

Black Leaders of the Pass

George T. Watson

Excellence in Education and Community Services

George, a prominent native of the Pass, graduated from Randolph High School in 1943, and was drafted for duty with the Marines during World War II. He then pursued his B.S. Degree graduating *Magna Cum Laude*. After teaching a few years he took leave to join the Douglas Aircraft Corporation in California where he also completed his Masters Degree at the University of California. Soon after his return, in 1961, he was appointed Principal at his Alma Mater, Randolph High, which is now the location of Pass Christian Middle School, and in 1972, he was appointed Assistant Superintendent for the Pass Christian School District.

Desiring further education, he took leave and received an advanced degree at the University of Miami where he was further recognized for his 4.0 grade-point average, and formally inducted into Epsilon Tau Lambda Scholastic Honorary Society.

George Watson, early began his participation as a community volunteer by championing many causes and by serving on many boards and commissions. In 1978, the Rotary Club presented him the "Outstanding Citizen of the Year" award.

George is well known throughout the state of Mississippi. In 1980, Governor William Winter appointed him to the State Board of Trustees for Institutions of Higher Learning filling an at-large position. The following year, Governor Winter made a talk at Pass High specifically announcing his sincere gratitude and friendship for George Watson.

Governor Ray Mabus appointed him Southern District Commissioner for the State's Public Service Commission. In the same year Alcorn State University presented him with its "Distinguished Achievement Award." In 1991, he was honored with the University of Mississippi's Annual Award of Distinction. In 1995, George was honored again by being named an Advisory Director to the Hancock Bank. Currently, he serves on the Harrison County Tourism Commission. He recently reflected, "I think Pass Christian, today, has finally reached where we were prior to Camille. Camille set us back so far. Needless to say, we have, a long, long way to go. However, there's an attitude of moving forward and there is a togetherness to go forward."

Peggy Johnson

Peggy is usually known as the city's Code Enforcement Officer. She always maintains an industrious approach to life with a passion for accomplishment. During her highschool sophomore year she applied to CETA for summer youth employment. Little did she realize that she would be picking up trash from the streets and washing school buses, but she did it with uncompromising zeal. Upon graduating from Pass High in 1975, she went on to graduate from Jackson State University majoring in Urban Studies and Community Development.

Her first position with the City was in 1985 when she accepted the Community Services Director position. In other capacities she worked in the Utilities Department, the Harbor Department, and the Tax office.

Never shirking a duty, Peggy now serves in many roles; some of which are: License and Permit Supervisor, Deputy Court Clerk, Historic Preservation Officer,

Zoning Enforcement Officer, Secretary to the Planning Commission, Secretary to the Zoning Board, and minutes clerk for the Harbor Commission. She realizes that the City is in budget restrictions and has allowed herself to wear these many hats.

Peggy's untiring efforts to serve the Community, its Boards, its Commissions, its citizens, has not blemished her performance in required tasks. In September of 1994, the members of the Rotary Club recognized her devotion by awarding Ms. Johnson a plaque by acknowledging her as "Employee of the Year". With added commitments, she also energetically serves as Recording Secretary on the Tricentennial Committee.

Valerie Isabelle

Val has served as Administrative Assistant through two mayors. Bay St. Louis is her birthplace and attended St. Rose DeLima and graduated from Bay High. She was the 1998 recipient for the Rotary's "Outstanding Employee Award."

Otis Gates, Sr.

Otis retired from the Army after 20 years of service and went on to become a registered nurse and supervisor of respiratory therapy at the Biloxi Veterans Affairs Medical Center for the next 18 years. Keeping very active, he serves on the Board of Directors of the Gulf Coast Community Action Agency, Treasurer of Grand Knights of Peter Claver Council #26, and a member of the city Planning and Zoning commission. If that's not enough, he dutifully fills a part-time driver position for Coastal Family Health unit. As Parish Council President for Mother of Mercy Catholic Church, Otis received an Apostolic Blessing and Citation for his outstanding spiritual and community services, which was presented in open Mass by Josephite priest of Mother of Mercy, Reverend Bartholomew S. Endslow, S.S.J., Pastor. Otis was further complimented by being awarded Outstanding Citizen of the Year by the Pass Christian Rotary Club and Chamber of Commerce.

Louis Raymond Perkins

Dr. Perkins, a graduate from Randolph High School in Pass Christian, enlisted with the Navy in June 1942. Following the war, he received his B.S. Degree in 1949 and his Masters Degree in 1957, followed by his doctorate.

During his early years in the Pass, he was one of the organizers of the *Knights of Zeus*, which conducted Mardi Gras Balls and Parades in downtown Pass Christian during 1939 and 1940, and he organized a Civil Defense Unit for which he received a Mayoral Commendation from former Mayor W.G. Simpson.

As a world traveler and Educator, Perkins was a College professor at the University of the District of Columbia and now teaches part-time at the National Institute of Health, Bethesda, Maryland.

During a visit to Pass Christian, for Black History Month in 1983, Louis Perkins extolled, "It is for my ancestors I carry on. We must open the door for the little children coming on. We must be the lighthouse that beacons for others."

On another occasion, he exclaimed, "Blacks who are now growing up in this nation must look to their own communities for motivation and inspiration. There are too few national heroes to provide such inspiration."

Horace Labat - The Businessman

Horace, owner of *Labat's Bar-B-Q Grill*, located on Davis Avenue north of the tracks, has renovated many Pass Christian beachfront homes. He also helped build quite a few of them. He has commented that, "These old houses have been through a lot of storms . . . the wood framing is what makes them stand up. Old houses will stand a long time more if they are handled right."

Pass Christian homeowners call him a "real craftsman." He was the rare wood worker who could build an 1890s style porch from scratch and make the neighbors think it has always been there.

His approach to restoration work wasn't for the timid. It is said that Labat would not pre-price projects, nor would he be told exactly what to do. "If a man can't meet the price, then corners get cut. I don't cut corners," he used to say.

Lucien Piernas

Lucien was part of the lineage of early coastal Negro settlers, which includes the Piernases from Bay St. Louis, the "Pass" Morgan family, and he was also related to the well known Martial Dedeaux.

Lucien did not make significant economic gains in his lifetime, however, upon retirement, lived out his years in his modest home. Not having opportunity for early education, his first job at 15, was at a Scenic Drive boarding house where he was paid \$5 a month and 3 meals a day while working everyday from 7am to 9pm. At age 16, he started as a janitor and worked up to Floor Manager at the *Community Cash Store* owned by Owen P. Farrell.

At age 27, he was hired as a waiter at the Merchant Marine Academy at Henderson Point, then, a military base. That job gave him the opportunity to go to New York for one year to wait tables in the officers dining hall. Never having journeyed from the Pass and just married, he took the opportunity as a honeymoon adventure. The Merchant Marines left the "Pass", so at 32 years he was back at Farrell's again.

He later became a bartender for the PCI Golf Club from 1960 to 1976, and then the Pass Christian Yacht Club, where he remained from 1976 to 1990. Lucien was rich because he claimed about 300 living relatives in the "Pass" area. As a retired citizen, Lucien was quick to state that after working all his life, social security wasn't what he thought it would be.