Swimmin' at 'La Pompe a Ris'

La Pompe a Ris (The Rice Pump) is almost a rarity on the Bayou Teche these days, but at one time the rice pumps were many and useful in the pumping of water from the slow moving Teche stream into the rice fields of the Cajun farmers. The Teche country is not a rice growing area, it is mostly cotton, corn and cane, but some landlords did try to grow rice and some succeeded, thus giving rise to the historic old Pompe a Ris.

This particular pump, a mile from Breaux Bridge, belonged to A.B. Whitlow, a local department store owner, and was run by the then, young mechanic Royal "Pou Pou" Castille. We kids would hear the pump start off when the wind was blowing towards town in late March, after the rice had been sown.

Then, with our homemade swim trunks, we would take off on foot or on bikes to the Pompe a Ris, to admit, were a happy lot. With this as the excursion fare for a train trip to New Orleans, with Uncles and Aunts of our 1910 generation would leave Breaux Bridge equipped with the clothes on their backs, for a one or two day trip to the city.

The water flowed from the Bayou Teche down a wooden trough and poured into a mile long canal which was deep enough and wide enough for all of us to swim and bathe. Oh you kid! Those were the swimmin' days.

Old Guard Cajuns

The Old Guard Cajuns, who are now dying out faster than we care to admit, were a happy lot. With the excursion fare for a train trip to New Orleans, with Uncles and Aunts of our 1910 generation would leave Breaux Bridge equipped with the clothes on their backs, for a one or two day trip to the city.

The train was slow but they were in no hurry.

What sort of conveniences the ancestors had on these trains, we don't know. But one thing was certain, they could buy an entire bunch of bananas for 10 or 15 cents, eat some on the way back home, and still have 2/3 of the BUNCH left for the family at home.

Our swimming suits were made from old pairs of pants cut off by scissors, and worn without tops. The girls had better swimming suits, and the old timers, had taffeta suits with bloomer like effects, as those worn by Alice Broussard and Rita (Guidry) Roy. One day the taffeta tore from age and the water formed a sort of balloon out of one of the of the girl's suit. There she was with her rear exposed to the crowd of teenagers, but no one dared to tell her, for fear of being embarrassed.

At any rate, it was the best place to go swimming, in fact, the only swimming pool for rich or poor kids. Certain off days were given to the colored kids...