Dear Student:

Your request for information concerning Alexandria-Pineville is appreciated. We hope this publication will meet your needs.

Alexandria and Pineville are at the hub of Central Louisiana, a many-faceted area. Here the rolling hill country to the north and west merges with the flat delta land to the east and south, each retaining its own distinctive history and traditions.

The history of Alexandria-Pineville dates back to the early eighteenth century, to the days of Indians and hardy frontiersmen. Red River was a big factor in settlement of the area.

In this publication you will find something of the history and continuing growth of Alexandria-Pineville. There is also data about the twin-cities of today.

Should you need additional information about some aspect of Alexandria-Pineville, please call on us. We may be able to help.

Available through the Chamber on request is information concerning points of interest to tourists in Alexandria-Pineville and Central Louisiana.

Additional information on Louisiana may be obtained by writing the Louisiana Tourist Development Commission, P. O. Box 44291, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

ALEXANDRIA-PINEVILLE
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
ALEXANDRIA, LOUISIANA
P. O. Box 992
214 Jackson Street
Alexandria-Pineville share a rich and colorful past. Located on opposite banks of Red River, which carves a diagonal slash through the heart of Louisiana, the cities are at almost the exact geographical center of the state.

Alexandria, on the south bank of the river, is the parish seat of Rapides parish.

Earliest records, not fully authenticated, indicate Hernando de Soto and his band were the first white men to explore Central Louisiana, in 1541.

The first white inhabitants, who probably arrived as early as 1690, were Spanish Franciscan missionaries who established a mission in what is now Pineville. Tradition has it that this mission was located within the boundaries of what today is the Rapides Cemetery in Pineville.

When the French under St. Denis ascended the Red River during the early days of the eighteenth century, they ordered the Spanish priests to leave Louisiana and return to Mexico, and the first settlement came to an end.

INFLUX OF TRADERS

It wasn’t long before traders and trappers, many of them French Canadians, began arriving. Trading posts were established in and around Alexandria-Pineville.

Many early settlers stopped along Red River at this point rather than make the portage around the rapids in the river, past which even a canoe could not go for four or five months of the year.

During those early days a ledge of limestone crossed Red River, forming a rapids just above the site of what is now Alexandria-Pineville.

In 1723 or 1724, the French stationed a small detachment of soldiers at the rapids, called "Post du Rapide", and the parish of today had its beginning.

THE FLAG OF SPAIN

Spain took control of the territory in 1766, and the military post was then referred to as "El Rapido".

Under liberal Spanish rule, many people moved into Central Louisiana from the American colonies during the latter part of the century. The original French and Spanish settlers were soon in a minority.

Virginians settled on the upper end of Bayou Rapides or Bayou Jean de Jean near Boyce; Marylanders at the rapids and along the lower section of Bayou Rapides, and South Carolinians in the vicinity of Cheneyville.

Since Red River and its tributaries provided the principal means of transportation, the river-front settlement at what is now Alexandria-Pineville became the focal point for development in the region.

At the time of the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, the population of what is now Alexandria was recorded as 150 whites.

In 1804, the County of Rapides was established by the legislature of the Territory of Orleans. It was designated loosely as the "settlement of Rapide, Avoyelles, Catahoula, Bayou Boeuf, Bayou Robert," and other settlements in the vicinity. Later the legislature put the boundaries in more definite terms, placing within Rapides a part of the present parishes of Grant and Caldwell, all of Catahoula, LaSalle and Avoyelles, and part of Vernon.

The legislature re-divided the state in 1807, creating 19 parishes from what had previously been 12 counties. Louisiana today is the only state in the union with parishes rather than counties.

The official history of Alexandria began in 1805 when Alexander Fulton, a wealthy landowner and merchant who had received a land grant from Spain, surveyed a tract having a front of 13 arpents along the river by a depth of the same amount and subdivided it into 81 squares measuring 213 feet square, each being divided into four lots.

The town was formally laid out for Fulton by Frederick Walter, and was named for Fulton’s daughter.

