



Bradford-O'Keefe Funeral Homes
The story of a family business and its remarkable community

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*In memory of our mother, Annette, and all those who
have gone ahead of us, in honor of our father, Jerry,
and in joyful solidarity with the entire O'Keefe clan.*

To our reader:

An Old Celtic Blessing

May there always be work for your hands to do.
May your purse always hold a coin or two.
May the sun always shine on your windowpane.
May a rainbow be certain to follow each rain.
May the hand of a friend always be near you.
May God fill your heart with gladness to cheer you.

Preface

What began 150 years ago as a sideline to an Irish immigrant's livery trade in Civil War-era Ocean Springs, continues today as one of the Mississippi Coast's oldest, most respected and civic-minded businesses.

Bradford-O'Keefe Funeral Homes proudly celebrates its Sesquicentennial in 2015, having originated in 1865 within Edward "Ned" O'Keefe's livery business on Porter Avenue, Ocean Springs, MS, in the waning days of the Civil War. The venerable O'Keefe 'brand' has not only endured much longer than most businesses, it has become known for excellent service and community leadership well outside the limited focus of its core function.

For half the Coast's settled existence, the O'Keefe family has been a vital, contributing member.

For the past century-and-a-half, the O'Keefe family has assisted its neighbors with the important duty of burying and honoring their deceased. Death is a challenging time for all impacted, but one made less oppressive and more profound by the professional, dignified services of a respectful funeral home.

And for more than a century and a half, the O'Keefe family has invested itself in the Coast community, professionally and personally. O'Keefes have served as tradesmen and entrepreneurs, as mayors and state legislators, teachers and lawyers; as board members and arts patrons; as foundation builders, benefactors and mentors.

In celebration of its 150th anniversary serving the Coast, Bradford-O'Keefe commissioned this book to document not only the rich history of its business and the O'Keefe family, but also to celebrate this unique coastal community. The O'Keefe story would be far diminished without the rich gumbo of cultures that have brought life, growth and success to the Mississippi Coast and sustained it for more than 300 years.

This book is a snapshot of an enduring family business and the culturally diverse community to which it remains committed. It celebrates Gulf Coast people and culture, as well as the O'Keefe story.

"We consider ourselves fortunate to live in such a beautiful area with so many wonderful people," explained Jeffrey O'Keefe, the President of Bradford-O'Keefe and the fifth of six generations to

operate the business. “We certainly could not have lasted this long and remained successful without the support of the people of the Coast. As our way of showing our appreciation, we remain committed to being involved in all matters important to them. We are as proud of our community as we are indebted to it.”

Acknowledgements

This work is based on a comprehensive manuscript prepared for the family by F. Cliff Kirkland. In preparing his work, Mr. Kirkland consulted with and reviewed the works of many of the Coast’s legendary historians. Special appreciation goes to Charles L. Sullivan, Ray L. Bellande, Edmond Boudreaux, Murella Hebert Powell, Val Husley and Kat Bergeron. Their research, and that of others, provided the historical background for this remembrance.

We also want to thank Mr. Bellande for his careful review of the draft. His depth of knowledge of the history of the Mississippi Gulf Coast protected us from many errors, as we added our own story to the tapestry woven by Mr. Kirkland. Any errors that remain are our own.

Newspaper articles from New Orleans, Biloxi and Ocean Springs helped confirm times and places, as did numerous family documents

and photographs. A number of historical postcards add color and period context.

The majority of the contemporary photographs were taken by Michael Ramsey, whose work is beautiful. Maureen Ward and Chris and Susan Snyder added other photos.

Of course, special thanks go to the people of the Mississippi Coast, whose indomitable spirit is readily apparent to all who live and visit here. The people and the Coastal environment have inspired creativity and success for hundreds of years. The O’Keefes, though descended from an Irish immigrant in the mid-19th century, proudly count themselves as products of the Mississippi Coast.

*~ Jeffrey H. O’Keefe, with
Maureen O’Keefe Ward, Susan O’Keefe Snyder, Justin B.
O’Keefe and Cecilia O’Keefe Neustrom*

I would like to thank my sister Maureen for her dedication in helping to develop this project on a mere request for assistance. She epitomizes the core spirit of the O’Keefe Clan to serve for the greater good of one and all . . . but most importantly . . . to care for those you love.

~ Jeffrey H. O’Keefe



Chapter 1:
The Early Years

“When words are inadequate,
have a ritual.”

~ *Anonymous*

“I did not attend his funeral,
but I sent a nice letter saying I approved of it.”

~ *Mark Twain*

Solemnity, dignity and grace are the hallmarks of the funeral ceremony in the United States, but humor and celebration are often just as evident in the modern rituals of waking and burying our loved ones, from common laborer to the most accomplished professional. (Anyone who has ever been to an ‘Irish wake’ is aware of the close connection between joy and grief, humor and despair.)

For the past 150 years, the O’Keefe family has deftly guided an overwhelming amount of the private and public commemorations of our deceased, overseeing solemn and lighthearted rituals alike while earning an enduring reputation for service.

And it all began with Ned, who was willing to deploy his livery teams for funerals, as well as all the other transportation needs of the community.



Edward 'Ned' O'Keefe was born in Ireland in "Prary County" (probably Tipperary) in approximately 1815. In all likelihood, he lived a relatively uneventful life until the Great Potato Famine of the mid-19th century, which compelled many Irishmen to immigrate to the United States for any faint promise of opportunity.

Among that wave of immigrants, arriving in the 1840s or early 1850s, were middle-aged Ned and his sister Catherine Jane.

They apparently first settled in New Orleans, but by 1853 Catherine Jane had married a mariner from Southern Mississippi, James Valentine Lee of Woolmarket.

Ned also moved to the Mississippi Coast, finding it a congenial, bountiful and promising location. He settled in what is now Ocean Springs — then a sleepy little unincorporated village known as Lynchburg Springs in honor of a local man who had discovered some of the area's medicinal springs.





By 1859, Ned had accumulated enough capital to buy property and marry Mary Tracey, another Irish immigrant 17 years his junior.

Ned and Mary settled on a lot at the corner of Porter and Rayburn Avenues in what had become by then 'Ocean Springs' and started their family.

The 1860 federal census lists Ned as a laborer who, with his wife Mary, had a new son "J. Keith" -- young Jeremiah (b. 1860), and \$500 in the form of his real estate.

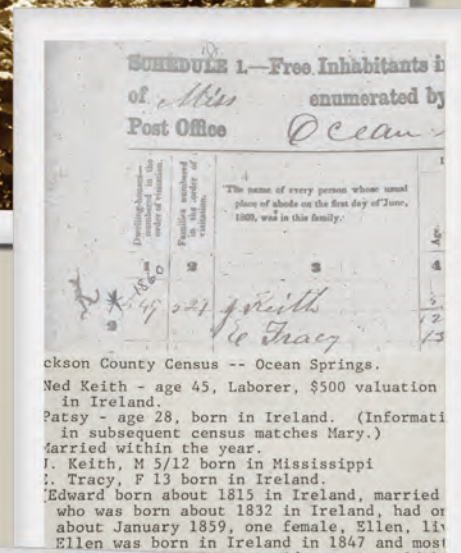
A daughter, Mary Helen, arrived three years later.

Until the Civil War, Ned continued work as a laborer. According to family history, he produced charcoal at one of the large kilns that dotted the forested countryside.

As did many Irish immigrants in the South, when war arrived Ned enlisted with the Confederate Army, joining the Live Oak Rifles of Company A, 3rd Mississippi Infantry in September 1861.



Portion of original O'Keefe Boarding House, later moved from Porter to Government Street.



A typical charcoal mound from the 1800s.



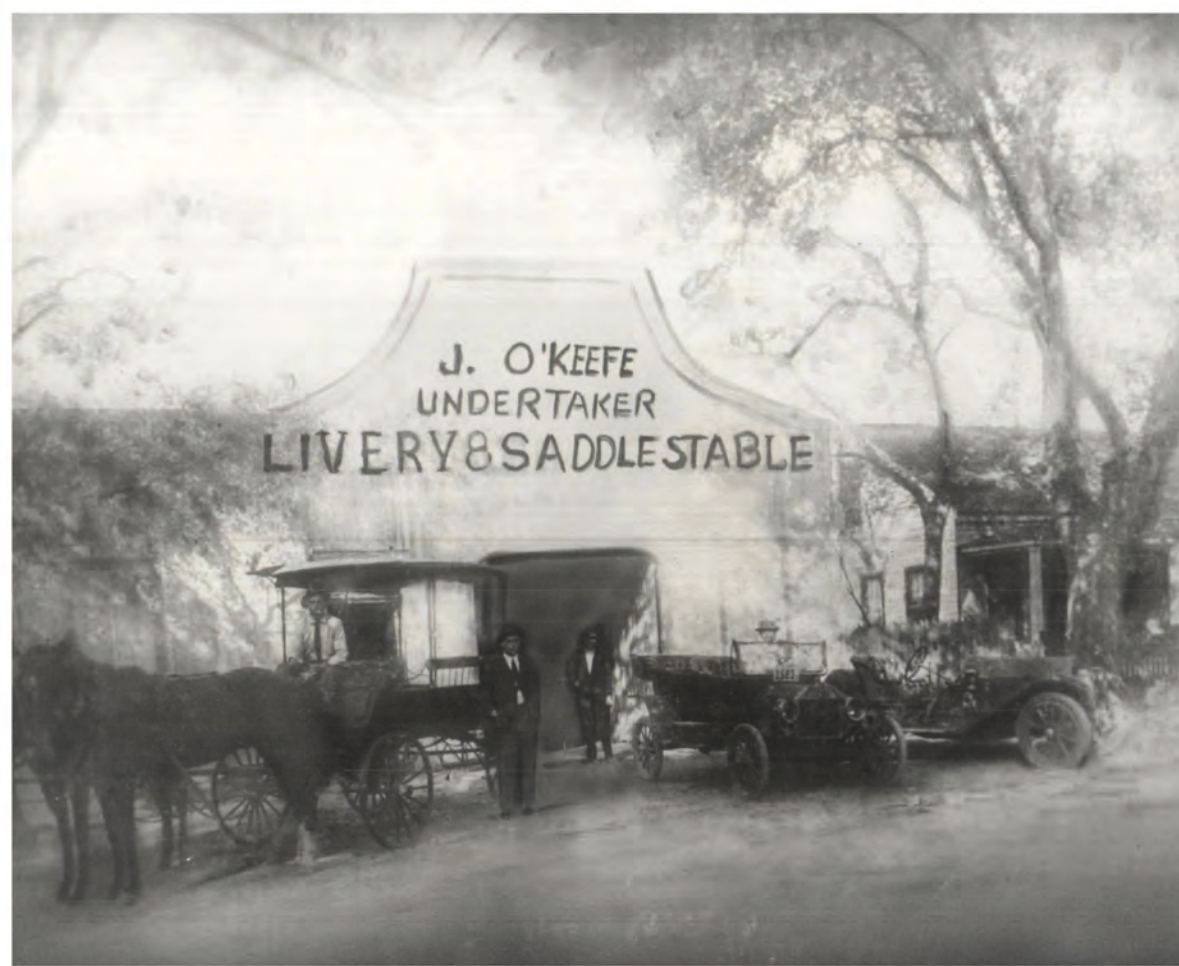
Ned saw limited action during the war, returning home once the fighting ended.

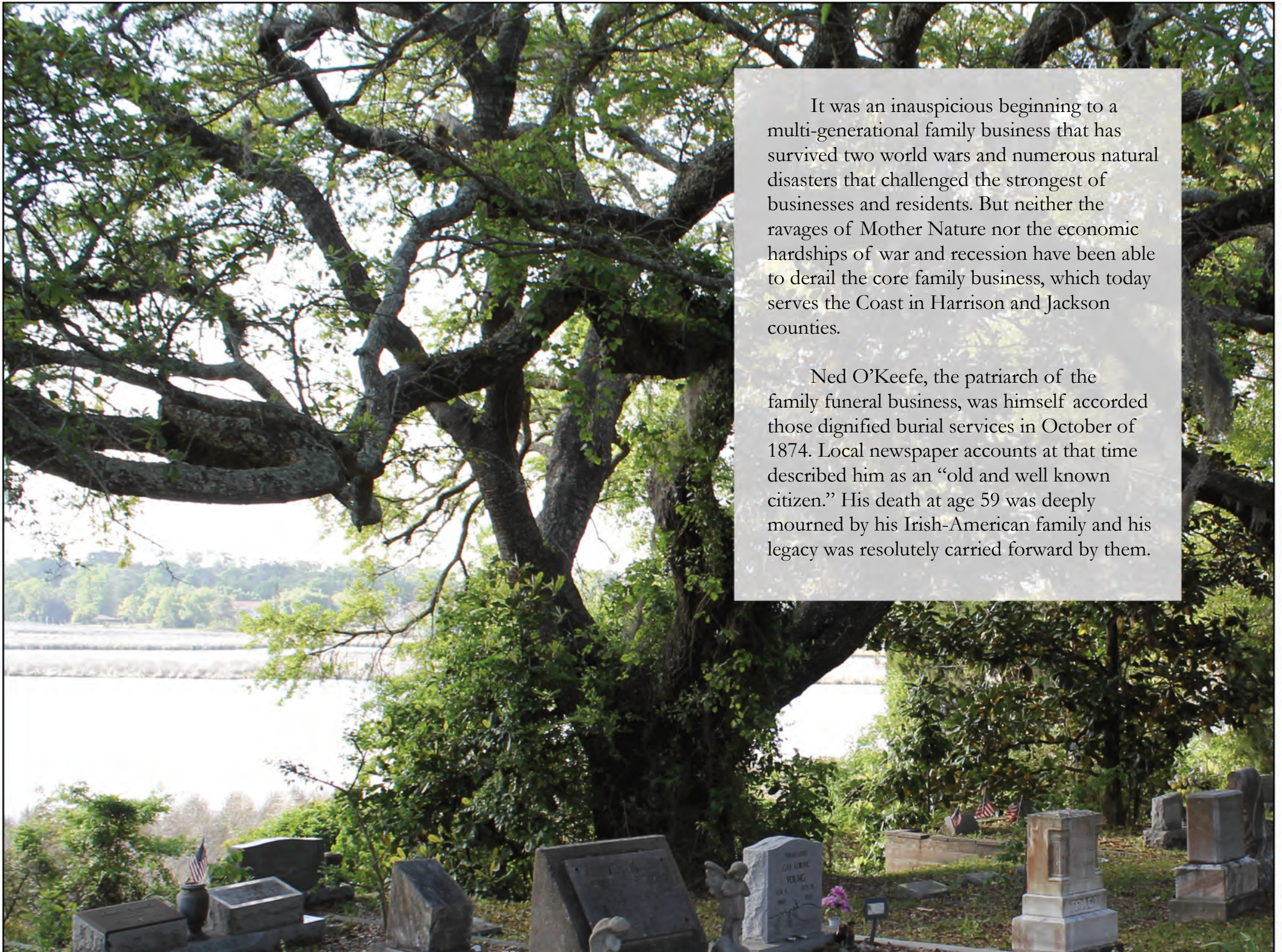
Now in his 50s, he became a teamster and opened a livery business to provide for his young family.

Before long, Ned was able to buy more property, this time on the corner of Porter and Jackson Avenues. Around 1870, he and son Jeremiah planted a row of oak trees along Porter, trees that survive to this day.

Located on this new lot, the O'Keefe Livery Service offered transportation to locals and the growing number of visitors who arrived on the Mississippi Coast by steamboat.

