolia Refinery. Ultimately his efforts were successful and, with time, the unions merged to represent all petrochemical workers, rather than providing representation only along segregated lines.

As a union representative, Mr. Nisby fought to repeal poll tax, to ensure that all Americans had the opportunity to vote. After the 1964 passage of the 24th amendment and the 1966 Supreme Court decision ruling that states could not assess poll taxes for state and local elections, Mr. Nisby, along with

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his wife, began to canvass apartments and other housing in Beaumont encouraging residents to vote and ensuring that they were aware that there would no longer be a charge at the polls.

To add to his work in the 1960's, he started working with the City of Beaumont City Council and the Jefferson County Commissioner's Court to encourage them to improve their hiring processes to allow for more equality when applicants were considered for jobs. Mr. Nisby was a regular attendee of both City Council and Commissioner Court meetings. His efforts resulted in the hiring of the first African American person in a clerical role in the City of Beaumont offices.

A lawsuit filed in 1983 by Cleveland Nisby resulted in the 1984 redistricting of Jefferson County Pct. 4, which led to the election of Jefferson County's first Black County Commissioner, Edward C. Moore, in 1986. Mr. Nisby ran for the Pct. 4 seat twice and despite the large number of votes he received each time, he was unsuccessful in both bids. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 had provisions against vote dilution, which was found to be at play in the Jefferson County Districts. After several years the lawsuit was successful, and Commissioner Moore was elected in the next election, and went on to serve four terms. The seat has been continuously held by African Americans, as current Commissioner, Bo Alfred was elected following Commissioner Moore.

Mr. Nisby was awarded the Ben Rogers Racial Justice Award in 1997, and was honored in numerous other ways throughout his life as well, with resolutions of respect, dedications of days, and visits to the White House, just to name a few.

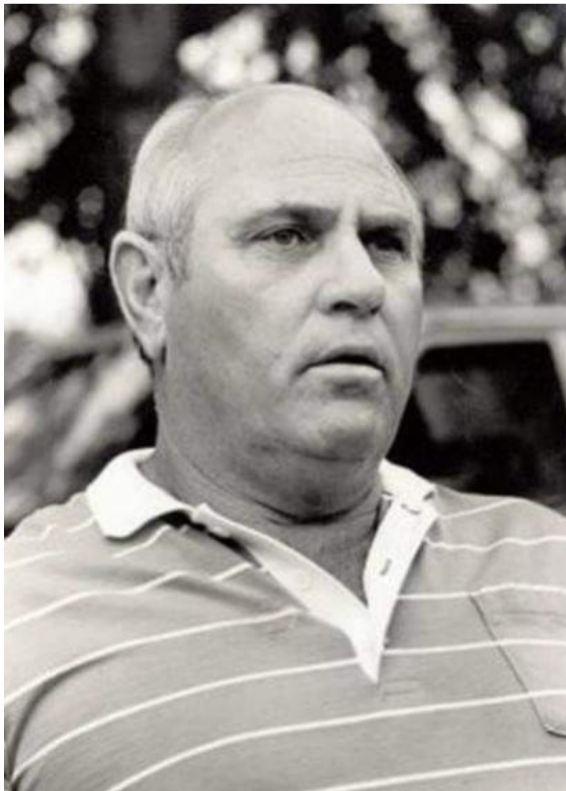
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3. Anthony Perricone

Anthony Perricone, one of the Perricone Quadruplets, came into the world with his brothers on Halloween in 1929, propelling their Beaumont family into the national headlines. Anthony, Bernard, Carl, and Donald Perricone (the Alphabet Quads) became the first surviving male quads in the world and the second documented set of quadruplets born in the U.S. In March of 1951, all four brothers were drafted to serve in the Army during the Korean War. After their service in the Korean war, all four went to work at Pure Oil Refinery. Anthony eventually decided he wanted to be a barber and remained in the profession for the remainder of his life. Anthony, Bernard, Carl and Donald celebrated their last birthday together in 1989.