THE FIRST CHARTER

Alexandria was made the parish seat in 1805. The city received its first charter in 1818 from the state legislature.

Although Pineville was settled earlier than Alexandria, it grew more slowly and was not incorporated until 1878.

Until 1902 there was a problem regarding communications between the two cities. In early days, row boats were the only means of crossing the river which separates Alexandria and Pineville. Later a ferry was installed, propelled by horses walking around a platform treadmill. The first steamboat ferry was put into service in 1849, and a bridge was erected in 1902.

In 1863, during the Civil War, Alexandria was occupied by Gen. N. B. Banks and his Union forces for about two weeks. The following year federal forces occupied the town a second time, and in retreating on May 13, 1866, set fire to the town and almost completely destroyed it.

POST-WAR RECOVERY

Post-Civil War recovery was slow at first. In 1880 the population of Alexandria reached 1,800. By 1890 it had climbed to 2,861 and in 1910 the population was 11,213 and Alexandria was entering an era of prosperity.

Wealth came from the lumber industry and the railroads as well as a growing mercantile system. The golden age of the "sawmill capital of the world" was dawning, with 75 mills operating within 40 miles of the town.

The first World War brought another surge of growth. Camp Beauregard was constructed near the city and thousands of soldiers and their families poured into the area. In 1920 the population was 17,510.

Then the war ended, the post-war boom of the 1920’s came and went, and the depression years settled over the parish.

The process of recovery was slow, but steady. By 1930 Alexandria’s population reached 23,025.

With the approach of America’s entry into the second World War, a new boom began.

In 1940 construction of Esler Field, Camp Claiborne and Camp Livingston was launched, together with the enlargement of Camp Beauregard. Hundreds of thousands of soldiers trained in Rapides parish in the ensuing years, and prosperity blossomed in the area.
The population that year was 27,066.

During the same period, Pineville was also growing. From a population of 540 in 1890, it grew to include 617 persons in 1900, a total of 1,212 in 1910, and by 1940 there were 4,297 persons living in Pineville.

**PERIOD OF GROWTH**

A recession, or even a depression, was predicted for the cities after the end of the war, but failed to materialize. Instead, Alexandria-Pineville entered a period of spectacular economic growth.

The 1950 census showed Alexandria with a population of 34,913 and Pineville with 6,423. Today the two cities have a combined population of more than 60,851.

Alexandria today is governed by a city council consisting of the mayor, who is also commissioner of public health and safety, and a commissioner of finance and utilities and a commissioner of streets and parks. Each is elected for a four-year term.

**APPOINTED OFFICIALS**

A city attorney, assistant city attorney, city auditor and city physician are appointed by the council for terms running concurrently with those of the councilmen.

Other municipal officials -- including the secretary-treasurer, city engineer, fire and police chiefs and superintendents of public utilities -- are appointed by the council subject to civil service regulations.

Ordinances, resolutions and the annual budget are adopted by majority vote of the council members.

Pineville is governed by a mayor and a five-member board of aldermen. The mayor and aldermen serve for terms of four years.

For the parish, the governing body is the Rapides Parish Police Jury. It consists of 16 members, each elected for a four-year term. Members elect a president from their ranks and appoint a secretary-treasurer (not from their group).

**NAMED BY THE JURY**

The police jury appoints the civil defense director for the parish, the registrar of voters, the parish library board and parish members of water district and drainage district boards.

Parish officials elected for a term of four years, in addition to police jurors, include the sheriff, the clerk of court and the assessor. Members of the parish school board are elected for six-year terms and by majority vote select a parish superintendent of schools.

A substantial number of federal and state agencies are headquartered in Alexandria-Pineville, partly because of the strategic location at the center of the state.

One of the largest installations is England Air Force Base, situated just northwest of the Alexandria-Pineville urban area.

**STABLE ECONOMY**

Expenditures of these installations and institutions is a strong stabilizing factor in the economy of the area.