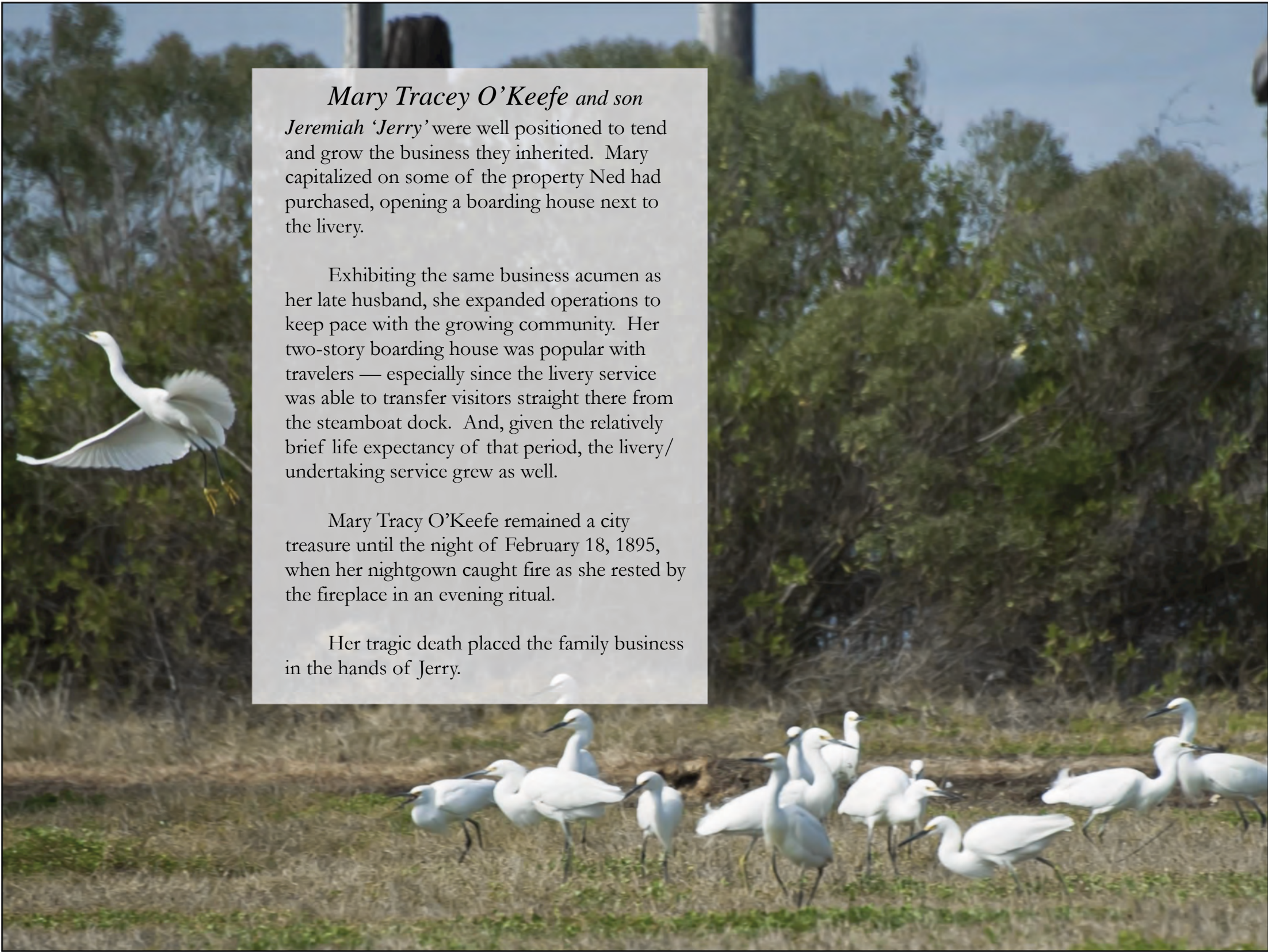
Out of this livery business grew the family funeral service business. Ned was occasionally asked to provide transport for caskets to local cemeteries. Recognizing the need, Ned O'Keefe began offering undertaking services.





It was an inauspicious beginning to a multi-generational family business that has survived two world wars and numerous natural disasters that challenged the strongest of businesses and residents. But neither the ravages of Mother Nature nor the economic hardships of war and recession have been able to derail the core family business, which today serves the Coast in Harrison and Jackson counties.

Ned O'Keefe, the patriarch of the family funeral business, was himself accorded those dignified burial services in October of 1874. Local newspaper accounts at that time described him as an "old and well known citizen." His death at age 59 was deeply mourned by his Irish-American family and his legacy was resolutely carried forward by them.



Mary Tracey O'Keefe and son

Jeremiah 'Jerry' were well positioned to tend and grow the business they inherited. Mary capitalized on some of the property Ned had purchased, opening a boarding house next to the livery.

Exhibiting the same business acumen as her late husband, she expanded operations to keep pace with the growing community. Her two-story boarding house was popular with travelers — especially since the livery service was able to transfer visitors straight there from the steamboat dock. And, given the relatively brief life expectancy of that period, the livery/undertaking service grew as well.

Mary Tracy O'Keefe remained a city treasure until the night of February 18, 1895, when her nightgown caught fire as she rested by the fireplace in an evening ritual.

Her tragic death placed the family business in the hands of Jerry.



J. O'KEEFE
UNDERTAKER
EST. 1865

Born in Ocean Springs and baptized at Nativity B.V.M. Catholic Church in Biloxi, Jerry was 14 years old when his father died. His younger sister Mary had died in 1878 from yellow fever.

Jerry helped sustain the family businesses after his father's death, and had become a respected city leader by the time of his mother's passing.

He was elected a city alderman in 1892, the year that O'Keefe Funeral Service was officially established from the less formal undertaking business that dated from 1865.

Jerry's election also began a family tradition of government service that continued into the 20th century.

Ned's surname had been denoted various ways ~ Keith, Keiffe and Keefe. But upon taking control of the family businesses, son Jeremiah 'Jerry' let it be known that his last name would forever be *O'Keefe*.



LIVERY
Ocean Springs, Miss.
Glen **J. O'KEEFE, Prop.**
813
**Carriages, Buggies and
Omnibuses for Hire.**
Orders Promptly Attended to.

In 1888, Jerry married Alice Cahill in her hometown of New Orleans. Alice's parents were also Irish immigrants. She and her family had frequently visited the O'Keefe boarding house in Ocean Springs, where she met her future husband.



Together, they ran the burgeoning O'Keefe business after the death of Jerry's mother, and raised children John, Mary, Jeremiah Jr. 'Ben' or 'J. Ben', and Joseph 'Jody'. Their first child, Edward Joseph, lived only 19 months.

Alice focused on ensuring the success of the family boarding house, while Jerry concentrated on the livery/funeral home operations, excitedly adding the city's first "modern" hearse in 1895.



Alice Cahill O'Keefe

J. O'KEEFE
 — LEADING —
Livery, Feed, Sale & Exchange Stables

Orders by mail or telegraph promptly attended to. Teams sent to any part of the Country. Turnouts of all kinds on hand.

General Bus and Transfer

FUNERAL DIRECTOR
 AND DEALER IN
 COFFINS, CASKETS AND UNDERTAKERS' SUPPLIES.
 FINE HEARSE run in connection to any part of the Country.
 Also Dealer in WOOD




DIED.

in Biloxi, Thursday, November 3rd, 1904, at 3 a. m.

HENRY HAHN,

Born in New Orleans, La. August, 1836
 Age 68 years and 2 months. A resident of this City for 57 years.

The Funeral services will be held from his late residence corner Beach and Magnolia streets, Friday, November 4th, at 3 p. m.

Friends and acquaintances invited to attend.

FUNERAL NOTICE

DIED—In Biloxi, Miss., Wednesday, July 5, 1905, at 2:00 o'clock p. m.,

Andrew Jackson Elder,

Aged 80 years, 10 months and 5 days, a native of Alabama, and a resident of Biloxi 18 years.

THE FUNERAL

will take place from the residence, 1020 Lameuse street, at 4 o'clock, Thursday, July 6th, 1905.

Friends and acquaintances of the family are respectfully invited to attend.

HALL OF MAGNOLIA LODGE NO. 120 A. F. AND A. M. Biloxi, Miss., July 5, 1905.

To the Officers and Members:
 You are hereby notified to assemble at the lodge room at 3 o'clock p. m., Thursday, July 6, 1905, to attend the funeral of our deceased brother, A. J. Elder.
 H. J. MEAUT, Sec'y.
 J. C. BRADFORD, W. M.

These are handbills, distributed in the days before regular newspaper publication to notify the public of deaths and funeral arrangements.



Change continued to arrive. In 1909, the family completed a new, more expansive home on the corner of Porter and Jackson, shown above. No longer needed, in 1910 the main portion of the O'Keefe boarding house was sold and moved from Porter to Government Street, Ocean Springs, where it stands today. (See photo on page 4.)



55946

PORTER AVENUE, OCEAN SPRINGS, MISS.

O'Keefe Home

Just five years later, 52-year-old Jerry died from appendicitis, the Biloxi newspaper reported. At the time of their father's death, the sons were youngsters: John was 20, Ben 16, and Jody just 11.

Alice's death followed 10 years later at the age of 56.

Community Mourns Death of Jerry O'Keefe

11-11-1947 P. 5

This community was shocked and grieved Monday morning when the news flew over town that Jerry O'Keefe was dead. Only a day or so previous he had been seen on the streets, in his stable and at the depot, apparently in his usual good health. Very few were aware that he had been ill and the news of his passing was entirely unexpected and came as a terrible blow to his hundreds of friends in the community where he had resided all his life.

The cause of his death was appendicitis. He was taken ill Thursday or Friday and died Monday morning at 2:30 o'clock.

The funeral was held Tuesday morning at 10:30 o'clock in the Catholic church, conducted by Rev. Father Peter de Gruyter. A mass of requiem was offered for the repose of his soul. The choir was under the direction of Professor Hemmersbach. During the services the pastor delivered an able discourse eulogizing the worthy character of the deceased both as a Christian and as a citizen. As a tribute of respect to the departed citizen every business house closed from 10 to 1:00 o'clock in order that all might attend the funeral. The public school was dismissed for the day and the pupils attended the services at the church in a body. The funeral was beyond a doubt one of the most largely attended in the history of the town.

The interment was in Evergreen cemetery beside the bodies of his parents, who died here many years ago.

That a good name is better than great riches was shown in the many choice floral offerings that covered his grave.



John, Ben, Mary & Jody O'Keefe



The third generation of O'Keefes capitalized on their well-seasoned traditions by continuing to build the family business, as well as branching out into other directions.

John Aloysius worked as a sugar chemist on plantations in Cuba, Haiti and elsewhere between college and military service in World War I. He later followed his father's political trailblazing and became Mayor of Biloxi in 1935. His election was a contentious affair with an ornery incumbent who initially refused to yield the office. A forcible takeover by Mayor-elect O'Keefe and supporters brought national attention. John later resigned to accept the post of Adjutant General of the Mississippi National Guard.



Miss O'Keefe Again Will Head School At Ocean Springs

Miss Mary C. O'Keefe was recently re-elected by the Ocean Springs School board to the position of superintendent, and will be at the head of the public schools from 1940 to 1942. Miss O'Keefe, who received her B. A. degree from Newcomb College and has done graduate work at Tulane, Columbia University, the Univer-



MISS MARY O'KEEFE

sity of Chicago, and abroad, has been superintendent of the Ocean Springs School system since 1929. During that time the schools have progressed splendidly, the enrollment has greatly increased, new school districts have been added, and the elementary school has progressed from Class B to Class A. The high school is fully accredited.

Miss O'Keefe has recently been elected to membership in Delta Kappa Gamma, national honor fraternity for outstanding educators.



Mary Cahill made headlines of her own as the first female school superintendent in the state, overseeing Ocean Springs public schools for 14 years. Today, her contributions to the city are memorialized in the Mary C. O'Keefe Cultural Center of Arts and Education in downtown Ocean Springs — a creative use of the school building over which she reigned for years.

Joseph Hyacinth 'Jody' also distinguished himself as a sugar chemist before dying at age 35 after suffering a broken neck in a diving accident in Cuba. His brother John had helped him enter the profession and had the sad duty of accompanying his body home from Cuba.



Ben, born Jeremiah Joseph Jr., worked with his brother John in the early 1900s as an automobile agent for the Ford Motor Company.

Ben married Teresa 'Tess' Slattery in 1921. He had met her in Shreveport, Louisiana, while visiting his sister Mary one summer. Mary, who was lodging with the Slatteries while teaching in a local Catholic school, advised lovely Tess that she needn't pay any attention to Ben,



J. Ben and Teresa 'Tess' O'Keefe

convinced that he should marry one of Mary's friends from Ocean Springs. Ben and Tess thought otherwise, married, and had four children: Alice Mary, Jeremiah Joseph III 'Jerry', John Bernard, and Joseph Benjamin 'Ben'.

By the time he married, Ben had returned to the family's core business and in short order introduced automobiles to the livery's line of vehicles.

Pictures From The Past

J. O'KEEFE is recognized as one of the best-equipped livery firms on the Gulf coast, the history of the business dating back to 1851, and has been handled by members of the O'Keefe family for three generations. This firm, now composed of young men, is conducting the business on strictly up-to-date lines, and was the first livery firm to introduce automobile livery service at Ocean Springs, besides being the first purchaser of a Ford car. The firm has the local agency for the Ford automobiles. The O'Keefe properties have an entire' frontage of half a block, and extend back one-



THE O'KEEFE FAMILY MANSION

half of a block. Their home, which is one of the handsomest in this section, and which is reproduced on this page, as can be seen, is of the Colonial style. In connection with the business are first-class rigs, automobiles and a splendid equipment for the handling of the undertaking business. An extensive drayage business has also been built up. O'Keefe can be reached by 'phoning the stable 46-2, or the residence 46-3.

John A. O’Keeffe told the story of the livery’s first car purchase — reportedly the first automobile in Ocean Springs. At his father’s direction, John had taken the train to New Orleans, picked up the car (a second-hand Model T) and driven it straight back to Ocean Springs, arriving near sundown.

Soon a fellow arrived at the livery, desperate to go to Vancleave that evening. John and Ben agreed to drive him there in their ‘new’ car.

All was well, until they realized that there were no headlights on the car to illuminate the pitch-black dirt road. But, with typical ‘Irish engineering’, one of them hopped onto the front bumper, torch in hand, to light the road, while the other navigated all the way to Vancleave. They swapped driving and lighting chores on the way back home and earned \$4.00 for their adventure. A satisfying engagement, indeed.





LOOKING DOWN PORTER AVENUE

The oaks in Ocean Springs are among the most beautiful in the country, and furnish lovely vistas in every direction.

This picture shows the O'Keefe Stables and the handsome O'Keefe house. To the old residents of Ocean Springs, the name O'Keefe is one of the traditions of the place. For over half a century the stables have been in operation. As the years passed, improvements came, and now luxurious limosines are taking the place of the original teams.

There are fifty-eight automobiles in Ocean Springs, among which the O'Keefe machines are the finest.





In 1923, Ben coordinated the move of the family funeral service to Biloxi, acquiring property on Howard Avenue immediately across the street from Nativity B.V.M. Church.





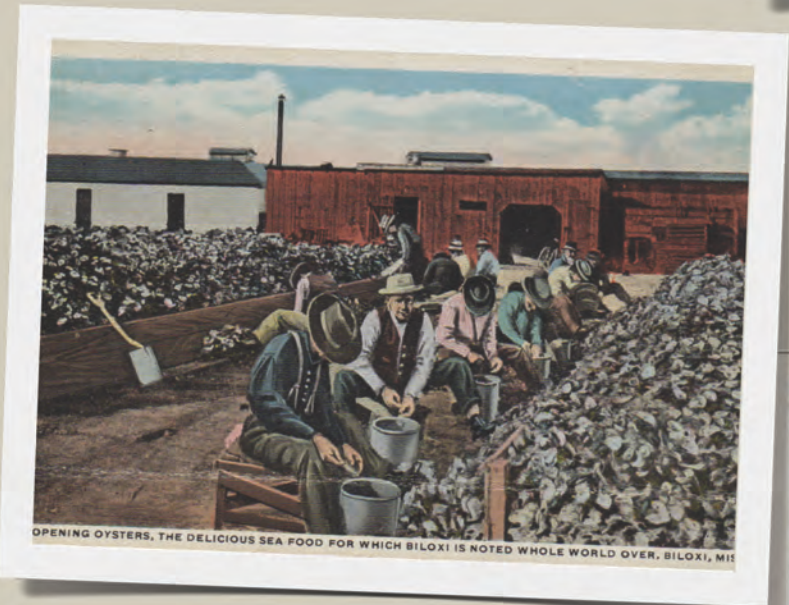
WATER FRONT, BILOXI, MISS.



The Beautiful Back Bay of Biloxi



CHURCH OF THE REDEEMERS, BILOXI, MISS.



OPENING OYSTERS, THE DELICIOUS SEA FOOD FOR WHICH BILOXI IS NOTED WHOLE WORLD OVER, BILOXI, MISS.

