

Pass Christian, Mississippi by Dan Ellis

Pass Christian has remained a small community on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, never more than 6000 residents, in spite of its nationwide popularity and its entrenched heritage since 1699. Following changes of the guard and national banners from French, to English, to Spanish, to Independence, and then to the American flag – the Pass Christian area emerged as a small fishing and commercial harbor and the main trade center on the Mississippi Sound. Because of its proximity to New Orleans, the first lighthouses in Mississippi were built as sister towers at Cat Island and Pass Christian in 1831.



Because of the healthy ozone quality of the area and blending scents of salt breezes and piney woods, plantation owners, investment bankers, and brokers from New Orleans and upper Mississippi, established dual residences at the Pass. Tourists followed in their path bringing about the first Coast hospice of grandeur – the Pass Christian Hotel. This was where, in 1849, southern yachting was born as sailing competitors celebrated the first boating Regatta and started the second yacht club in the United States. The Yacht Club became a Mecca for sailing enthusiasts. Voyages at sunset, or by moonlight along the magnificent coastline, or to the nearby islands, or for the thrill of renewed regattas, have created a constant parade of billowing sails throughout the years.

The longest operating newspaper, the *Tarpon-Beacon*, started in 1880 and closed in 1993. ---And, the Coast's longest operating private library, the *Town Library*, operated from 1893 to 1996. The Pass also had an Opera House in its early days. Its *Historic District*, today, traverses the coastal beaches for three miles, revealing hundreds of antebellum and fine old homes that are listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The Pass has a Preservation Commission and a Tree Commission with alert members who are ever mindful of heritage and historic values. Scenic Drive is lined with Live Oaks, water oaks, and magnolia trees presenting a wonderful pageantry that borders the many architectural gems that are ornately guarded by wrought iron works or white picket fencing – providing a showcase of Victorian and Creole-Caribbean design.

Popular annual events that attract many Coastians and tourists are the St. Paul Mardi Gras Parade, the St. Patrick's Walking Parade, the Spring Pilgrimage, the Blessing of the Fleet, the Tour of Homes, Jazz in the Pass festival, the Sea Food Festival, the Collage of Arts, Celebrate the Gulf, and Christmas in the Pass. Most of these events include food fare ranging from fast-food items to specially prepared gourmet cuisine.

The Pass Christian Municipal Harbor is very busy with commercial boats that dredge the eight oyster reefs just off-shore and drag their nets for shrimp during the seasonal change. Visitors enjoy the benefits of the only harbor along the Coast that is so openly visible from the main highway. The small downtown section with narrow streets keeps traffic at a slow pace and is most inviting to tourists who are in search of antiques, crafts, or just strolling. Not to be missed, is the Musée Bourdin, a museum-in-a-plumbing shop, where thousands of photographs are on display as well as hundreds of cataloged heritage items on people, places and events of Pass Christian.

Out of state visitors enjoy the cool Gulf breezes, the refreshing waters, and the sophisticated elegance offered only in Pass Christian. The many who return, frequently speak of the attractiveness of the *Pass* and the special allure that brings them back.

Note: Dan Ellis can be reached at danellis3@juno.com or at <http://DanEllis.Net>