

Holy Mosquito Bite, Batman! *It's Summer Time!*

WHAM!



KAPOW!



Do you remember the '60s TV show, *Batman*? Twice weekly, Batman and Robin treated audiences to their own brand of campy slapstick comedy, awash in the fiendish antics of the Daring Duo's roster of villains: the Joker, the Penguin, and the Riddler, as well as others. These cunning scoundrels taxed the Daring Duo's patience, as well as the Duo's ability to eradicate them. Each show ended with a cliffhanger, leaving the audience to ponder if Batman and Robin would survive. But the Daring Duo may have met their match had they traveled south via the Batmobile and experienced a Mississippi Gulf Coast summer with its heat and those flying, biting Harpies of the South - the pesky mosquito.

One wonders why God created mosquitoes, and why Noah saw fit to save them all those millennia ago. But created they were, and ever since they've been a royal pain in the derriere, or the arm, or the forehead, or wherever the little blood suckers bite. Through the years mankind has attempted to soothe the fearsome itch that accompanies a mosquito bite. Old-timers applied an onion slice or baking soda on the bite. As far back as 1652, a book entitled "The Ladies' Dispensary" suggested a remedy of "caterpillars applied with oyle." Who knows if that remedy worked, but the sight of a hairy, oily caterpillar oozing around on your skin would definitely take your mind off the itchy problem! Attempts to eradicate the

mosquito and the itchy nightmare it creates have resulted in some unusual procedures.

In the 1920s, Gulfport's City Fathers decided to attack the local mosquito population head on. Or should I say...bat on? An August 4, 1922 Daily Herald article penned by Bostick Breland opened with these words: "*We have been wondering where the next piece of tom-foolery would break out, what it would be, and when it would happen.*" Mr. Breland - better known as "Crab" - was the creator of "Crab-ology," a regular feature of the Herald in those days. He further opined that Gulfport would be the site of said tom-foolery because it was to be the site of a bat house in



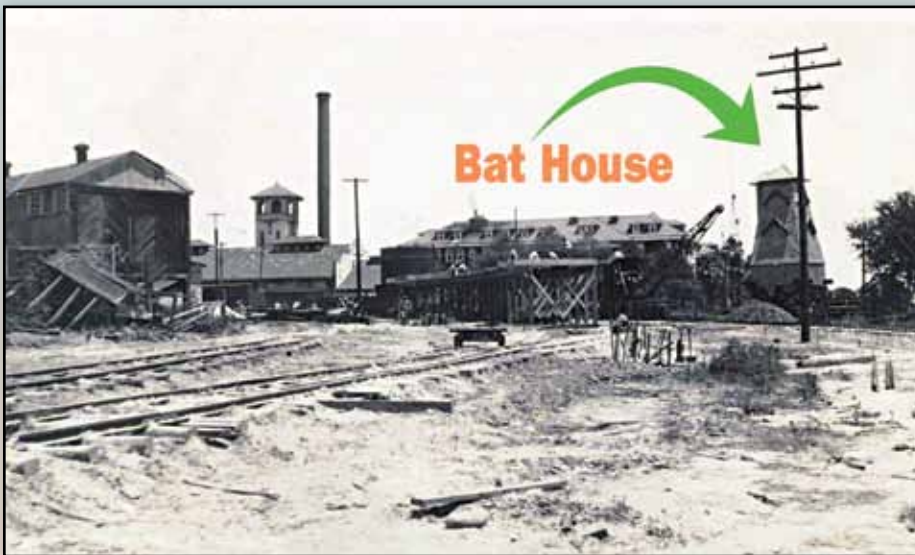
Resting place of Bostick H. Breland, writer of the Crab-ology articles in the old Gulfport Dailey Herald. Photo courtesy of Mr. Gene Phillips

which bats would be raised. They, in turn, would gobble up the little skitters in vast numbers.

Crab stated he had it on good authority that "*a bat house is under-way that will accommodate 250,000*

(bats), a number thought to be sufficient to clean up the entire coast.” The bat house mentioned by Crab is visible in the period picture from the extensive postcard collection of Paul Jermyn. The bat house was once located in the vicinity of the current Mississippi Power building, and its strange design was integral to its success. Was it a success? Keep reading.

To be successful, bats don't have to live in a house of strange design. In present-day Austin, Texas, over a million bats live under the Congress Avenue bridge. Their nightly dance, spiraling upward in the summer sky, is a local tourist attraction. It is estimated the million-plus bats devour on average 20,000 insects nightly. Folks, that's a whole lot of eatin' goin' on! The good citizens of Austin were at first fearful of the bats and reacted to them in ignorance. Crab reacted in much the same manner.



“The bat has always appealed to us as something weird, uncanny, and unclean. He is a cross between a beast and a bird, with the eyes of a serpent, and the smell of last year's hawk nest,” wrote Crab. “Gee! Think of turning loose a quarter of a million of them upon a peaceful and helpless community.”

Someone should have informed dear ol' Crab of this surprising truth, presented by Bat Conservation International: “Bats are gentle and incredibly sophisticated animals; bat-watchers have nothing to

fear if they don't handle bats.”

It appears Crab was also fearful that the occupants of the local bat house would multiply like proverbial rabbits. “What makes us (Gulfport citizens) so nervous about this bat breeding scheme, we are afraid those in charge will lose control of the birth rate and literally flood the county. We have never liked to live in a screened house, but if this bat business pans out according to expectations...we are in the market for bat proof screen wire...”

According to an article in the Herald's August 23 edition, the bat house that had been under construction was completed. “The manure will be placed in it today, and the house closed except for the small opening which will admit the bats.” It was once thought that bat manure or guano attracted bats, but that is not the case according to Bats Conservation International. The Herald also

stated another bat house was being constructed in Logtown (a long-vanished logging town) with another planned a few miles north of Gulfport.

The fine citizens of Gulfport in charge of dislodging bats from the eaves of local houses and buildings were using “a rather unusual method,” discovered by Doctor Charles A.R. Campbell, “the man who made the great success of mosquito extermination by bat breeding in San Antonio, Texas.” His unusual method? Playing jazz records on a Victrola at 3:00

in the morning where bats congregated. According to the good doctor, the bats never returned. Another gentlemen who had met with great success using the doctor's method - and perhaps borrowing his jazz records - stated, “Man is the only animal on earth which can stand jazz.” It should be remembered in 1922, jazz music was considered “the spawn of Satan” by many U.S. citizens.

Jazz may have sent the bats flying in vast numbers to Gulfport's bat house, but their stay there was ill-fated. On October 1, 1930, the Herald stated the bat house had failed to live up to expectations and had been demolished. But why? After additional research, the City Fathers decided the problem was the bat house's offensive odor. They surmised the bat's little nostrils were highly offended by the smell of the creosoted lumber of which the bat house was built. The little darlings had no problem with the smell of their own guano, but the smell of creosote sent them packing. Bats! Gotta love 'em.

Thus ends my little tale concerning Gulfport's early attempts at mosquito control, which was brought low by the smell of creosote. Should *Batman* be revived in all its campy, slapstick glory, perhaps one of the Daring Duo's most mysterious methods of controlling their snarly nemeses might be a good dousing with creosote. I can hear Robin now: “Holy Barf Bag Batman! Creosote surely does stink! But we're saving the world! So who cares! To the Batmobile...”

Please remember to keep our troops in your prayers. May God Bless, and keep a song in your heart!

Kal



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