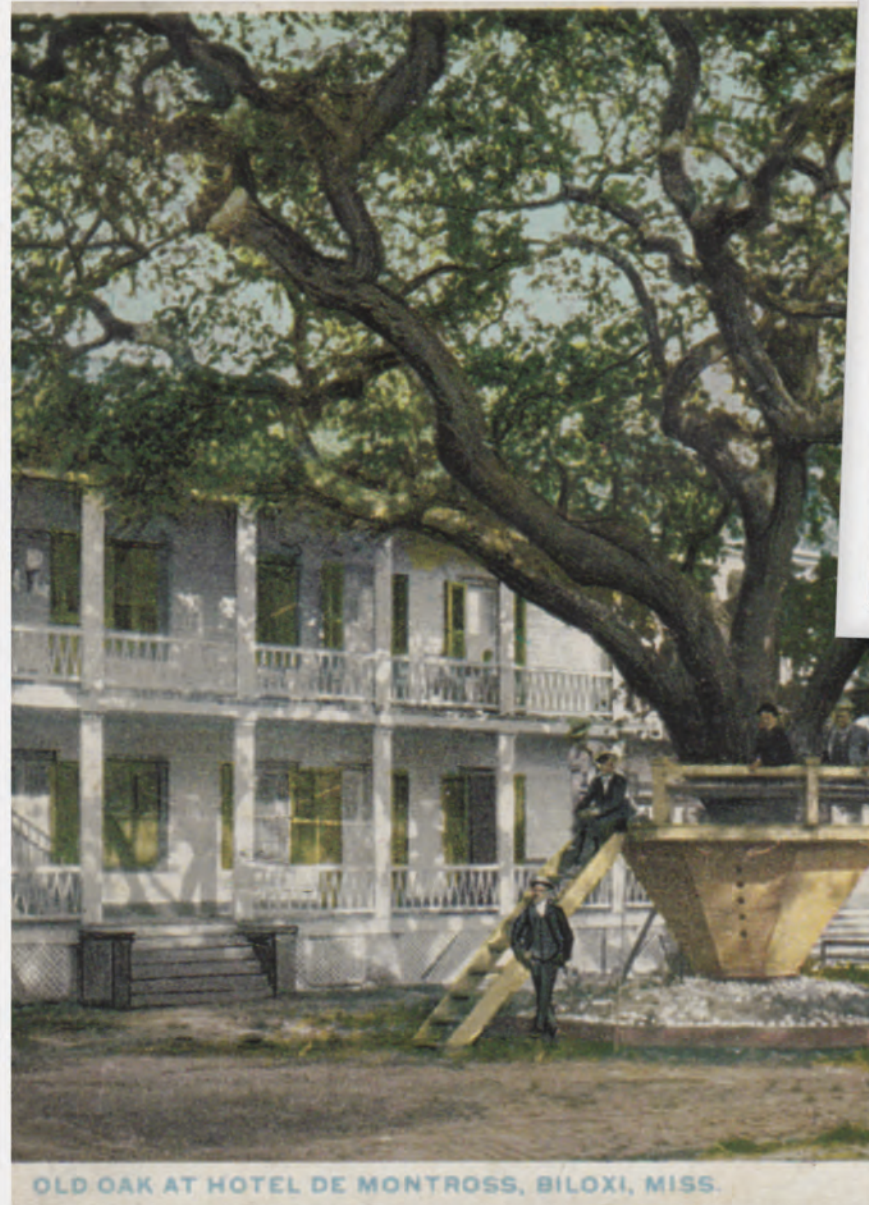


BILOXI, MISS. BEBACHI AVENUE OAKS. Dear Sister, I haven't heard from you for some time and I hope you are well. I am well and home we are having a good time. Love from sister Della



VERANDA — THE BUENA VISTA HOTEL — BILOXI, MISS.

100926



OLD OAK AT HOTEL DE MONTROSS, BILOXI, MISS.

BILOXI LIVE OAK. BILOXI, MISS.



BILOXI NEWS CO.

THE SHELL ROAD, BILOXI, MISS. in 1908.



25. COPYRIGHT 1901, BY DETROIT PHOTOGRAPHIC CO.

Mrs. N. H. Smith
 Clanton, Ala.

*Am now in Ala
 and like my new
 home fine. How are
 all. You are very well.
 Baby is beginning to talk
 and reboles of her.*



Ben was the first O'Keefe to earn a degree in mortuary science, and added burial insurance to the funeral business. What once was a sideline to a livery service was now a substantial business that Ben built into a complete funeral service, including embalming and preparation for burial.

*Jerry, Alice
& Johnny*



*Johnny, Jerry, Alice,
Mama Tess, Daddy Ben & Ben*

*Alice, Jerry & Ben,
with Mama Tess*



Johnny

Ben's vision for modernizing and diversifying the funeral business with an insurance component resulted in even greater progress. But in 1953, he suffered a stroke and died the following year at age 60.

As was typical with the family, after Ben became incapacitated and died, his children picked up the ball and ran, pursuing the businesses and expanding into other professions.

Tess passed away in 1995 at age 100. She loved to be surrounded by her family, requesting for decades that we come to her home every Sunday for fried chicken, followed by her delicious pound cake.

She went to daily Mass for years and delighted in playing bridge and collecting coins and Hummel figurines. She was an intrepid world traveler, even to the point of riding a camel in Egypt in her 60s or 70s.



J. BEN O'KEEFE, Married Miss Theresa Slattery 1921; children are Alice Mary, Jerry J., John Bernard and J. Ben O'Keefe. He is a member of Knights of Columbus, Elks, Maccabees, W.O.W., West End Fire Company and Gulf Coast Fish and Game Association.

owner and manager of O'Keefe Funeral Service, secretary-treasurer of O'Keefe Burial Association, Inc. Residence, Ocean Springs. Born November 27, 1894, Ocean Springs. Graduate of Cincinnati College of Embalming. Licensed for embalming in Mississippi and Louisiana. Established business in Biloxi in 1928; in business in Ocean Springs and Biloxi 14 years.



Eldest son *Jerry* assumed control of the funeral and insurance businesses, marking the start of a new era for O'Keefe funeral homes.



Alice and her husband Leo Sebastian settled in Shreveport, Louisiana, and raised children Celia, Kathy, Johnny, Irene, Tess, Bob, Leo, Steve, Beth and Jeri. After her youngest children started school, Alice trained in nursing and worked as a nurse for more than twenty years.

After serving in the military, *John* went on to become an orthopedic surgeon and practiced in Biloxi, raising a family of four with his wife, Sue Biddy. Their children include Dennis, Colleen, Danny and David.

Ben, a talented artist and draftsman, worked at Ingalls Shipbuilding in Pascagoula for many years. He and wife Jenny Boone raised two children, Ben Jr. and Laurie.



Jerry & Alice



*Johnny, Mama Tess
& Ben*



Jerry, Alice, Ben, John & Mama Tess



Chapter 2: Our Diverse Peoples



As the O’Keefe family grew and prospered, the larger community was also expanding, diversifying, and prospering. Undoubtedly our greatest treasures are our people, their rich cultures, and the vibrant communities and enterprises they have built.

Coastians have always distinguished themselves from the rest of Mississippi. From descendants of its first settlers to European, African and Slavic settlers of the earlier eras, to the Asian and Latin immigrants of recent times, the Coast has a history of diversity that has always enriched its culture.

Eight different flags have flown over the Mississippi Gulf Coast since the first European settlement was established, including the banners of France, Spain, Great Britain, the Republic of West Florida, the United States, the Confederate States and Mississippi (pre- and post-Civil War).

Each of those sovereigns provided the growing Biloxi area with a solid splash of their respective vitalities and refinements, establishing in the process a diverse and expansive culture that has grown richer over the last three centuries. The enduring message is that the Mississippi Coast has been a land of opportunity that welcomes and assimilates all.

The French and the Native Peoples. In February of 1699, French Canadian explorer Pierre LeMoyne, Sieur d'Iberville, first set foot on the Biloxi peninsula during an expedition to locate the mouth of the Mississippi River. He ceremoniously flagged the land for France, although Spanish explorers passing through the area had laid claims as early as the mid-1500s.

Less than two months after arriving, Iberville and his men constructed a fort, Fort Maurepas, just off the beach at present day Ocean Springs. The explorers called the encompassing area "Biloxi", in honor of the local Native Americans, part of the Sioux tribe that, according to historical accounts, had migrated south years earlier.

Although little is known of the history of the Biloxi peoples on the Gulf Coast, it is clear they were agrarians who raised corn and other vegetables, and feasted on the abundant buffalo, bear and deer from surrounding woods, and seafood from nearby waters. By the time the French settled, the tribe had been decimated by tribal warfare and epidemics. They gradually migrated into Texas and Louisiana, where they eventually merged with the Tunica tribe from central Mississippi. Descendants of the merged tribes still reside in Louisiana. Hopefully this relocation proved consistent with one of the Biloxi's traditional phrases, which translates as "God is everywhere."

The French influence on the Mississippi Gulf Coast continues today in celebrations of its history, its food and its festivals. Since establishment of that first French settlement, the Biloxi area has been married to French culture.

From reenactments of Iberville's 1699 landing to the zany and color of Mardi Gras, the Mississippi Coast honors its ties to France every year. Local bakeries have sold "French bread" and petit fours for centuries; local restaurants protect their "roux" recipes for gumbo; and local streets have names like Caillavet, Lameuse and Reynoir.

The Fleur-de-Lis Society in Biloxi has been around for four decades, celebrating and honoring the city's French heritage. French family names abound in the community, for example, Barq, Bellande, Beaugez, Boudreaux, Bourgeois, Breaux, Dedeaux, Desporte, Doucet, Favret, Farve, Fayard, Fountain, Gautier, Gollott, Hebert, Ladner/Ladnier, Moran/Morin, Necaie, Richard[s], Saucier, and Seymour.





African Americans. Most historical narratives agree that African-Americans were brought to the Mississippi Coast in the 1720s by their French masters aboard slave ships from the Caribbean region and West Africa. Many of these early slaves worked as household servants, while others were made to farm or harvest lumber.

There were a few free Black men and women in the area, having earned release from bondage by various means. But Blacks were treated mostly as chattel until after the Civil War. Upon gaining their freedom, many accepted offers to continue working as household help for the wealthy and others chose to pursue employment opportunities in local industry.

Interestingly, at least some slaves liberated from plantations relocated to Biloxi after the Civil War, building homes and raising their families in a more tolerant environment. Pleasant Reed was such a man, who made his livelihood as a carpenter and handyman. Until it was destroyed by Hurricane Katrina, his modest but well-made home, which had remained in his family until the mid-twentieth century, survived as testament to his improved circumstances.

However, despite the Emancipation Proclamation, Blacks on the Coast were not exempt from the harsh reality of treatment as second class citizens. At worst, some were victimized and terrorized by a racist society that was not exclusive to Mississippi.

Many Blacks in the late 19th century and early 20th successfully created businesses on the Coast. Desegregation of public schools on the Coast occurred in the late 1960s under federal pressure.

As Coast Blacks began to vigorously pursue fundamental rights, tensions rose and occasionally spilled over into acts of violence caused by angry whites, most notably in the “Biloxi Wade-ins” between 1959 and 1963. The wade-ins were led by Biloxi physician Gilbert Mason, a native of Jackson, Mississippi, a well-respected physician and community leader. Black leaders continued to push for change in a peaceful manner, usually through the courts. The racial divide, which grew more overt and violent across the state until the 1970s, was more muted along the Coast. Blacks began opening more businesses and gaining jobs in every industry across the Coast. And desegregation slowly helped blur the color line.

Today, African-American families no longer live in designated “Black” sections of Coast cities. Coast Blacks are school valedictorians, business leaders, entrepreneurs, doctors, lawyers, preachers, politicians and educators. They are as important to community growth and the area’s future as any other ethnicity found here.

Surnames of Black families on the Coast include Adams, Benton, Dickey, Dunn, Flowers, Griswold, Hines, Jackson, Keys, Mason, Mayfield, Nichols, Peyton, Ramsey, Reed, Seymour, Simms, Smith, Stuart, Trotter, Washington, White and Williams.



The English and Spanish. In the 1763 settlement of the French and Indian War, Britain acquired France's holdings east of the Mississippi and Spain's holdings in West Florida, pledging that its new subjects could continue to practice their Roman Catholic faith. The English made inroads on the Coast through this dominance, as well as by migration from colonies, later states, in the Northeast.

The City of Gulfport and Ingalls Shipbuilding are examples of the beneficial English presence. William Hardy, a Mississippi railroad lawyer and lumberman partnered with Joseph T. Jones, an oil tycoon from the Northeast, to link Hattiesburg to the Coast by rail, in order to facilitate shipment of South Mississippi pine to Europe and Latin America. They founded Gulfport on July 28, 1898 and turned to constructing the rail line, organizing the lumber business, and dredging a channel from Ship Island Pass to Gulfport.

With similar gusto, Robert Ingersoll Ingalls, Sr., a transplant from Ohio, built mighty Ingalls Shipbuilding, starting in 1910 with a blacksmith shop.

As for the Spanish, though Spanish explorers first visited Biloxi environs in the 1500s when searching for gold and other natural resources, it wasn't until 1780 that the Gulf Coast became part of Spanish West Florida by means of a victory over the British at Mobile.

As with other ethnic groups working along the Coast, the Spanish focused initially on developing natural resources. In 1881, Lazaro Lopez, a Spaniard who had immigrated to Biloxi by way of Cuba and Texas, joined F. William Elmer, W.K.M. Dukate, William Gorenflo and James Maycock to open the Lopez, Elmer & Company seafood plant in Biloxi and, in varying partnerships, proceeded to build Biloxi into the Seafood Capital of the World. And of course, these businessmen couldn't have done it without the many other immigrants moving to Biloxi in search of a better life.

Additional surnames that harken to the English include Adams, Bolton, Bradford, Clower, Handy, Maycock, Johnson, Jones, and Teesdale/Tisdale. And names of some of our Spanish neighbors include Acevedo, Anglada, Basque, Castanera, Catchot, Cuevas/Quave, Gutierrez, Lopez; Perez; Rodriquez, Sanchez and Santa Cruz.



Hibernia Marching Society of Mississippi



2012 Celebrations
34th Anniversary

The Irish. The story of Ned O'Keefe mirrors the optimism and hard work of the many Irish immigrants who escaped famine by coming to this country. According to the 1860 census, there were a number of other Irish families already living in Ocean Springs when Ned arrived. These and other Irish folk went on to contribute significantly to the Coast.

But perhaps the greatest overall contribution of Ireland to the Mississippi Coast has been that of the hundreds, if not thousands, of Catholic priests and nuns who have served the community in churches, parochial schools, and social work programs for most of the past 125 years or more.

The Coast's sustaining Catholic history is heavily indebted to the Irish priests and nuns who left their homeland and families to minister to Mississippians. Many have now concluded their professional lives and many have returned to Ireland in retirement. However, the spirit of Ireland remains strong across the Coast as a result of their remarkable presence, and is annually celebrated with St. Patrick's Day parades from Biloxi to Bay St. Louis.

An O'Keefe was among those who organized the Coast's first St. Paddy's parade and festival. Unofficial Irish gatherings on St. Patrick's Day had occurred in Biloxi in the late 1960s at Mary Mahoney's Old French House restaurant. But in 1978, Dr. John O'Keefe placed an ad in the local newspaper inviting the Irish and their like-minded brethren to attend an organizational meeting at Mahoney's. Thus was born the Hibernia Marching Society, which established a downtown St. Patrick's Day parade and daylong celebration in and around Mahoney's restaurant.

Several O'Keefes ~ including John ~ have served as Grand Marshal over the years, and the Hibernia Marching Society has grown into one of the Coast's largest cultural organizations.

Among other Coast Irish names are Ames, Blessey, Cavanaugh, Collins, Egan, Farrell, Keating, Mahoney; McDermott, McDonald, McGuire, O'Brien, Shaughnessy, and Sullivan. Our photo of Mary Mahoney's, over which Mary Cvitanovich Mahoney presided for decades, could just as well go on the French or the Slav photo page, but we Irish claim it for our own!



Happy St. Patrick's Day
from the O'Keefe Family

Jerry O'Keefe Sr., Grand Marshal - 1984
Laurie O'Keefe-Delashmit, Colleen - 1988
Jeffrey H. O'Keefe Sr., Grand Marshal - 1995
Danny O'Keefe, Grand Marshal - 2011

The Slavs. The most obvious illustration of successful cultural integration is the Slavic people who initially arrived in the late 19th century to escape looming war.

