Bayou Named For Big Snake

By HILDA GALLASERO

There have been handed down to us a number of interesting Indian legends concerning this area. One of them tells how Bayou Teche got its name.

It is said that in the early 17th century, on the banks of the bayou, its great size, poisonous breath, and the great lashing of its tail, when angry, struck terror in the hearts of all the braves of the countrywide. Finally, a great body of warriors assembled to kill the reptile. It was some time, however, before they could gain enough courage to approach the monstrous snake. At last it was clobbered and fatally wounded by its body pierced with many arrows.

To commemorate their victory, the Indians named the stream “tenche” or “Teche” meaning snake.

St. Martinville

A true lady is said to grow old gracefully, her years settling becomingly upon her. If this is so, then St. Martinville is a true lady. For she sits serenely upon the banks of the Teche, seemingly unconcerned with worldly affairs and frustrations.

For more than 75 years the population of St. Martinville remained the same. Few people came. Hardly any left. Except those who were taken down to the cemetery, of course.

The little town is one of the more historic places in southwest Louisiana, and her history is more than that of the Acadians alone. In the 1750s her location was a French Trading post and was referred to as Poste des Attakapas — named for the Indians of that region.

St. Martinville was admitted to the Union in 1812.

St. Martin de Tours

One of the oldest churches in the United States is St. Martinville’s St. Martin de Tours. Established in 1765, this serene old church still uses the marble baptismal font donated by Louis XVI. Above the altar is the painting of St. Martin and the beggar boy, done by Jean Francis Mouchet.

In the left wing of the church is a reproduction of the Grotto of Lourdes in France. Built in 1883 by a parishioner and composed of Spanish moss, it was his thanks for answered prayers.

Behind the church is a statue of Longfellow’s Evangeline marking the grave of Emmaline Labiche. Cast in bronze now, this Acadian heroine sits quietly — patiently waiting on the banks of the Teche.

At the foot of a street not far away is the Evangeline Oak, under which Emmaline Labiche (Evangeline) is said to have found her long lost lover.

Also in St. Martinville there is the Longfellow Evangeline Memorial Park with its Acadian House Museum. This museum is a handsome, two and a half story structure with heavy columns on the ground floor. Louis Arceau — the lover who did not wait — once resided here.

Catahoula Lake

Catahoula Lake, located near St. Martinville was, to the Indians, a sacred body of water, their sins. Beneath its clear, in their language, the word Catahoula meant sacrifice.

Under the live oaks standing on the high banks of this clear lake, the Indians used to gather to offer up to the great spirit their sacrifice in propitiation of pure waters they plunged, to be cleansed of all impurities.