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Vermilion Historical Society

2007 News

Meeting schedule 2007

Date	Place
January 23, 2007 5:30 pm	Board meeting, Old Vermilion Parish Library, Abbeville
April 24, 2007 5:30 pm	Membership meeting, Old Vermilion Parish Library, Abbeville
July 24, 2007 5:30 pm	Board meeting, Old Vermilion Parish Library, Abbeville
October 23, 2007 5:30 pm	Board meeting, Old Vermilion Parish Library, Abbeville

Quarterly Meeting of October 23, 2007

October 23, 2007—The fourth quarterly meeting of 2007 of the Vermilion Historical Society was held on October 23, 2007, at the Abbeville Museum and Art Gallery. Present were board members Rene Breaux, Margaret Steen Villemez,

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Gary Theall, Ken Dupuy, Barbara Hebert, Velta Bourgeois, Joseph Vallee, Lloyd Dore, III, Charles Dill, Jr., Sylvia Putnam, Meceal Smith, and a large crowd of observers. The meeting was called to order by President René Breaux. After a reading and approval of the minutes, the financial report was given by the treasurer, and was adopted.

Gary Theall demonstrated the prototype of the new model building, which is the Vermilion Parish Courthouse. The manufacturer has found a way to do the columns, and this sample is much better than the one they produced a few years ago that was rejected by the Society. Theall announced that 400 of the buildings have been ordered. Also, because the building was made in pieces, we did not know what the price would be for this model. The last buildings we ordered cost us \$26 per unit. The board was pleased to learn that the cost of the model courthouse will be only \$2.00 more per unit.

Theall informed the board that the Live Oak Tree Committee of Keep Abbeville Beautiful had asked him to be the historical consultant for a project they had undertaken to name the eleven live oak trees on Donald Frederick Boulevard after the first eleven mayors of Abbeville. Theall asked them if they did not think it would be more appropriate to name them after eleven Abbeville veterans killed in World War II, since the boulevard itself is named after an Abbeville sailor who was killed aboard the USS Arizona in the attack on Pearl Harbor. They liked the idea, and decided to do that instead. After a great deal of research into every source available, the committee chose eleven soldiers and sailors who were killed as a result of enemy action and who had sufficiently strong ties to Abbeville based on the research and the judgment of the committee. A dedication ceremony is planned for November 12, 2007, at 10:00 a.m. at the north end of Donald Frederick Boulevard. Cmdr. Willie Himel of the American Legion Post 29 will be the master of ceremonies. The ceremony will be conducted under the recommended military rules pertaining to such dedications. The J. H. Williams band will perform, and dignitaries will speak. Theall will say something about each of the eleven heroes being honored. He expects to have pictures of at least nine of the eleven. He has not been able to find any living relatives of two of the honorees, Dunice Hargrave and Preston Harrington. A permanent bronze plaque will be installed at the base of each of the trees, inscribed to the memory of the corresponding honoree. Simultaneously, the trees will be inducted into the Live Oak Society and officially named for the veterans.

Theall also said that all of the funds for the Boulevard project will be raised through donations. Since Keep Abbeville Beautiful is an agency of the city

government, fundraising is a problem for them. Theall offered for the Vermilion Historical Society to become a partner in the project and to handle the fundraising. Donations to the Society are tax deductible. The project will not cost the Society anything, because we have an anonymous donor who has guaranteed the cost of the project to the extent of any deficiency in the funds raised. Also, the permanent plaques to be installed next to the trees will indicate that this was a project of Keep Abbeville Beautiful and the Vermilion Historical Society. On motion duly made, seconded, and unanimously passed, the following resolution was adopted: "Resolved, that the Vermilion Historical Society partner with Keep Abbeville Beautiful in a project to honor eleven Abbeville veterans killed in World War II as a result of enemy action by dedicating the eleven live oak trees on Donald Frederick Boulevard to their memories."

Theall reported that a contract has been signed with Ken Dupuy for the publication of his book, and a contract has been signed with a printer. All we are waiting for now is the arrival of ISBNs (International Standard Book Numbers) . The Society ordered a package of ten numbers, which is the minimum. One number will be assigned to Volume 1, one to Volume 2, and one to Ken Dupuy's book, leaving seven for future publications.

After the business meeting, Gary Theall and Ken Dupuy made a PowerPoint® presentation of "The Railroad Comes to Abbeville." It detailed the spread of railroads into Louisiana, the twenty-year campaign of the *Meridional* to bring a railroad to Abbeville, the numerous frustrations and dead ends encountered by the citizens' committees, and the eventual success of August Erath's Iberia & Vermilion Railroad company in linking Abbeville to New Iberia by rail. Many old pictures were shown of the people and places involved. One of the highlights of the presentation was the first public showing of the recently discovered photograph showing a full side view of the Abbeville passenger depot. This photo has been generously donated to the Society by honorary board member, Heloise Broussard.