Nikola Skrmetti is generally credited with convincing Biloxi seafood factory owners that they needed more Croatians. Factory managers were so impressed by his work ethic that they encouraged him to entice family members and other Croatians to Biloxi. As word spread across the Dalmatian Coast about the abundant opportunity, Croatians flooded the central Gulf region from Louisiana to Alabama. And here, in the heart of the area, Biloxi was the prized destination.

In 1913, ten charter members established the Slavic Benevolent Association of St. Nikolai to enhance cultural and social benevolence among the Croatian community. From its eventual base on Myrtle Street in east Biloxi, where the town was first established, the organization positioned itself within the fabric of Biloxi, and became a meeting place and social center for generations of Slavs, as well as business and government leaders across the whole Coast. Members celebrated with annual events highlighting their rich heritage. They reveled in American culture, as well, fielding a competitive baseball team against the best regional semi-pro squads.

And when they initiated an annual golf tournament to provide scholarships to community youth, it grew in short order from a modest two-day event at Gulf Hills to the largest amateur golf tournament in the Southeast, if not the country.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the group rallied to assist colleagues who lost homes, possessions and family members. Just as importantly, club members went out in force to assist their fellow citizens from Biloxi to Bay St. Louis. They also raised funds to build the spectacular Croatian American Cultural Center on Point Cadet, where in 2013 the Association celebrated its 100th anniversary.

Though they arrived as hard working laborers, Croatians quickly climbed to positions in business, medicine, law and government. The Slavic immigrants provided a blueprint for assimilation and achievement that has been successfully copied by many others.

A sample of our local Croatian names includes: Barhonovich, Baricev, Covacevich, Dubaz, Gilich/Gillich, Gruich, Illich, Kovacevich, Kuluz, Marinovich, Mavar, Mladnich, Peranich, Peresich, Pitalo, Rosetti, Sablich, Sekul and, of course, Skrmetti/Skrmetta.



The Germans. With the advent of the railroad to the Coast in the 1870s, people of German extraction began arriving as well.

Coming primarily from Alsace-Lorraine, Bavaria, Baden-Wurttemberg and Schleswig-Holstein, they focused on a wide range of businesses from saloons, to orchards and truck farms which grew and shipped pecans, citrus, grains and other crops, to seamen, shoe and saddle makers, blacksmiths, carpenters and building contractors, bakers, druggists and doctors.

George Ohr, Biloxi's famous potter, was also of German descent. His parents arrived in New Orleans in the 1850s, a pathway into Mississippi shared by many German and other immigrants.

These industrious folks also contributed much to basic civic organization in Ocean Springs and the other places where they settled, helping to form banks, including the Farmers and Merchants State Bank, whose lovely building still stands in downtown Ocean

Springs, telephone companies, and insurance agencies. They served in elected positions and helped to build churches.

Residents of Germanic ancestry today constitute the largest ethnic group in both Biloxi and Ocean Springs — larger than those of French, Spanish, English, Irish or even 'American' ancestries.

In Ocean Springs, they account for some 13.9% of the population, while in Biloxi they are 10.44% (edging out 'Americans' (10.27%), Irish (10.08%), French (9.41%) and English (8.1%).

Names of German families who settled in this area include Arndt, Bechtel, Bellman, Braun, Domning, Eglin, Endt, Gottsche, Illing, Klein, Pabst, Rosambeau, Schrieber, Schmidt, Wentzell, Wetzel and Wieder.



The Italians. Most of the Italian immigrants to the Mississippi Coast began arriving in the late 19th century, many arriving as families via New Orleans from Sicily and Ustica in search of opportunities in truck farming, fruit vending, as well as the fishing and canning industries. Still others came to be merchants, operate restaurants, groceries, liquor stores and tobacco shops.

In the early 20th century, Biloxi's seafood and tourism industries offered even more chances for successful careers. Some Italians became owners of seafood processing factories and others built enduring businesses. William Cruso arrived penniless but soon was buying seafood from coastal fishermen and selling it to restaurants. By the 1960s, the Cruso seafood packing plant run by Cruso's descendants was one of the largest in the South. The Alfonso story is another good example. Arriving in New Orleans as an unschooled orphan, without money and unable to speak English, Decidue Alfonso married Laboria, another

orphan from his hometown in Sicily. They soon migrated to Gulfport and Decidue proceeded to build a fishing business with his sons. The sons in turn became expert sailors, one of them a self-made naval architect, designing sailboats, including the Alfonso Racer, and with his brothers forming the Gulfport Yacht Club. Granddaughter Margaret now serves as Youth Court Judge for Harrison County.

Fiercely proud of their old and new homeland, Coast Italians have created local Italian-American societies and commemorate their heritage with annual events that celebrate their storied culture.

Other Italian names evident in our communities include Bertucci, Canizaro, Canonici, Capuano, Caranna, Corso, Fallo, Giardini, LaRosa, Mattina, Randazzo, Scardino, Taranto, Tedesco, Toricelli and Uchello.



BIRDSEYE VIEW OF SEAFOOD INDUSTRY IN BILOXI, MISS.



BILOXI HUGO'S MISS.



Eastern Mediterraneans. People of Greek, Jewish and Lebanese origins have lived in Biloxi for many generations.

The Greek immigrants became fishermen, seafood workers, and restaurateurs while their progeny excelled in law and engineering. Though not as large a community as others, local Greeks have regularly celebrated their heritage with Greek Night, cherishing Greek food and dancing. Some Coast families of Greek origin are: Eleuterius, Fotinas, Kouvarakis [Stevens], Pandella, Stratakos, and Vlahos.

Early people of Jewish ancestry on the Coast made their livelihoods primarily as traveling peddlers and, upon accrual of enough capital, store owners. Their numbers were few for many years, but in 1853 Jews from New Orleans established a cemetery, Hebrew Rest, in Biloxi, probably to secure burial for Jews who had left New Orleans to escape yellow fever. In the wake of World War II the local community was large enough to establish a formal congregation. Further growth has occurred in the wake of legalized gambling. Succeeding generations of Jews have excelled in accounting, law, medicine, real estate and merchandising. Representative Jewish Coast families include Friedman, Grishman, Heidenheim, Hirsch, Levine, Levy, Moritz, Piltz, Rosenblum, Rubenstein, Silver, and Weinberger.



**SALOMON HAHN
DIED AT MOBILE.**

—

**Was Well Known Along the
Gulf Coast.**

—

Mobile, Ala., Aug. 14—Solomon L. Hahn, an old and highly esteemed Jewish resident of Mobile, died at his home in this city last evening, after a brief illness. Mr. Hahn had been a resident of Mobile many years, coming to this city in 1862, from Columbus, Miss. The deceased was a native of Germany and for many years was engaged in the cigar and tobacco business in this city. Beside his aged wife, he is survived by three sons, Samuel J., Aaron M., of this city and Moses A. Hahn of New Orleans. The funeral was held this afternoon from the late residence, and was largely attended. The interment was made in the Jewish cemetery.

The deceased was well known and popular at Biloxi where he frequently visited on business.

The Vietnamese. The end of the Vietnam War and the fall of South Vietnam in the mid-1970s caused rapid migration of Southeast Asians to friendlier places. The Gulf South, similar in climate to Vietnam, was a prime destination because it also offered jobs in the seafood industry.

Many Vietnamese immigrants were processed through the port of New Orleans. Some stayed in Louisiana, some moved to Texas, and a large portion of the refugees moved to the Metro Biloxi area and Alabama. Once it became clear that the Mississippi Coast was more accommodating to this population than other Gulf States, the numbers of Vietnamese increased dramatically across Coastal Mississippi. Federal government subsidies helped the Vietnamese transition into the local seafood industry.

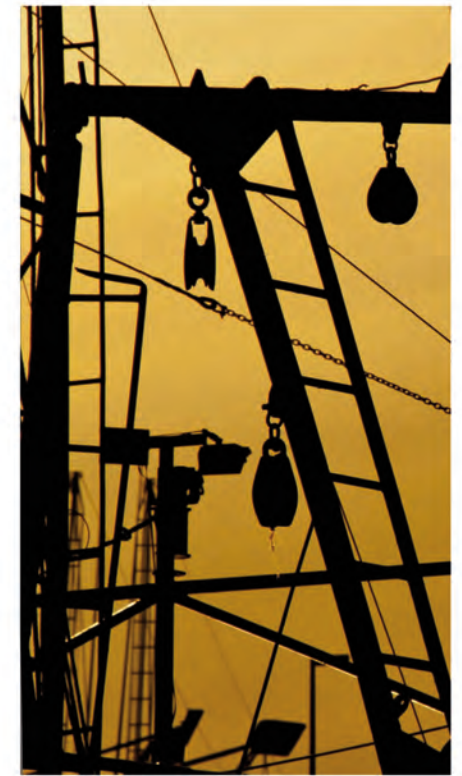
By the 1990s, most of the local shrimp harvesting of Gulf waters was accomplished by Vietnamese boaters and the Vietnamese were well integrated into Coastal life, from education to business. The local Asian population grew from about 2% of the Coast population in 1990 to 5% by 2000.

When Hurricane Katrina overwhelmed the Biloxi 'Point' — the eastern tip of the Biloxi Peninsula, where much of the seafood community lived, many Vietnamese families moved away.

In the last 10 years, some of that population has returned, though the upswing slowed due to the 2010 British Petroleum oil spill, which strained Gulf seafood harvesting for several years.

Today, Vietnamese are widely involved in local industries, especially fishing, food service, and tourism. East Biloxi offers a Vietnamese-language Catholic Church and a Buddhist Temple. Annual Asian holidays are celebrated, and often include large numbers of non-Vietnamese celebrants.

Bui, Dang, Le, Nguyen, Pham, Tran, Truong, and Vo are among the Vietnamese surnames found in our community.



Latin Americans. Whereas Hurricane Katrina caused the loss of some Vietnamese, it attracted a stunning influx of Latin Americans eager to find construction jobs as the Coast began the arduous task of rebuilding. Most of the immigrants came from Mexico and were undocumented workers enjoying a U.S. government mandate that made allowances for anyone coming to help with the massive rebuilding. Others came from Central and South America in search of the same opportunities and allowances.

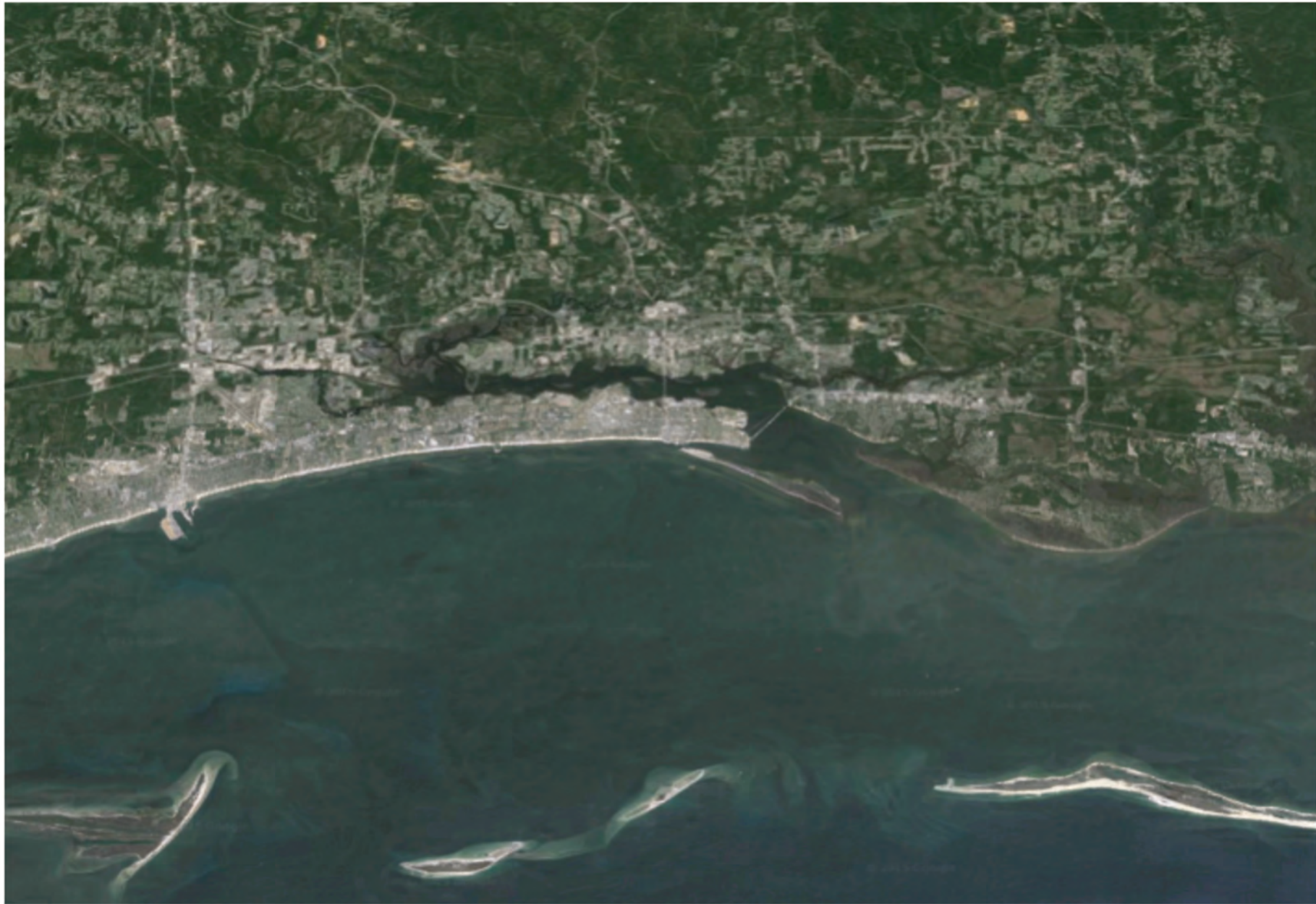
Hard working and used to harsh living conditions, Latino immigrants provided the numbers of workers necessary to accomplish the challenge. And when Katrina recovery finally ebbed, most of them chose to remain on the Mississippi Coast. In fact, Latinos now make up more than 5.4% of Harrison County and 4.9% and 3.4% of Jackson and Hancock Counties, respectively.

Latinos now work in construction, in the casinos, as landscapers, and in service industries generally. We are also beginning to see the

emergence of Latino entrepreneurship, as families begin to offer imported foods, authentic restaurant fare, and other services.

Some local Latino surnames include Arellano, Ascencio, Castro, Flores, Garcia, Garza, Hernandez, Lopez, Mangana, Moctezuma, Morales, Martinez, Ortiz, Perez, Rodriguez, Silva, and Vega.





Chapter 3: Our Beautiful Communities

And where would our people be without our places ~~ the diverse communities into which we have organized ourselves?

Linked by history, geography, and culture, the cities of *Biloxi* and *Ocean Springs* have long pumped lifeblood to the Mississippi Gulf Coast, starting with their friendly competition over bragging rights as the first permanent European settlement on the

Mississippi Coast. More recently, the city of *D'Iberville* has emerged among us and joined the historical fray.

Before we turn to each of these cities, along with *Gulfport* and *Vancleave*, we want to share some charming photos of Ocean Springs' 1939 celebration of Iberville's landing, taken from the scrapbook of Mary C. O'Keefe, who organized that particular commemoration.