Anthony Perricone at age 65



*L-R: Anthony, Bernard, Carl and Donald Perricone.
Photo taken in San Francisco when returning home*

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4. Guy W. Junker

Mr. Junker was born in Beaumont on March 4, 1865 to Captain W.A. Junker and Catherine McClure Junker. He was tutored by his mother and also attended Stovall Private School. Later he was sent to Jamestown, NY for schooling. Once he returned to Beaumont, he worked as a bookkeeper at the Reliance Lumber Company. Around 1904, he went into real estate and insurance business. He was Beaumont's Post Master from 1892 until 1896. In the early 1900's he served on the city council. He also served as President of the Beaumont Board of Education. He was recognized as one of the most outstanding men in the Masonic Order in the state of Texas.



The Beach Road is the coastal section of the Texas Highway 87 system. Stretching along the Gulf of Mexico from Sabine Pass through Chambers County to Port Bolivar in Galveston County, it follows a historic route that proved vital to the early development of Jefferson County. Native Americans, early settlers, traders, cattlemen and Republic of Texas mail carriers all used the route. During the Civil War, Confederate forces used the route, which was generally known as the "Road from Galveston." By 1920, local residents found it difficult to travel on the unmaintained Beach Road. In 1923, commissioner W.A. Vaughan worked to improve the route using shell deposits from along the coast. Soon traffic to McFaddin Beach and westward to Port Bolivar increased dramatically, leading

to a business boom in the area as firms built facilities for visitors. A larger effort by the state in the late 1920s called for a paved road with a ferry connection to Galveston. The project moved slowly, but in 1931, the Texas Highway Commission named the new roadway as part of State Highway 87. In the 1940s, during World War II, the highway contributed to coastal defense preparedness. The U.S. Immigration Service set up a barricaded checkpoint for through traffic and the Coast Guard patrolled it during that time. Over the years, hurricanes battered the highway and eroded the nearby coastline, resulting in tidal zone encroachment. Destruction caused by two storms in 1989 forced its closure, though sections of the route remain in use for local traffic. (2007)

UPCOMING EVENTS

November 8— 6:30 p.m.—8:00 p.m. Rescheduled Date of Music at the McFaddins featuring Jivin' Gene & Eazy. 1906 McFaddin, Beaumont. For more information, visit www.mcfaddin-ward.org

November 9— 10:00 a.m. Historical Marker Dedication at the Chamber House Museum. 2240 Calder St. Beaumont. For more information, visit www.beaumontheritage.org

November 14— 2:00 p.m. Presentation of the two films, *The Example* and *They Will Talk About Us: The Charlton Pollard Story* to the Tyrrell Historical Library repository. 695 Pearl Street, Beaumont. For more information, call 409-833-2759.

November 14— 6:30 p.m.-8:00 p.m. McFaddin-Ward Lecture Series presents "On the Neches with MARAD and The Reserve Fleet..." by Brian Hill. 1906 Calder, Beaumont. For more information, visit www.mcfaddin-ward.org

November 21— 5:30 p.m.— 7:30 p.m. Heritage Happy Hour at the Chambers House Museum. 2240 Calder St. Beaumont. For more information, visit www.beaumontheritage.org

November 22— 6:00 p.m.-8:00 p.m. Lamar Brass Quintet at the Museum of the Gulf Coast. 700 Proctor St., Port Arthur. For more information, visit www.museumofthegulfcoast.org

December 7— 10:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m. Holiday Family Fun Day at the Museum of the Gulf Coast. 700 Proctor St., Port Arthur. For more information, visit www.museumofthegulfcoast.org

December 7 & 8— 5:00 p.m.-7:00 p.m. Holiday Open House Saturday and Sunday, McFaddin-Ward House, 1906 Calder, Beaumont. For more information, visit www.mcfaddin-ward.org

GET IN TOUCH

JCHC Offices: 1149 Pearl Street—3rd floor Beaumont, TX 77701
409-835-8701 • www.facebook.com/FRIENDSofJCHC