Special Meeting of the Board of Directors, August 7, 2007

August 7, 2007—President René Breaux called a special meeting of the board of directors for tonight at 5:30 p.m. at the Abbeville Museum and Art Gallery for the purpose of discussing the possibility of having the Vermilion Historical Society publish Kenneth A. Dupuy's new book, *Journeys Into the Past—Abbeville, Louisiana: The Early Years*. Present were President René Breaux, Margaret Steen

Villemez, Velta Bourgeois, Alberta Winch, Sue Butaud, Lloyd Doré III, Joseph Vallee, and Gary Theall. Ken Dupuy had waived his appearance to avoid the appearance of a conflict of interest.

After calling the meeting to order, the president turned the floor over to Gary Theall, who made a presentation showing excerpts from the book. The book has been completely written, edited, indexed, and formatted for printing using the most up-to-date publishing software. Theall pointed out the problems Dupuy was encountering in trying to have the book published himself. For a book with this limited a market, the choices are not good. Theall said that when he mentioned to Dupuy the possibility of having the VHS publish the book, Dupuy was receptive. Theall has obtained at least one quote from a book printer so far that may be acceptable. Theall pointed out to the board that the Society has the funds to undertake this project, and even if the Society does not get back all of its money from book sales, it is a worthy expenditure of funds in terms of fulfilling the purposes of the Society, which are to collect, preserve, and disseminate the history of Vermilion Parish. Publishing a third history book would enhance the Society's reputation as "perhaps the best historical society in the state," as the Baton Rouge *Advocate* has said. All of the board members are familiar with the quality of Dupuy's work. On motion by Alberta Winch and second by Velta Bourgeois, unanimously passed the following resolution:

Resolved, that Gary Theall be and he hereby is authorized to negotiate a contract on behalf of Vermilion Historical Society with Kenneth A. Dupuy whereby the Society will acquire the right to publish his book and to sell it in return for a commission to be paid to Dupuy based upon the sale price of each book, and under such other terms and conditions as Theall may deem to be in the best interest of the Society.

Theall presented the details of one quote he has received for the printing of the book. For 1000 books the cost would be \$23.05 per book, or for 1500 books the cost would be \$17.32 per book. After a full discussion of the financial impact on the Society, the nature of the market for the book, and the suggestion by Margaret Steen Villemez to "think big," on motion by Joseph Vallee and second by Sue Butaud, the motion to limit the initial number of copies to 1000 was rejected, and on motion by Margaret Steen Villemez and second by Lloyd Doré III, the following resolution was adopted by a vote of 6 to 2:

Resolved, That Gary Theall be and he hereby is authorized to negotiate a contract on behalf of Vermilion Historical Society with a book printer for the publication by the Society of Ken Dupuy's book, Journeys Into the Past—A History of Abbeville,

Louisiana, with an initial order of 1500 copies.

Lloyd Doré III then discussed the need to conserve the Morgan Effigy. He has consulted other museums and learned that the best person to do this kind of work is Lynn Harrington. After due discussion, on motion by Lloyd Doré III and second by Margaret Steen Villemez, the following resolution was adopted:

Resolved, that Lloyd Doré III and/or Gary Theall be and they hereby are authorized to contract with Lynn Harrington to have the Morgan Effigy treated as may be recommended and to pay Lynn Harrington for her services an amount not to exceed \$1,500.00.

Lloyd then reminded the board that it had previously authorized him to look into the possibility of having a carving made of the Morgan Effigy, with the idea of using the carving to make a mold for the replication of the effigy. After due discussion, on motion by Lloyd Doré III and second by Alberta Winch, the following resolution was adopted:

Resolved, that Lloyd Doré III and/or Gary Theall be and they hereby authorized to contract with the Gueydan carver to have a replica of the Morgan Effigy carved as may be recommended and to pay the artist for his services an amount not to exceed \$500.00.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Quarterly Meeting of July 24, 2007

July 24, 2007—The third quarterly meeting of 2007 of the Vermilion Historical Society was held on July 24, 2007, at the old library building in Abbeville. The meeting was called to order by President René Breaux. After a reading and approval of the minutes, the financial report was given by the treasurer, and was adopted.

A large crowd was again in attendance, thanks to the publicity in the Abbeville Meridional. Gary Theall reported that the model building for this year will be the courthouse, and it is on order. The company that we deal with had tried once before but was unable to do the columns. The rest of the building was fine. Now they say they can do the columns.

Gary reported that President Breaux has called a special meeting of the board of directors for Tuesday, August 7, 2007, at 5:30 p.m. at the Abbeville Museum and Art Gallery, for the purpose of discussing the possible publication of Ken Dupuy's book, as discussed at the last meeting.