*Annette Saxon
center front*

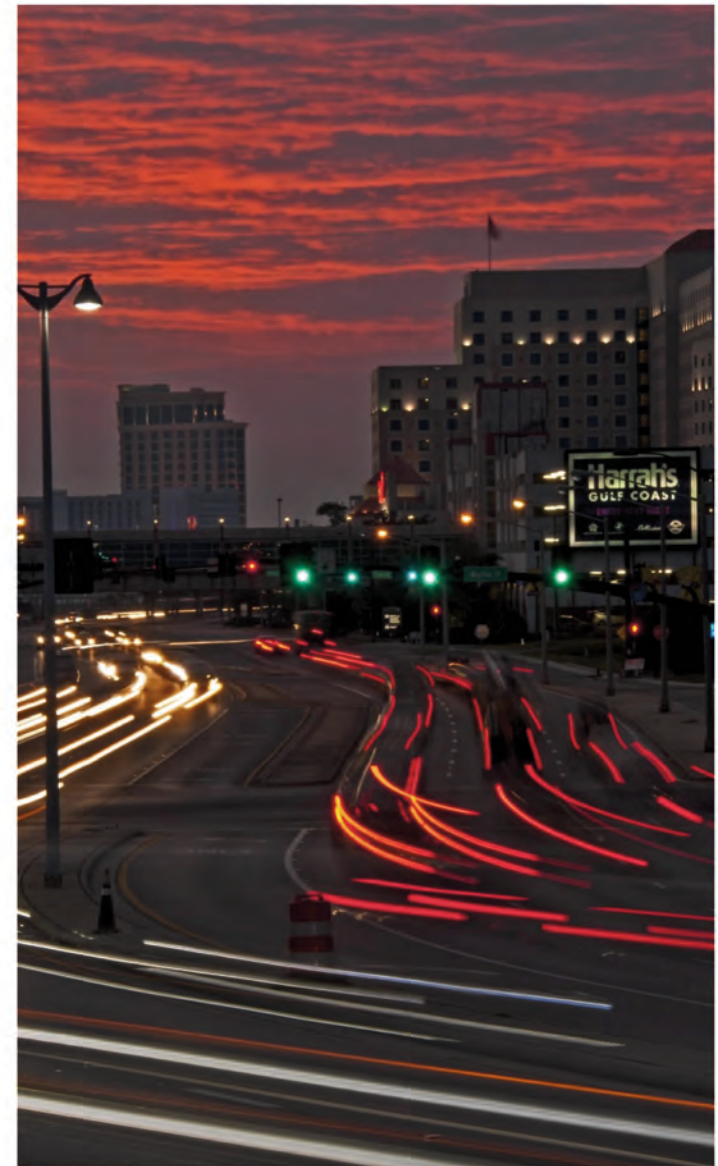
Biloxi. From its earliest days, Biloxians fished the abundant coastal waters to feed their families and exploited other resources that nature provided. Given such bounty and geographical proximity, it was only natural that strong ties, both in trade and recreation, developed between Biloxi and New Orleans. Their corresponding French origins translated to strong Catholic influences and cultural similarities.

Biloxi businessmen visited New Orleans for commerce and even more New Orleanians visited Biloxi for salt water bathing and respite from the big city's heat and its yellow fever scourge. Several beachfront hotels were erected to accommodate the visitors from Louisiana, and an industry was given life. Biloxi has remained a powerful tourism presence ever since.

With the advent of tourism, and the help and ingenuity of immigrants arriving before and after the Civil War, Biloxians realized that fishing was also a promising means of commerce and development. They began supplying the broadened local market and, after advent of the railroad, served markets farther afield. The shrimp and oysters harvested from the Mississippi Sound, Louisiana marshes and the Gulf were packaged inside a rapidly growing number of local plants and shipped across the country and beyond, giving substance to Biloxi's claim as the Seafood Capital of the World at the dawn of the 20th century.

Throughout this time, Biloxi continued its gradual transformation from resource-blessed village to popular tourism center. While the local seafood industry operates on a much smaller scale today, Biloxi tourism is in its heyday. Recognized as the tourism capital of Mississippi, it attracts millions of visitors each year to indulge in its history, its fresh seafood, its fine-grained sand beaches, its splashy resort casinos and its abundant recreational opportunities from water sports to golf.





Ocean Springs. Though similar to Biloxi in many ways — French origin, natural bounty, steamboat correspondence with New Orleans enabling visitors to enjoy waterfront recreation, and eventual presence of the railroad — Ocean Springs developed along its own unique trajectory.

While Biloxi pursued its destiny as a seafood producer and robust tourist magnet, Ocean Springs gently settled into a quiet, contemplative and rehabilitative community. Boarding houses and hotels accommodated those coming for hydrotherapy in naturally occurring mineral springs, or to simply indulge nature in a reassuring environment. Citrus, pecan orchards and wool and timber shipping were substantial industries, in addition to the seafood typical of the Coast generally.

The city's interest in tourism accelerated in the late 1920s when the Gulf Hills resort was built, but it remained significantly more sedate than Biloxi's tourist scene.

Shearwater Pottery was formed by master potter Peter Anderson and his accomplished artist brothers, James McConnell Anderson and Walter Inglis Anderson, a master watercolorist, who has a museum in his honor in Ocean Springs. The family's prodigious creativity heavily influenced the community's embrace of an identity as an artist colony. And the Andersons have inspired generations of other local artists, whose work has redefined Ocean Springs as a leading arts community.

Today Ocean Springs enjoys a solid reputation as a quieter, diverse arts and shopping community blessed with a temperate climate and natural beauty. Ocean Springs revels in its architectural charm and relaxed lifestyle. A thriving restaurant, bed and breakfast, and entertainment district has replaced the boarding houses of yesteryear, giving rise to a younger generation of entrepreneurs and artists who are sustaining and redefining the heart of the city's culture.





Gulfport. While Biloxi, Ocean Springs and D'Iberville were battling it out for the title of first town, Gulfport became the business and professional center of the Coast.

Gulfport, founded in 1898, grew out of a different competition ~ the 19th century search for the terminus of a new rail line from Hattiesburg, MS to the Coast. Once that location was fixed and the settlement erected, it grew significantly, ultimately absorbing rival Mississippi City and several other small communities.

The efforts of William Hardy and Joseph Jones on the planned railroad led directly to the creation of the Port of Gulfport in 1902. And on the financial front, Leo W. Seal, Jr. grew Hancock Bank from a humble beginning in 1947 to an institution with 164 locations spanning four states.

Gulfport continues today as a working seaport generating millions of dollars in tax revenue for the State of Mississippi. Adjacent to the port lies Jones Park, a \$35 million post-Katrina development on land donated by the family of Joseph T. Jones. The waterfront park has become a premiere spot for a range of activities from family picnics to festivals and music concerts to food markets.





D'Iberville. From a quiet start north of Biloxi, the community 'across the bay' came on strong after incorporating in early 1988. In the opinion of many, the vibrant area is now the retail center of the Coast. It nonetheless remains rooted in the area's rich history.

D'Iberville's city seal depicts a cross and boulder, reminiscent of its traditions. Emmanuel Sanchez, a Spanish ship carpenter, settled in 'Back Bay' before 1834 and erected a small Catholic chapel on his land with, reportedly, a large wooden cross nearby. Anecdotal history indicated that Iberville had originally landed on the Sanchez site (later sold to the Catholic Church and subsequently the site of the first Sacred Heart Catholic Church). Although not certified by historians, the Daughters of the American Revolution placed a boulder at the site in 1920 to commemorate Iberville's historic landing.

The storied Blessing of the Fleet was launched simultaneously at Back Bay, as well as the front beach channel, as the Catholic priests blessed the fishing fleet passing in procession.



Our neighbor *Vancleave*, located northeast of Ocean Springs near a tributary of the Pascagoula River, has had several incarnations.

Established temporarily in the early 1700s by French colonists, it was permanently developed as “Bluff Creek” in the mid-19th century to facilitate harvesting of the region’s virgin pine forests. Access to the waterway encouraged other commerce, including charcoal making and the production of naval stores, especially turpentine and rosin. Several decades later, it was renamed in honor of Robert A. Van Cleave, one of the community’s early merchants and founders.

As the land was cleared by the timber industry, some sheep farmers settled in the area, creating a wool industry that enriched

exporters when demand rose significantly during WWI. Foreign competition later diminished the wool trade. Pecan orchards and truck farming also contributed to the area’s economy.

Vancleave’s business and family profiles held sway until the 1990s when a number of Coastal residents moved north to enjoy lower taxes and lower crime rates. Hurricane Katrina accelerated that migration, which continues today. Vancleave is a growing town of about 6,000 residents, enjoying a steady influx of new residents. Its heart and soul, however, continues to be the generations of dedicated Vancleave residents whose ancestors settled there about the same time O’Keefe funeral homes first opened for business a few miles south in Ocean Springs.





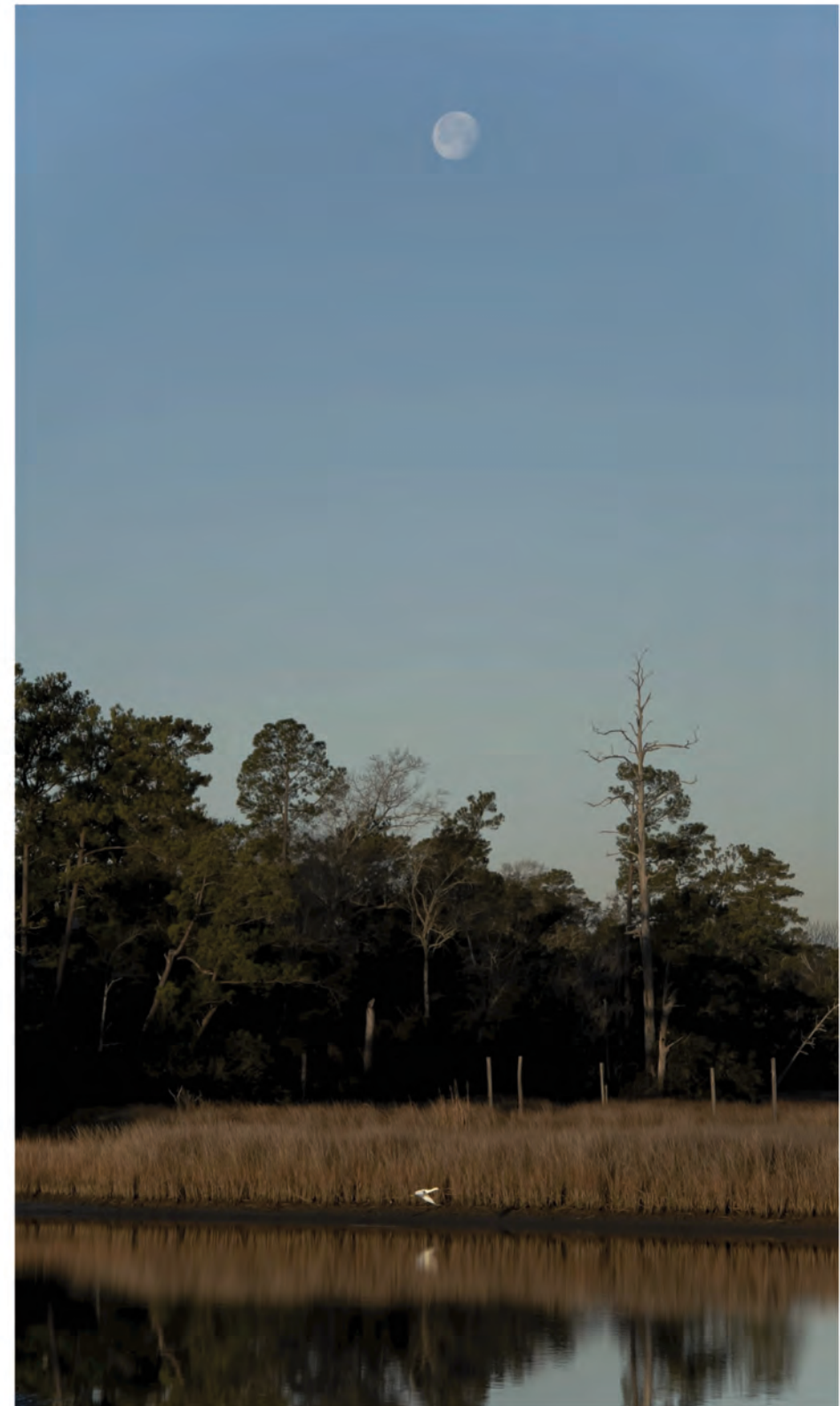
Chapter 4: Our Resources and the Fruits of Our Labor

In the 150 years that O'Keefe family funeral homes have served the Mississippi Coast, area residents and regular visitors have spent fulfilling, active and entertaining lives in one of the most glorious environs created from God's heavenly palette.

From majestic Live Oak trees to hypnotic sparkling waters, the largest and longest man made beach in the world, and all flora and fauna in between, the Coast has always offered endless occasion for recreation and entertainment to children and adults alike.

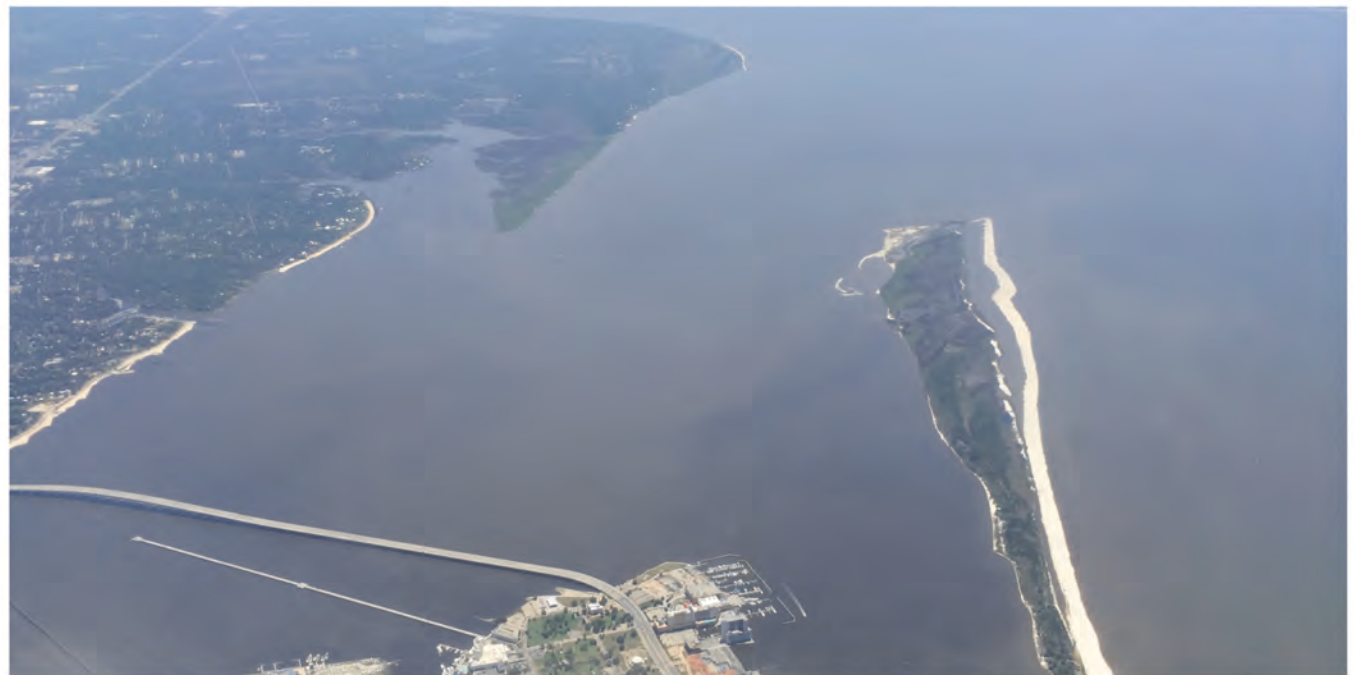
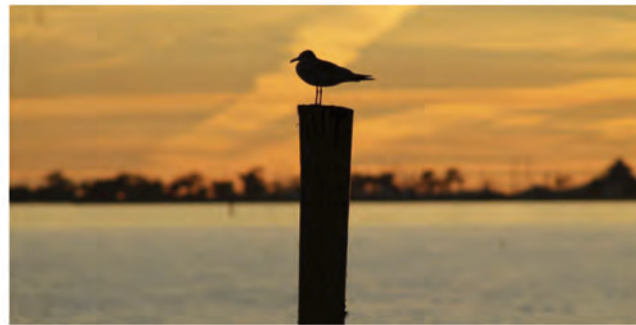
Today's activity menu pays homage to a distinguished past, yet presents a comprehensive selection from the simple to the sublime: walking the water's edge on sugary sand beaches; casting a net for Biloxi bacon (popeye mullet); deep sea fishing south of the barrier islands; skiing Back Bay; hiking through ancient forests; chasing golf balls across manicured fairways; jogging and biking scenic roadways; sailing to explore the barrier islands; rolling the dice in illegal and legal casinos; experiencing live performances of international performers; feasting on world class southern cuisine in signature restaurants; gazing on centuries-old artifacts predating Biloxi's settlement in the 17th century; honoring the genius of our native artists; and celebrating cultural diversity at numerous heritage festivals.