Rapides is largely an agricultural parish. Principal crops are cotton, corn, hay, soybeans and sugar cane. Beef cattle and dairy production also play an important role.

More than 100 manufacturers are located in the Alexandria-Pineville area. Among the principal manufacturing industries are lumber milling, wood working, production of cottonseed oil, cotton ginning and production of food and kindred products.

**RAW MATERIALS**

Available nearby are almost limitless sources of sulphur, salt, petrochemicals, standard basic chemicals and many intermediates.

Alexandria-Pineville is also the key retail and service outlet for a trade area including more than 350,000 persons.

The area around Alexandria-Pineville abounds in sites of historic significance.

Fort Buhlow, on the Pineville side of Red River near the O.K. Allen bridge, was constructed during the Civil War to repel an anticipated third invasion by Union troops, but was never used. It has now become a favorite picnic area. Adjacent Lake Buhlow, established in recent years by an earthen dam on Rocky Bayou, is a popular spot for boating, swimming, water skiing and fishing.

Louisiana State University had its beginning just north of Lake Buhlow at the site of the old Louisiana State Seminary of Learning. The seminary opened January 2, 1860, with William Tecumseh Sherman as its first president.
TRANSPORTATION

A network of transportation facilities spread from Alexandria-Pineville like spokes from a wheel.

HIGHWAYS – Alexandria-Pineville are served by U.S. Highways 65, 71, 165, 167 and 171 with numerous other hard-surfaced highways lacing the entire trade area.

AIR – Esler Field is Alexandria-Pineville’s commercial airport. Two major airlines serve the area with flights daily radiating in all directions. The Buhlow Lake Airport offers accommodations for light planes.

BUS – Alexandria is the home of the Continental Trailways Southern Lines bus system which, through various connections, provides service to all sections of the U.S.

RAIL – Five major railroads serve Alexandria-Pineville – Texas and Pacific, Missouri Pacific, Rock Island, Southern Pacific and KCS-L&A – offering service to any part of the country.

TRUCK LINES – 8 major freight lines maintain terminals and provide daily motor freight service to points throughout the nation.

RECREATION

Alexandria’s 100-acre city park provides tennis courts, baseball and softball fields, golf course, zoo, children’s rides, large playgrounds, picnic areas and municipal swimming pool. Pineville also has a large city park with swimming pools and picnic facilities. Both cities have community centers and are within easy access of countless fishing, boating and hunting areas.

MEDICAL FACILITIES

Alexandria-Pineville has become a major medical center, with 141 doctors of medicine and 23 doctors of dentistry representing all major medical and surgical specialties. There are 6 hospitals in the immediate area with a combined bed capacity of 1,400. Central Louisiana State Hospital, in Pineville, has an additional 3,200 beds.

TRADE AREA

The Alexandria Trade Area, as defined by the Department of Commerce, is comprised of 12 parishes with a population of 354,300 and with retail sales of $250,852,500 in 1960, an increase of 18 percent over 1955.

AGENCIES and INSTITUTIONS

25 federal and 19 state agencies and institutions maintain regional and/or statewide headquarters in Alexandria-Pineville. There are also 3 private institutions, making a total of 47 with a combined annual payroll of over $30,000,000 and total local expenditures of approximately $50,000,000.

MILITARY

England Air Force Base, located 6 miles northwest of Alexandria-Pineville, is the home of the 1st Air Commando Wing.

ALSO OF INTEREST

CLIMATE – Mean average temperature, 67.8°, from average annual high in July of 83.1° to average monthly low in January of 51.9°.

HOTELS – 3, with a total of 400 rooms.

MOTELS – 17, with a total of 850 units.

CHURCHES – 87 representing 17 denominations.

CIVIC-CULTURE – 113 civic organizations including all major luncheon clubs, Service League, garden clubs, YWCA and YMCA, Community Concert Association, Little Theatre, Art League, Matinee Musical Club, and related organizations.

CHAMBER of COMMERCE
of the Alexandria-Pineville Area, Inc.
P. O. Box 992 Alexandria, La.