After the business portion of the meeting, Gary Theall and Ken Dupuy presented Part Two of the life of Père Antoine Jacques Désiré Mégret entitled "Mégret in Louisiana." In the spring of 1842, Mégret sailed from Bordeaux to New Orleans on the *Talma*. One of his co-passengers was the author, Alexandre Barde, who was to remain a friend of Mégret for life. When Mégret arrived in New Orleans, Bishop Antoine Blanc was in the midst of a revolt by the *marguilliers* (trustees who owned and operated the St. Louis Cathedral), who were largely anti-foreigner. They engaged on a course of continually provoking controversy and legal problems with the bishop, until the Louisiana Supreme Court issued a ruling in 1844 that essentially stripped the *marguilliers* of their power to object to the bishop's appointments of clergy. In the meantime, St. John's church in Vermilionville, where Blanc had sent Mégret, had joined the revolt. The *fabrique* (board of *marguilliers*) of St. John's consisted of some of the most powerful people in Vermilionville, including descendants and relatives of Jean Mouton, who had founded Vermilionville and had given five acres of land for the church. The presentation detailed the problems that Mégret had with the St. John's *marguilliers*, including being chased from the pulpit with a stick and being beat up in the street. Mégret finally ended the trouble by abandoning St. John's and threatening to build a church himself that would be free of any control by the *marguilliers*. He bought the land on which to found the town of Abbeville, and proceeded to build a church there as well. The congregation eventually sided with Mégret and ousted the troublemakers. The presentation then went into detail on the ten-year struggle between Abbeville and Perry's Bridge as to the location of the parish seat, and showed how Mégret eventually won the battle, although after his death, and despite an adverse Louisiana Supreme Court ruling.

Quarterly Meeting of April 24, 2007

April 24, 2007—The second quarterly meeting of 2007 of the Vermilion Historical Society was held on April 24, 2007, at the Abbeville Museum and Art Gallery, which is in the old library building in Abbeville. The meeting was called to order by President René Breaux. After a reading and approval of the minutes, the financial report was given by the treasurer, and was adopted.

The *Meridional* had publicized the meeting, and as a result a large crowd was in attendance. The annual election of board and officers takes place at the April meeting. The nominating committee nominated the following officers: René Breaux, president; Margaret Steen Villemez, vice-president; Patricia Heard, secretary; and Gary Theall, treasurer. The committee announced that Heloise Broussard in recognition of her outstanding service to the Society has been promoted to Honorary board member. The committee then nominated the following for board of directors: Velta Bourgeois, Abbeville; Sue Butaud, Erath; Lloyd F. Doré III, Abbeville; Charles Dill, Jr., Abbeville; Kenneth A. Dupuy, Maurice; Betty Girouard, Kaplan; Barbara Hebert Hebert, north Abbeville; Sylvia Brown Putnam, Abbeville; Meceal Hollier Smith, Gueydan; Joseph G. Vallee, Abbeville; Alberta Villien Winch, Maurice. The nominees were elected by acclamation.

Gary reported that he would be asking President Breaux to call a special board meeting soon to discuss the possibility of the Vermilion Historical Society publishing Ken Dupuy's book, *Journeys Into the Past—A History of Abbeville, Louisiana*. The book is almost ready for the printing press, and because of the limited (although enthusiastic) market, the major publishing houses are not interested and the smaller ones want a lot of money to print it and then want to sell it and pay only a small commission to the author, making it a losing proposition.

After the business portion of the meeting, Gary Theall and Ken Dupuy presented Part One on the life of Père Antoine Jacques Désiré Mégret entitled "Mégret in France." Mégret was born in Abbeville, France, on May 27, 1797, and became a priest on September 22, 1822. After the so-called July Revolution in France, Mégret and other bright young priests joined up with a radical priest, Fêlicité-Robert de la Mennais, and began to publish a newspaper called *L'Avenir* (The Future). The French government had seized the lands of the church after the 1789 revolution, and had in large measure taken control of the church. Lamennais thought the church should be governed only by the Pope. His newspaper advocated separation of church and state, freedom of education, and freedom of the press. The French bishops, whose salaries were paid by the French government, were satisfied with the status quo, and regarded Lamennais as a troublemaker. The French government and the anti-Catholic revolutionaries also disliked Lamennais's ideas. These forces brought pressure to bear on the Pope to shut down *L'Avenir*. Lamennais and his followers were sure that the Pope would side with them since they were trying to place the church under his complete control. When the issue was presented to Pope Gregory XVI, he deliberated for nine months before issuing an encyclical condemning the

separation of church and state, freedom of the press, and freedom of education, and shutting down *L'Avenir* permanently. He ordered Lamennais's followers to break off their connection with him. Mégrét did as he was ordered, but must have felt some residual resentment toward the hierarchy of the church, which may explain some of his unusual activity later in Louisiana, as will be detailed in Part Two on July 24, 2007.