And none of this would have been possible without bountiful natural resources and the determination and resourcefulness of the people, both alone and united in the many institutions that underpin our life on this beautiful Mississippi Coast.





Abundant nature and healthful foods sustain us





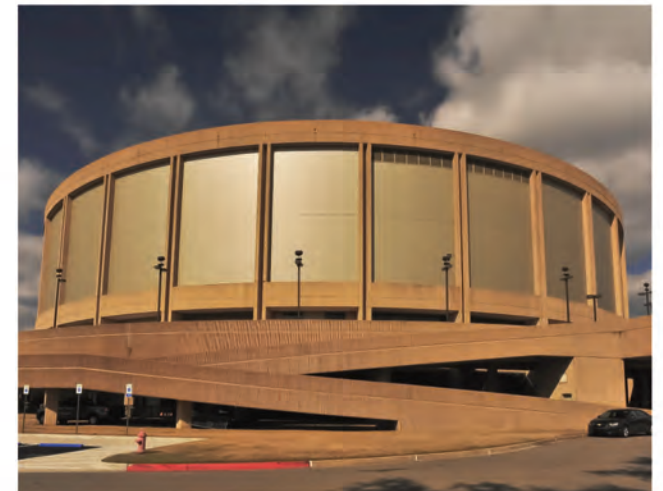


Religious institutions support our faith and good works





Public institutions protect and enlighten us





Government, business and industry provide our livelihoods

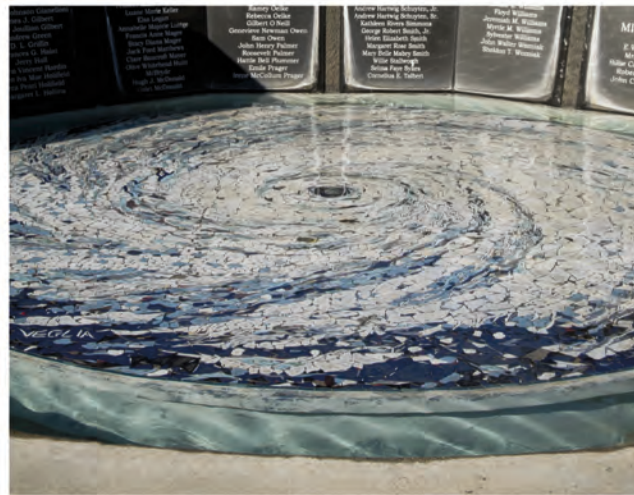






Historic structures help us recall our past





Tests make us stronger



Bradford-O'Keefe Gulfport Facility, after Katrina



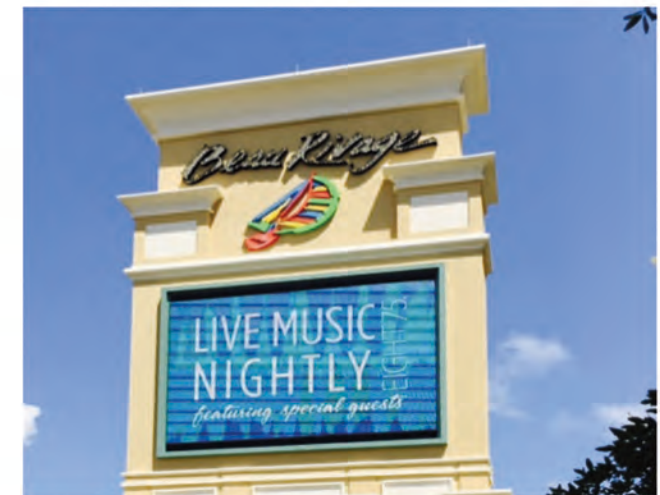


We find endless ways to expand and enjoy our lives . . . on land . . . water





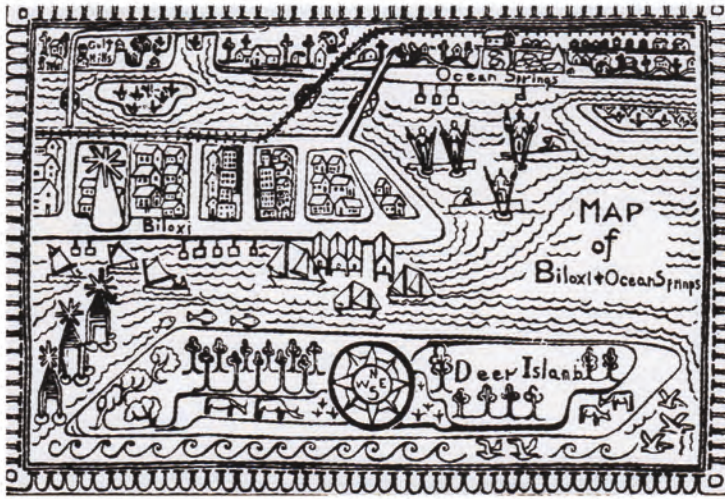
... and casino row





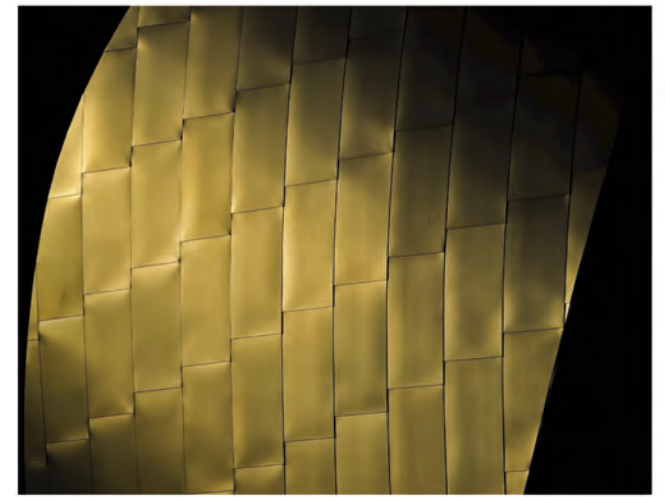
Lively organizations deepen our appreciation of history and art



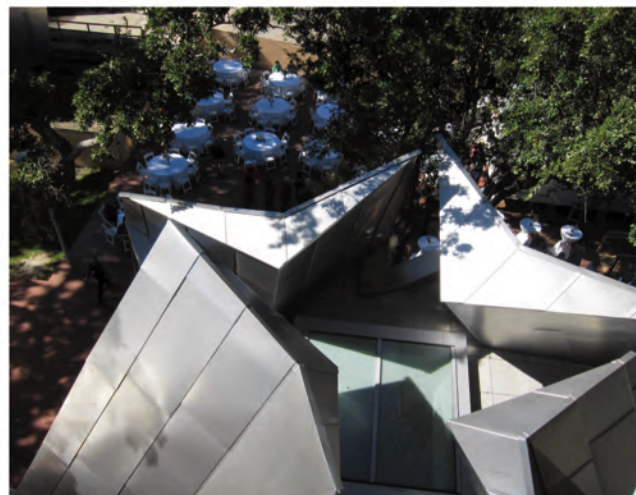


... Walter Anderson Museum of Art & the Peter Anderson Festival





... Ohr-O'Keefe Museum of Art





... and cultural festivals of all kinds



Jerry



Jeff Sr.





Chapter 5: Living Legacy, Now and Future

The fourth and fifth generations of O'Keefes account for the lion share of the current success of Bradford-O'Keefe Funeral Services.

Ben O'Keefe's vision for modernizing and diversifying the funeral business formed a strong base, but when he passed away in 1954, his son Jerry assumed control of the funeral and insurance businesses and launched a new era of growth for the family businesses.

Jeremiah Joseph 'Jerry' O'Keefe III was born 91 years ago in the front parlor of the O'Keefe home on Porter in Ocean Springs.

His childhood ~~ spent with his brothers Johnny and Ben, and sister Alice ~~ was filled with all of the work, study, and merriment one might expect of any child in that place and time. He tells of playing hooky on the first day of first grade, hiding in a ditch until a neighbor found him and took him back to school.

Jerry met his future wife, *Rose Annette Saxon*, during

those early years at St. Alphonsus Catholic School. Annette's mother came to the O'Keefe home to discuss the house on Jackson Avenue that she'd been renting from Jerry's family. The kids peeked at each other around the door while the grownups conducted their business.

In December 1938, the O'Keefes lost their cherished home during the depths of the Depression. Jerry and Annette's friendship waned when Jerry and his family moved to Biloxi.

Jerry had graduated from Sacred Heart High School and was attending Soule College in New Orleans when World War II broke out. Only 18 years old, his father Ben had to give permission for him to enlist.

After months of pre-flight and flight training, during which he found time to rekindle his relationship with Annette, then at Ursulines College in New Orleans, Jerry was posted to Camp Pendleton, California. He and Annette married at La Jolla, California in March 1944, before Jerry shipped off to the South Pacific to fly corsairs in support of the naval fleet.



The war was short for Jerry, but not uneventful. As has been well described elsewhere, he was dubbed an ‘Ace’ pilot, earning the Distinguished Flying Cross and other awards for his achievements in combat over Okinawa (shooting down five Japanese planes during one mission and two more on another). He was ordered home when the war ended.



Jeremiah J. O’Keefe, III

Highest Rank Held, Branch of Service:

1st Lieutenant, U.S. Marine Corps

Veteran Of:

U.S. Navy 1942-1943
U.S. Marine Corps 1943-1945
World War II 1942-1945

Biography:

Jerry O’Keefe was born on July 12, 1923, in Ocean Springs, MS. He joined the Aviation Cadet Program of the U.S. Navy in June 1942, and was commissioned a 2d Lt in the U.S. Marine Corps and designated a Naval Aviator on June 16, 1943. Lt O’Keefe joined VMF-323, the Death Rattlers, in August 1943 at MCAS Cherry Point, NC, and moved with the squadron to NAAS El Centro, CA, in January 1944, and then to Hawaii in July 1944. He next deployed with the squadron to the Southwest Pacific in September 1944, and to Okinawa during the Battle of Okinawa in April 1945. Lt O’Keefe became an Ace in a Day when he shot down 5 enemy aircraft in aerial combat over Okinawa on April 22, 1945, adding 2 more air victories on April 28, for a total of 7. He returned to the U.S. in June 1945, and left active duty at the end of the war in September 1945. After leaving active duty, Jerry graduated from Loyola University with a bachelor’s degree in Business Administration in 1948, and later bought his father’s funeral home business in 1953, which became Bradford-O’Keefe Funeral Home in Biloxi, Mississippi. Jerry served as a Mississippi State Legislator from 1960 to 1964, and was Mayor of Biloxi from 1973 to 1981. He and his wife Annette Saxon O’Keefe had 13 children together and lived in Biloxi until her death on May 16, 1998. Jerry married Martha Peterson on July 27, 1999.

His Navy Cross Citation reads:

For extraordinary heroism and distinguished service in the line of his profession as Section Leader and a Pilot in Marine Fighting Squadron THREE HUNDRED TWENTY-THREE, Marine Air Group THIRTY-THREE, FOURTH Marine Aircraft Wing, in aerial combat against enemy Japanese forces during the assault on Okinawa Shima, Ryukyu Islands, on 22 April 1945. Fighting his plane aggressively in two engagements against a total of more than fifty Japanese suicide dive bombers, First Lieutenant O’Keefe pressed home a series of bold attacks in the face of hostile fire to destroy five of the enemy aircraft. By his resolute courage, skillful airmanship and devotion to duty, he aided materially in preventing the numerically superior force from reaching its objective, and his gallant conduct throughout reflects the highest credit upon First Lieutenant O’Keefe and the United States Naval Service.



Maureen, the first of Jerry and Annette’s thirteen children, was born while Jerry was overseas. After completing his military service, Jerry attended Loyola University on the GI Bill, earning a business degree — knowledge he would soon put to use in his father’s business back in Biloxi.

Jerry’s well-known passion for civil rights became evident during his time at Loyola. A business fraternity asked if he would serve as its president. After reviewing its bylaws and learning that Blacks and Jews were excluded, Jerry declined the post. The group removed the exclusion and he happily served as president.



One of Jerry's earliest acts back in Biloxi was to tour other southern funeral homes, looking for ideas to enhance the business. He soon proposed that the funeral home be air-conditioned. His dad, however, was reluctant to take that costly step, even though Jerry offered to pay for it himself.

When Jerry assumed control of the business in the wake of his father's illness and death, he promptly installed air conditioning, to good effect in Biloxi's hot and humid climate. Annette contributed as well, taking on the task of playing the organ during wakes and funerals.

Jerry soon conceived and quarterbacked an even more important expansion plan — a merger in 1957 with competitor Bradford Funeral Home to create a more formidable company, Bradford-O'Keefe Funeral Homes.



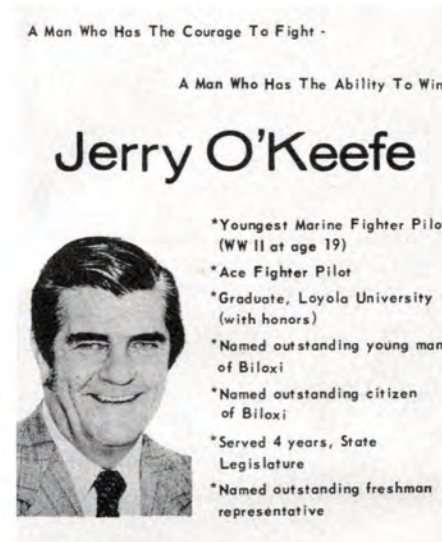
a Bradford funeral service



Paul Bradford

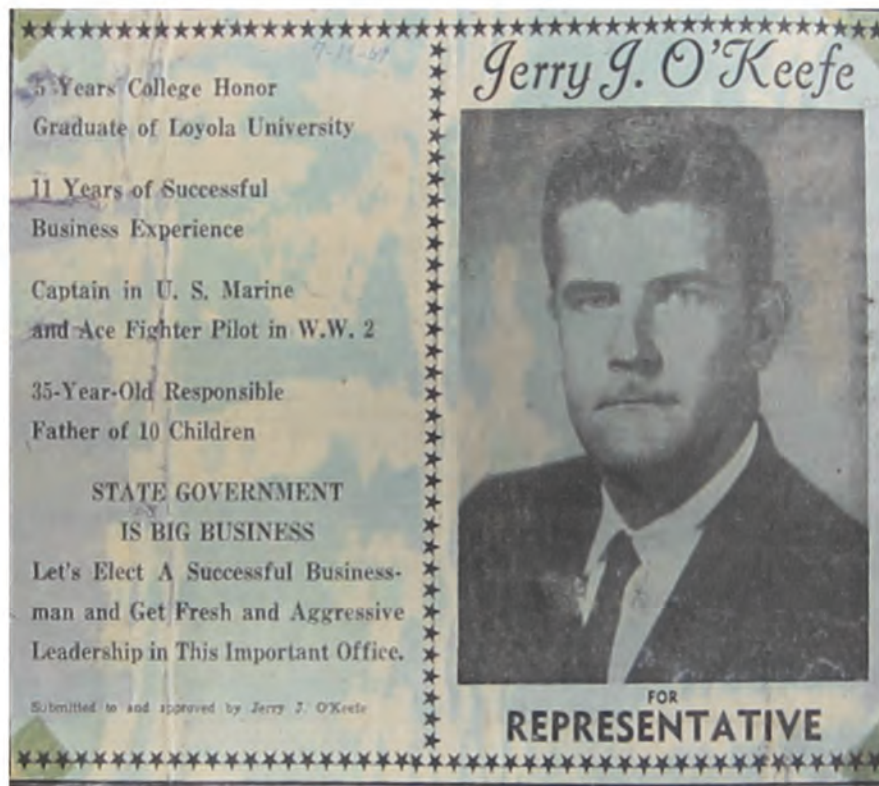
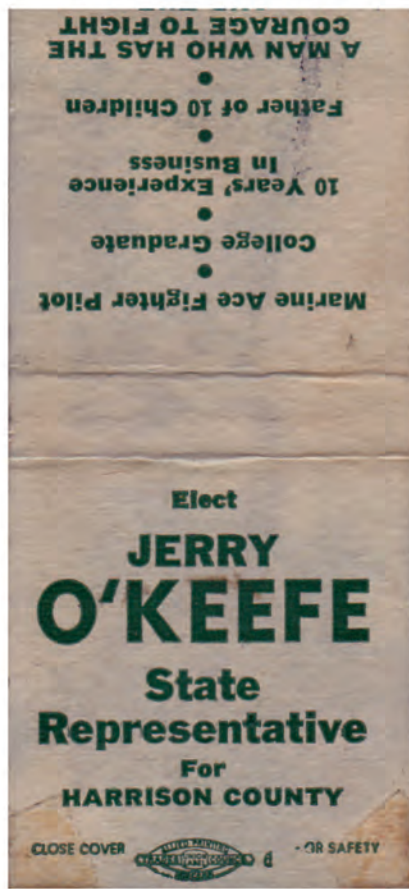


And with Annette, in 1958 he began Gulf National Life, a burial insurance company that provided customers with small life and burial insurance policies. Before that time funeral homes had been selling “face value” burial insurance policies with limited coverage and significant risk to policyholders in the event of funeral home insolvency. Jerry saw the need to form a “legal reserve” company, which would guarantee policyholders that their claims would be met by backing the policies with a deposit with the State of Mississippi of about \$100,000.



Jerry and Annette's family kept pace with all of the business growth!





Select O'Keefe As Outstanding House Freshman

Harrison County Representative Jerry J. O'Keefe has been named the outstanding House freshman in the Mississippi legislature by the reporters who cover the state capitol.

Outstanding freshman in the Senate is Sen. W. J. Caraway of Leland.

O'Keefe, 36, was floor manager of the legal liquor measure, which came closer to passage during this session than at any other



BEST FRESHMAN

time in the 52 years of Mississippi prohibition.

O'Keefe said this morning "I'm pleased to have been selected and I feel it was a privilege to serve with this fine group of legislators."

NOT DISCOURAGED

"While I'm disappointed that we didn't pass the local option liquor bill, I'm not discouraged.

"The backers of this bill feel that this is just the first effort and that we expect to be back to try to solve the whisky problem at the next session," he added.

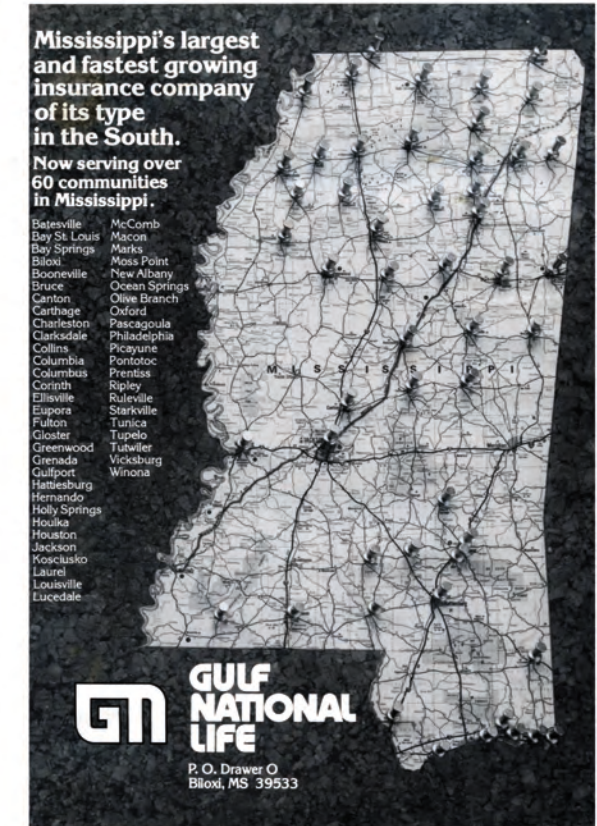
In addition to the liquor bill, O'Keefe also handled the Deer Island development bill, the amendments to the Harrison County Seaway bill and a measure allowing the city of Biloxi to add one mill taxation for the employees' retirement systems.

As things became stable on the business front, Jerry followed in his grandfather's steps, turning to public service in the Mississippi State Legislature beginning in 1959.

Though he came a few votes short on a pet project — local option liquor legalization, he returned home after helping redistrict the legislature to provide substantially more representation for Harrison County. He was confident that the Coast would get its liquor —and other important rights, now that it would have adequate representation in Jackson.



CONTROVERSY OVER WHISKY —These three leading figures in the fight over local option whisky legalization, met at the House podium just before the lower chamber voted 65-60 against accepting a conference report on the bill Tuesday. They are (left to right) Jerry O'Keefe, Harrison, chairman of temperance, who led the fight for legalization; Rep. Vardaman Webb, Winston, temperance vice-chairman, a devout dry who opposed, and Rep. Charles Deaton, Leflore, author of the measure. (Photo by Nations).



In 1960 Jerry moved the main Bradford-O'Keefe funeral home to its current location on Howard Avenue in Biloxi.

Naming Audrey Murray President of Bradford-O'Keefe, Jerry delegated management of the funeral home operations so he could focus in earnest on growing the life insurance division of his business.

He began to market the company's legal reserve insurance to funeral homes throughout the state as an added means of coverage once their smaller limits had been met and or surpassed. At one point more than 100 funeral homes, owned by Caucasians and African Americans, were writing these policies and Gulf National Life became the largest provider of excess coverage statewide.

As with everyone else in the community, the funeral business experienced the wrath of Hurricane Camille in 1969, which also devastated the O'Keefe family residence on Beach Boulevard.





In the wake of Hurricane Camille's widespread destruction, Jerry bought two vacant lots on Biloxi's front beach to spur redevelopment and began construction of a three story office building. Completed in 1971 and decorated by Annette, it served as Gulf National's headquarters, also housing a number of small businesses and government agencies and the medical practice of his brother John.



Jerry also maintained his strong interest in politics. In 1971, he persuaded son *Jeremiah J. IV 'Jody'* to run for State Representative for Harrison County. Jody was elected and served from 1971 to 1979, earning, as had his dad, the title of Outstanding Freshman Legislator. After Jody's 2007 death, the Mississippi Legislature commended him for this, as well as the "notable, courageous vote" he had taken regarding civil rights, and his status as the only white legislator to stand with the newly formed Black Caucus.

And in 1973 Jerry resumed his own career in elected office, serving as Biloxi's Mayor for eight years. During this period he spearheaded a number of civic projects, including the design and building of the Biloxi Library/ Cultural Center and acquisition of the Tullis-Toledano Manor as an historical site. However, he was especially proud of his civil rights record, in appointing Black officials and standing up to the Ku Klux Klan.



Under Jerry's guidance, Bradford-O'Keefe enjoyed tremendous growth and financial success. He continually reinvested in his business and, with Annette, his community.



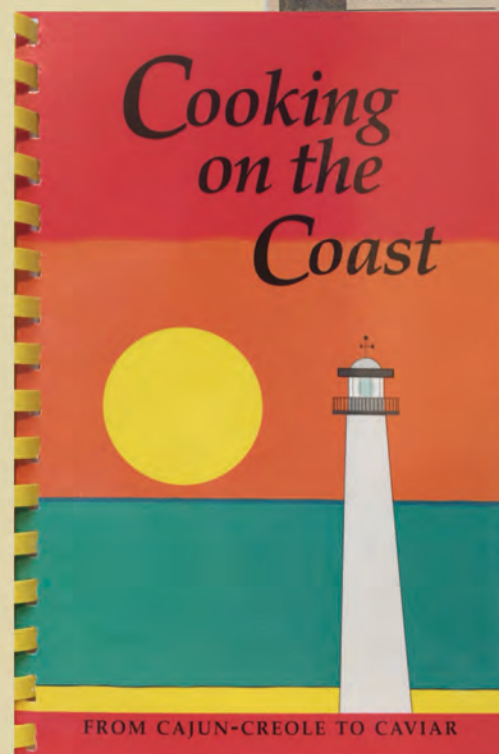
One of Jerry's regular activities in those years was fundraising — both for his religious home at Nativity BVM Catholic church, where he led major financial campaigns, as well as for civic groups. For example, he teamed with Courtney Blossman to raise the considerable funds required to build the Walter Anderson Museum of Art in Ocean Springs.

While Jerry occupied himself with fundraising for church, charitable, and museum projects, Annette was active in church, choir, art, Little Theatre, and mental health advocacy. Serving as president of the Harrison County Mental Health Association, she spoke widely about the benefits of treatment and the need to destigmatize this physiological condition.

On the business front, Annette was a member of the Biloxi Chamber of Commerce, and helped with membership drives. With her friend Mary Mahoney, she organized the first annual seafood festival. She also served as a corporate officer in the family insurance business, working there as well processing the payroll for many years.

Perhaps her fondest project was authoring *Cooking on the Coast* (1994), with youngest son Joe. The cookbook reflects the family's love of good food and was a 'hot commodity' after Hurricane Katrina destroyed so many local family kitchens!

In 1996, Annette, Jerry and their family transferred the assets of Gulf National Life into a new charitable family foundation designed to support local charities, programs for the handicapped, and research on mental health issues. Jody O'Keefe served as the chief executive of the O'Keefe Foundation for several years until the torch was passed to independent professionals.



COAST CLAN'S FAVORITES

"It's hard to imagine that 50 years have passed since we spoke our vows in the Ranch House of Camp Pendleton, California. I remember the day so clearly. I wore a shell pink silk jersey two-piece outfit. My hat was a soft green straw that came forward and was topped with two large Meissen roses of silk. My carriage was of giant garlands and the fragrance still brings back memories of that day. Dad, of course, wore his Marine Corps uniform and looked so handsome. I asked my mother and Mrs. O'Keefe to stand as matrons of honor so neither would have to be left alone during the ceremony. "Would I ever have dreamed of being a parent of so many children? You know the answer to that one. I was scared enough as it was. God, of course, knew exactly what He was doing."

— Rose Annette O'Keefe, writing about her wedding to Jerry O'Keefe, in *Cooking on the Coast*

By Courtney Parker
Clarion-Ledger Food Writer

Rose Annette Saxon O'Keefe is the devoted mother of 13, the grandmother of 36, and the author of a wondrous cookbook, *Cooking on the Coast: The O'Keefe Family Recipe Book*.

The cookbook, published in 1994, contains more than 200 tried-and-true Gulf Coast recipes like stuffed crabs and red fish courtbouillon. Each chapter is introduced and peppered with lyrical insights and memories of raising a boisterous and happy clan with her husband, Jerry.

O'Keefe was born in Augusta, Ga., on Dec. 12, 1924, and raised in Chicago and on the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

"My father was vice president of Continental Bank of Chicago. When he passed away, the president of the bank brought us down to the Gulf Coast for the summer — and we voted to stay," she said.

Jennifer Laird/The Clarion-Ledger
Cooking on the Coast cookbook.

"My mother bought a huge Victorian house from the O'Keefes, and that's how Jerry and I first became acquainted. I was 8 years old. We were childhood sweethearts."

"They were married in 1944, during World War II, and O'Keefe subsequently gave birth to seven daughters and six sons."

"My greatest influences in life were my French-Canadian grandmother and my mother — also a sweet French lady," O'Keefe said. "My grandmother said that no matter how many children you have, you want to spoil them all. And that each one is like an egg — you'll want to cook it six or seven different ways."

"Both of these people instilled in me an appreciation for good food methodology," she said.

In the early years of marriage, with a household of children to tend to, O'Keefe kept her cooking on the simple side, dishing out meals that were "hearty but appetizing," she said.

Her cooking became geared toward entertaining guests as Jerry pursued politics, serving in the Mississippi Legislature, where he was named outstanding junior freshman. After a four-year term, his political career took a local turn, and he was elected mayor of Biloxi in 1960.

"He ran the city for two terms," Rose O'Keefe said. "As we became involved in civic organizations, I developed a way of presenting a beautiful table. That was my stepping forth into society — through the world of food."

Her entry into publishing has also been through the world of food. With more than 2,000 copies sold, the book is in its second printing; proceeds go to the Ocean Springs YMCA. Recipes were gleaned from family, relatives and friends who were part of the bustling homelife on Beach Boulevard.

See O'KEEFE, 4E
Recipes, 4E

Jerry and Annette raised 13 children, virtually all of whom worked in the family funeral or insurance businesses along the way. Maureen started at the insurance company, sweeping floors after school, when she was in the 6th grade. The rest of the siblings followed suit. For example, Jim, who passed away in 2011, served as chief executive of the funeral company for some years and John served as president of the insurance company while Jerry was mayor. Susan, Kathryn and Virginia worked for the funeral or insurance business for as long as 30 years, with Susan serving as insurance company president for a number of years before the business was sold in 2001.



*Mercedes, Mary, Susan, Virginia, Kathryn, Cecilia, Maureen, Annette,
Jerry, Jody, Jim, John, Jeff, Justin & Joe*

In 1971, son *Jeffrey* began working in the funeral business after school, doing whatever jobs assigned to him. Jeff continued his training at the Hulett-Winstead Funeral Home in Hattiesburg, while attending the University of Southern Mississippi. In 1986, Jeffrey purchased control of the funeral company and serves as its president today.

In 1989, Jeffrey arranged for Bradford-O’Keefe to team with the *Lang* family of Gulfport — whose history in funeral services dates to 1884. In addition to founding an undertaking business in Pass Christian, the family patriarch *John H. Lang* authored, at age 82, a history of Harrison County, published in 1936.

At the time of the O’Keefe merger, John’s grandson, *A.W. ‘Buzzy’ Lang*, managed their operations, along with wife Doris. Buzzy, a contemporary of Jerry O’Keefe, also served as Mayor of Gulfport for four years. He was eventually joined in the funeral business by son *A.W. ‘Bubba’ Lang III* and grandson *A.W. ‘Kippy’ Lang IV*.

Jeff’s brother *Justin O’Keefe*, who had worked at Bradford-O’Keefe on and off as a Licensed Funeral Director while obtaining a Bachelors’ Degree, came aboard full-time in 2010 to head up the company’s pre-arranged funeral programs. Justin has also gained steam as one of Mississippi’s youngest Chartered Life Underwriters, as well as a Chartered Financial Consultant and Chartered Advisor of Philanthropy assisting with asset growth and protection.



When the O’Keefe family lost their lovely Beaux Arts home in the midst of the Great Depression, Jerry had promised his sister Alice that one day they would buy it back.

In 1989, some 50 years later, he made good on that promise, repurchasing the property, which includes not only the 1909 home where he and his brothers were born, but also, remarkably, the original livery stable. Equally remarkable is the fact that Mr. Willy Dale, who bought the property in 1938, still owned it in 1989 and was willing to sell it back.

After a period of careful restoration overseen by son Jeff, the house and livery stable were inaugurated as centerpieces of the Ocean Springs historic district.

More than a static relic, the home also serves as a site for Bradford-O’Keefe Funeral Services and other community events.





November
1989



Bradford-O'Keefe Funeral Home, Inc., has been serving the Gulf Coast for five generations. In the mid 1800s, Edward O'Keefe was an undertaker, while also operating a livery stable. The livery stable enabled him to transport the casket to the burial site. During this era, the coffin was built overnight to fit the deceased for the funeral the following day.

In 1923, Edward's grandson, Ben O'Keefe, moved his undertaking business to Biloxi, directly across the street from Nativity B.V.M. Catholic Church. The enterprise that had started as a sideline of the livery and drayage business had now become an independent business. Changes occurred, and preparation previously done at the home of the deceased now took place at the funeral home. Later, a chapel was added for the funeral services of those who did not wish to take the deceased to the church for funeral rites. A hearse and limousine were purchased for transportation to the cemetery.

Ben and his wife, Theresa Slattery, had four children. The oldest son, Jeremiah Joseph III, known to most as Jerry, graduated from Loyola University in New Orleans and joined his father in the funeral business. In 1953, Jerry bought the business from his father, who died the following year.

In 1957, Jerry purchased the Bradford Funeral Home Company. Three years later the two companies merged forming the present Bradford-O'Keefe Funeral Homes, Inc. Bradford-O'Keefe Funeral Homes, Inc. presently owns and operates Crestawn Memorial Park, Mississippi Gulf Coast Crematory, the first crematory in the state, and 6 funeral chapels in Biloxi, Ocean Springs, Gulfport, Pascagoula, and Columbia, Mississippi. Bradford-O'Keefe serves more families than any other funeral service in the state of Mississippi.

A large part of O'Keefe history is related to the O'Keefe home which was built in 1906 by Jeremiah O'Keefe. Although hard times forced the sale of the home, a two-and-one-half story frame house, in 1938 by Mary O'Keefe the family never retired its dream of someday owning the home again. This dream was realized when Jerry O'Keefe regained ownership of the house in 1988 and restored it to its former glory. Presently the O'Keefe Family Home serves as the funeral home for the Ocean Springs area.