Biography of Reverend James A. Herod

February 15, 2007—We are pleased to announce that we have posted our first African-American biography. It is the story of Reverend James A. Herod, the preacher/teacher who has been called the "Father of African-American education in Vermilion Parish." It was written by Ravin St. Julien-Brown. Herod was instrumental in bringing quality education to African-Americans in the days before integration. Abbeville still has a school named after this outstanding educator. Read his biography by [clicking here](#).

Quarterly Meeting of January 23, 2007

January 24, 2007—The first quarterly meeting of 2007 of the Vermilion Historical Society was held on January 23, 2007, at the old library building in Abbeville. The meeting was called to order by President Rene Breaux. After a reading and approval of the minutes, the financial report was given by the treasurer, and was adopted.

A large crowd was in attendance, due to the fact that the Abbeville Meridional had done a story on the upcoming meeting. The board welcomed Rachael Cherry, a Meridional reporter, as a guest at the meeting, and thanked her for the favorable coverage that the newspaper has given to the Society.

Gary read aloud portions of a [newspaper article](#) from the December 24, 2006, issue of the Baton Rouge *Advocate*, written by their genealogy editor, Damon Veach, in which he reviewed the accomplishments of the Vermilion Historical Society and praised it as "perhaps the best in the state." Copies of the article were distributed to the crowd.

The board discussed the next model building in the series. Various suggestions

were made, including adding the Mount Carmel Covent to the list of possibilities. The board decided to make another attempt at the Vermilion Parish courthouse. The first attempt was unsatisfactory because of the impossibility of making a mold to handle the building and the large columns on the porch in such a way that the finished model could be removed from the mold. The representative of the company that makes the models for us has now indicated that perhaps the courthouse could be done in two pieces, or perhaps by doing the columns separately.

Lloyd Doré III reported to the board that an effort is underway to have a historic marker placed at the Frank's Theater, now vacant, which was the site of the 1948 world premier of the highly acclaimed documentary *Louisiana Story*. Four sponsors are needed, and three have already been found: the city of Abbeville, Elmore Morgan, Jr. (son of the photographer associated with the documentary), and Lloyd Doré III. Upon motion duly made, seconded, and adopted, the Vermilion Historical Society agreed to become the fourth sponsor.

After the business portion of the meeting, Gary Theall and Ken Dupuy narrated a PowerPoint® presentation of the history of the Eli Wise home. This home, completed in 1893, was built at the same time as the Solomon Wise building (most recently Black's Oyster Restaurant). Just before the home was completed, Solomon Wise gave it to his son, Eli Wise, as a pre-wedding gift. Eli was about to marry Olivia Marks of New Orleans, whose father, Ferdinand Marks, owned a large home on the corner of St. Charles Avenue and Louisiana Avenue. Solomon modeled the Abbeville home after the Marks home in New Orleans so that the bride would feel more comfortable moving from the big city to the small town. The New Orleans home is now incorporated into the Bultman Funeral Home. Details of Eli and Olivia's elaborate wedding were presented, as well as the reception of the bride and groom in Abbeville after the honeymoon. Details of the lives of Eli and Olivia, as well as of the subsequent owners, Drs. Marion Young, Sr. and Jr., were presented. Pictures of the owners and of the homes in Abbeville and in New Orleans were also presented.

The Wilmer Geoffroy collection

January 1, 2007—If you like old photographs, check out the [Wilmer Geoffroy collection](#) that has just been added to the website. Wilmer Geoffroy was for many years the photographer for the Vermilion Parish School Board. After his death, his sister Marianne Geoffroy Thibodeaux contributed to the Vermilion

Historical Society some of the photographs that Wilmer had accumulated during his lifetime. Included are pictures of the Veranda Hotel, the Audrey Hotel, the Abbeville power plant, the Sol Wise building, the L g  Hotel, the rice mill, opening day of the bridge in 1938, the old courthouse, the convent, churches, some politicians, a doctor, a dentist, and a little bit of history to go along with each photograph.

High praise for the Vermilion Historical Society

January 1, 2007—The Sunday, December 24, 2006 issue of The Advocate (Baton Rouge) contained an article heaping high praise on our Society. The article was written by Damon Veach, genealogy columnist. He had browsed this website and our history books, which caused him to title his article, "Vermilion Historical Society maintains high standard for its publications." In his article he describes the Society, the history books, and the many features of the website. Concerning the books, he recommends that "[t]hese ... excellent publications ... need to be in all major genealogical collections," and tells readers how they can order them. He concludes with these words about the Society: "Their efforts place them in the enviable position of being *perhaps the best in the state*. Their work seems effortless, yet so important to future generations and to the preservation of Louisiana history in general. They are to be congratulated in their efforts." You can [read the entire article](#) in PDF format if you have Adobe Acrobat Reader installed.

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