Along with the Bradford-O'Keefe Funeral Homes there is another growing personal service company, Gulf National Life. Founded by Jerry and Annette O'Keefe, Gulf National first began selling policies for funeral homes in Biloxi and Gulfport. In 1960, they began acquiring a series of small funeral insurance companies. But, as always, the primary function of Gulf National Life is family protection on a personal basis. That's something the O'Keefes are very proud to provide.

As you can see the O'Keefe Family has deep roots in the community. Their commitment to quality and friendly service has made them a vital part of the Gulf Coast for nearly 125 years and they will continue to provide this high level of service for generations to come.

BRADFORD-O'KEEFE
FUNERAL HOMES, INC.

Rose Annette Saxon O'Keefe passed away on May 16, 1998, surrounded by her large and loving family.

In view of her strong love and support of the arts, Jerry suggested that the family make a substantial contribution in her memory to the George Ohr Museum, which was then planning an expansion. Thus opened another chapter in the family's commitment to the Coast.





In recognition of this memorial gift, the museum was renamed in Annette's honor, the Ohr-O'Keefe Museum of Art. And Jerry personally took on the task of raising the other funds needed to build the expansion.

The Museum later was able to engage Frank Gehry, a world renowned architect, to design the facilities — multiplying exponentially the monies Jerry would work to raise.

Katrina dealt the Museum a devastating blow in 2005, but it survived and today is commemorating the 10th anniversary of that catastrophic event. Its campus is now 95% complete and the family is committed to continuing — with the assistance of the Coast community — its support of this beautiful tribute to their mother and the outstanding local artist, George E. Ohr.





Jerry is a longtime political strategist and operative, whose support of civil rights has long countered the endemic racial separatism of Mississippi. And while he is an avowed Democrat, he has worked with Republicans on projects for the common good. He has been roasted and toasted by everyone from local municipalities to Boy Scout troops to the United States House of Representatives.

Still involved in community affairs at age 92, Jerry enjoys retirement with his second wife, Martha Peterson O'Keefe. in the beachfront home he rebuilt after Hurricane Katrina.



Six Generations of Dedicated Service



Today the newest generation O'Keefe and Lang families continue to follow the Bradford-O'Keefe tradition of service, with the fourth and fifth generations stepping up to serve.

Jules, Jeffrey Jr., Jerry, Jeffrey & Justin

Today, an experienced and dedicated team of professionals leads Bradford-O'Keefe into its next century of service. "By remembering the legacy of commitment and pride our forefathers took in establishing this company, we understand the level of excellence the past demands of us today" said Jeffrey O'Keefe, Sr.

Jeff and Justin O'Keefe each has a son working in his respective division of the family business: *Jeffrey Jr.* and *Jules*, members of the sixth generation of O'Keefes, work to advance funeral options for families of the Gulf Coast. New generations of Langs are also stepping forward.





*A.W. 'Kippy' Lang IV &
A.W. 'Bubba' Lang III*



One of the hallmarks of Bradford-O'Keefe is its dedicated staff. While there have been a number who worked for relatively short periods or in part-time capacities, over the years a core group of dedicated professionals have made their careers with Bradford-O'Keefe and affiliated companies.

We would like to recognize the contemporaries of Jerry J. O'Keefe, in particular Mrs Audrey Murray, Tommy Newman and Mr. A.W. Buzzy Lang, Fred Rounsaville and Frank Conway are excellent mortuary professionals. Frank Wright and Leslie Nobles were two of the finest cemetery set-up crewmen on the Coast. These gentlemen taught their effective techniques to Allen Fairley who manages Bradford-O'Keefe's Cemetery and Grounds crew today. On the insurance side of the business, who could forget Donald Santa Cruz — one of the finest cooks on the Coast, who regularly entertained visitors at Gulf National Friday lunches.

Virginia O'Keefe worked at Bradford-O'Keefe in a number of capacities, along with former husband Ernie Brown who

managed the company for several years. James P. 'Jim' O'Keefe, second son of Jerry and Annette, graduated from the Mortuary of Science College in Houston Texas and served as President of Bradford-O'Keefe in the late 1970's.

We proudly recognize our dedicated staff, each of whom is integral to our team, including Dusty Benfield, Rose Down, Gary Dubaz, Matthew Dubaz and Max Dubaz, George Emile, Ray Gustafson, Scott Hill, Doug Hopkins, William Hutchinson, Justin Ireland, Danny Jackson, Louie Kostmayer, Shanna Ladner, Donna Lamey, Whitney Lang, Sidney Lowery, Buttons Martin, Betty Menard, Elaine McDonald, Pam Meek, Bill Metcalf, David Montana, Garland Moran, John Necaie, Shari Pol, Mary Polk, John Porche, Jimmy Price, Kimberly Pyron, Preston Reeves, Guy B. Roberts, Chuck Rosonet, Howard Rutland, Cora Sewell, Dean Shankland, David Stanley, Adrienne Tompkins, Angela Weems, Michelle Williams, Zachary Williams, and Theresa Yennie. These and many other dedicated employees are hugely responsible for the success of Bradford-O'Keefe in serving the community with compassionate care.

From the meager origins of its original location in Ocean Springs, Bradford-O'Keefe has grown to include a total of six Gulf Coast locations, two cemeteries, and Mississippi's first crematory.

Pictured here are company locations on the Pass Road in Biloxi, built in 1979, on O'Neal Road built in 2004, in Ocean Springs built as a residence in 1906 and renovated in 1986, and the Howard Avenue location in Biloxi, developed after the merger between Bradford and O'Keefe in approximately 1957.



Pictured opposite are Bradford-O'Keefe's Vancleave location, added in 2010, the 15th Street location in Gulfport, added in 1979, and Mississippi's first crematory established in 1976.



*Bradford-O'Keefe Crematory
in D'Iberville, Mississippi's First*

While the contours of the business have varied over the years, one thing has remained constant — Bradford-O'Keefe's core value is providing service to the families who call upon them. It has always been willing to help those who needed help the most.





Perhaps because of his appreciation of the family's lengthy legacy, Jeffrey O'Keefe, Sr. enjoys celebrating history. He regularly commemorates various historic events by deploying Bradford-O'Keefe's horse-drawn hearse for the delight of the community.



Shown here are Jeff Sr. and supporting cast during Ocean Springs' 130th anniversary of Iberville's 1699 Landing. Also included are photos from the 2015 St. Patrick's Day Parade in Downtown Biloxi, where the hearse was decorated to commemorate the company's 150th anniversary.



Jeff Sr.

Jeff recently secured an additional horse-drawn hearse in order to offer unique services to families nostalgic for historical rituals.

Bradford-O'Keefe also has been involved more directly in historic occasions. In 2008 the remains of four unknown U. S. Soldiers were unearthed by USM faculty and students. Researchers determined that the four had been veterans returning from the Mexican-American War in 1848.

With the benefit of a Chevron grant, the University worked in close partnership with several Coast organizations in final excavations and reburial arrangements, including the G.I.

Museum of Ocean Springs, the Jackson County Historical and Genealogical Society, Biloxi National Cemetery, the Department of Veteran Affairs, Ocean Springs Veterans of Foreign Wars, Coastal Environments, U.S. Rep. Gene Taylor's office and the Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

Bradford-O'Keefe was particularly honored to participate on Memorial Day 2010, when the remains were reinterred with full Military Honors at Biloxi National Cemetery.



Bradford-O’Keefe values community involvement. For example, Jeffrey O’Keefe Jr. and Kippy Lang organize an annual “Sweater For Veteran” program, in which local groups donate sweaters for Veterans who are homeless or otherwise in need. At the event shown, sweaters were delivered to the Biloxi National Veterans Administration, escorted by “The Freedom Riders”, a group of veterans who honor other veterans at various causes.





At left is Crestlawn Memorial Park Cemetery in Ocean Springs and below, during a Celebration of Lights ceremony, is D'Iberville Memorial Park, in D'Iberville.

Each year in early December, the company sponsors a candlelight remembrance at the cemeteries they manage. At each Service of Remembrance, families light a candle on the graves of loved ones. The resulting glow from the luminaries provides a spiritual lift to those left behind, helping them cherish memories of the loved ones who have preceded them.



Bradford-O'Keefe also saved the Friar House just before it was to be torn down to make way for a widened intersection at Highway 90 and Washington Avenue in Ocean Springs.

Local architect Bruce Tolar had approached Jerry suggesting that the Friar House architecture was very “representative of the Ocean Springs culture”, and asked him to save the structure.

Agreeing with Tolar's assessment of the building's charm, Jerry and company did just that, relocating and rehabbing it into another historical gem. The Friar House served as the insurance company's home office for a period of time and currently serves as the administrative office for Bradford-O'Keefe.



BRADFORD - O'KEEFE
FUNERAL HOMES
"Celebrating the Lives of the Ones You Love"

1865 2015
150 Years

Our Executive Team
 Jeremiah J. O'Keefe Jeffrey H. O'Keefe Jeffrey O'Keefe Jr. Kippy Lang Judith Lang

Harrison County **Jackson County**

Gulfport Biloxi Ocean Springs Vanclave

Mississippi Coast

Year	Address	Event
1859	18452 O'Neal Rd., Gulfport	Edward Neal O'Keefe immigrates to America from Tipperary County, Ireland purchasing his first property in Ocean Springs on February 3, 1859.
1861	1716 15th Street, Gulfport	Edward enlists in the Confederate Army on September 18, 1861, serving in the "Live Oak Rifles" Company A 3rd Mississippi Infantry as a private.
1865	2911 Pass Road, Biloxi	Edward opens a boarding house and livery stable in Ocean Springs. Under taking services quickly evolve out of the livery by carrying people to their final resting places.
1870	228.374.3609	Jeremiah, Joseph I., second son of Edward and Mary O'Keefe graduates from St. Ignace Commercial College and joins them in the family business.
1874	1844 Corenflto Rd, O'Keefe's Life	Edward dies Oct. 21, 1874 and is buried in the O'Keefe plot at Evergreen Cemetery in Ocean Springs. Jeremiah, Joseph I and his mother Mary continue the business.
1923	228.875.5522	Jeremiah Joseph II, Ben, takes over the family business when his father dies and opens the O'Keefe Funeral Services in Biloxi.
1952	675 Howard Ave., Biloxi	Ben suffers a stroke and his son Jerry, a decorated World War II flying Ace, takes over management of the company.
1957	911 Porter Ave., Ocean Springs	Jerry buys the original Bradford Funeral Home of Biloxi and renames the Bradford Home.
1981	1347 Bienville Blvd., Ocean Springs	Jerry's son, Jeffrey H., O'Keefe, upon earning his B.S. from The University of Southern Mississippi, rejoins the family business.
1986	4901 Jim Ramsey Rd., Vanclave	Jeff acquires control of the funeral home and along with Jerry, they reacquire their original Ocean Spring property and rename it into a modern funeral home.
1989	228.875.5522	The Lang Family joins the O'Keefe team and combines a similar legacy of service with the Bradford O'Keefe business.
2005	228.875.5522	Bradford-O'Keefe celebrates 140 years of service to the families of the Mississippi Gulf Coast.
2010	228.875.5522	Jeff H. O'Keefe's son, Jeffrey Jr., joins the family firm just as Bradford-O'Keefe grows into Vanclave and celebrates it's 145 year anniversary.

Jeffrey O'Keefe offers a final note of appreciation for the privilege of working closely with his father for some 40 years, beginning with the start of high school. Many positive developments have occurred during this time, crowned by the repurchase and renovation of the property in Ocean Springs where the family and business got their start. Other highlights include the expansion of a West Biloxi branch, two Gulfport branches and one in Vanclave; the repair or reconstruction of all facilities in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina; and very meaningfully, the opportunity to give back to the community. Today Jeff and Jeff Jr. carry forward many of the civic and social functions in which Jerry and Daddy Ben participated. Whether serving on a bank board, hospital board, university board, or the Irish Heritage Society or Carnival Association, the O'Keefes continue their involvement in the community.

Jeff is particularly grateful for the love and support of his wife Lynn and each of his three sons, Jeffrey Jr., Jacob, and Jordan. In addition to being a savvy business woman in her own right, Lynn deployed her keen artistic sense in decorating several of the funeral homes after Katrina. Jacob is well on his way to a promising career as a pharmacist. Jordan is a talented high school athlete. Jeff Jr.'s key role in the business is noted above.

Finally, we give hearty thanks to our Gulf Coast community, in whose midst our family settled and where it has thrived for these 150 years. The next 150 are lookin' good!



Jacob, Jeff, Lynn, Jordan & Jeff Jr.

We end with two poems that have special meaning to the family. The first memorializes our last horse-drawn hearse, which met its fate returning from a funeral. A witness recalled seeing the hearse in pieces on the railroad track, having been hit by a train, liveryman in top hat and tails, running after the horses. The wagon tongue to which the horses were tied was the only remnant. Decades later, our brother Jody O'Keefe refurbished it and presented it to dad with this poem. Poem and wagon tongue now grace the arrangement center at the Ocean Springs Funeral Home.

The second poem is dad's favorite, recited from memory on public and private occasions when he wishes to speak to the value of building for the ages, a principle that has guided his life.

The Wagon Tongue

It's no small blessing to be called to teach or preach,
and in a good book for such lessons to be bound.
But one good lesson to be found and learned,
is from an old wagon tongue that never burned.

This short poem 'tis hoped may teach - something -
to those strong, those wise, and who would preach,
for it is many of us when the day is done,
have done the most wrong with a waggin' tongue.

Let us mend our thoughts and mind our words,
for in doing our deeds we sow our seeds.
And after we've seen each setting sun,
praise the Almighty and give thanks to His Son.

The old wagon tongue of which I speak
has seen some laugh and others weep.



In its heyday, it pulled to and fro'
merrymakers from an old depot.
It was also hooked to many a carriage
to take bride and groom to a mighty fine marriage.

But the well worn tongue which brings this verse
was used most times to pull a hearse.
And though so used for many years,
it's only pecan and can shed no tears.
It belonged to an undertaker for whom we wept -
and prayed to One God that his soul be kept.

We must worship God and pray to Jesus -
and always remember They never leave us.
And because silence is golden, so is Death,
for it is only in death that we may see,
all the glorious things God meant to be.

The Bridge Builder

By Will Allen Dromgoole

An old man going a lone highway,
Came, at the evening cold and gray,
To a chasm vast and deep and wide,
Through which was flowing a sullen tide.
The old man crossed in the twilight dim,
The sullen stream had no fear for him;
But he turned when safe on the other side
And built a bridge to span the tide.

“Old man,” said a fellow pilgrim near,
“You are wasting your strength with building
here;
Your journey will end with the ending day,
You never again will pass this way;
You’ve crossed the chasm, deep and wide,
Why build this bridge at evening tide?”

The builder lifted his old gray head;
“Good friend, in the path I have come,” he
said,
“There followed after me to-day
A youth whose feet must pass this way.
This chasm that has been as naught to me
To that fair-haired youth may a pitfall be;
He, too, must cross in the twilight dim;
Good friend, I am building this bridge for him!”







FRANK J. TREMMEL
1867 - 1950

EMMA TREMMEL
SEPT 22, 1886
NOV 9, 1947

IN MEMORIAM
ELEANOR E. LAVERS
MOBILE ALA. JUNE 22, 1819
BILOXI MISS. JULY 14, 1890
ELEANOR E. LAVERS
1819 - 1928

MONUMENT FOR JACOB ELLER
A tall, white, tapered obelisk with a pointed top and a decorative base. The base features a relief carving of a figure. The name "JACOB ELLER" is visible on the base.

JACOB ELLER

SACRED TO THE MEMORY OF
MARY CECILIA JOYCE
WIFE OF
FREDERICK W. MOGALES
A NATIVE OF NEW ORLEANS.
DIED IN BILOXI.
JAN. 16, 1897.
AGE 46 YRS. 11 MOS. & 7 DS.
DEAREST LOVED ONE WE HAVE Laid THEE
IN THE RESTFUL GRAVES EMBRACE
BUT THY MEMORY WILL BE OVERSHED
WILL NOT BE FORGOTTENLY SACED.

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William Colgin made most of the photos of Bradford-O'Keefe employees, p. 93, as well as that of the wagon tongue, p. 102; Chuck Whiteside made photos of the horse-drawn hearse, pp. 10, 96.

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