DOWN THE BAYOU

Bienville and His Brother Traced This Historic Path

By CLAIRE PUNEKY

DONALDSONVILLE, La. — Every year has its anniversaries recalling deeds and those who performed them. Waning 1974 has had its share of these, including two major events in the life of Jean Baptiste le Moyne, Sieur de Bienville and the colony he cultivated and loved.

It was 275 years ago, in 1699, that Bienville and his brother, Pierre le Moyne, Sieur d'Iberville, caught their first glimpse of the bayou that has come to be known as Lafourche at its meeting place here with the Mississippi River.

History records that, at the bidding of Iberville, Bienville and 10 fellow Canadians explored the bayou, visiting villages of the Chitimaches Indians. The stream, which became known as "The Fork of the Chitimaches," is today known only as "The Fork" (Lafourche).

A second Bienville anniversary tied to this year of 1974 was a 25th for him and a 250th for history. It was in 1724, a quarter-century after his eventful exploring expedition along Bayou Lafourche and other streams along the Mississippi river, that France recalled him.

He had served the new colony as governor from 1701 to 1713, from 1716 to 1717 in an acting capacity and from 1718 to 1724, when he was ordered to France to answer accusations made by personal enemies. The recall resulted in his dismissal, but in 1733 he again was at the helm of the colony, remaining in that post until 1743.

To justify his conduct which brought about the 1724 recall, he presented a memoir of his services on arrival in France. It read in part:

"It is not without trouble that I became absolute master of so many nations with such barbarous tempers and different characters. One can imagine how many difficulties I encountered and what risks I ran to found the colony and maintain it to the present time."

He outlined his means of communication, noting that "I first strove to qualify myself to govern without the aid of an interpreter. I applied myself to learn the language which appeared to me to be the dominant one among the savages, the knowledge of which would help me in learning the others."

He went on to relate that he was fortunate from the first in gaining "the confidence and friendship of the savages. I studied their customs in order to retain them in peace, one with the other," he declared, calling himself "the arbiter of their differences."

Said Bienville, "I always governed these nations born in independence, so to speak — despotically, pushing my authority even to the deposing of their chiefs."

He stated to those who had recalled him that establishment of the colony was due to the constancy with which he had attached himself to it without being out of it since he discovered it with his brother Iberville.

He was 21 years old when he first became governor of Louisiana in 1701 and 68 when he died in Paris on March 7, 1768.}

THE 250th ANNIVERSARY of the discovery of Bayou Lafourche is being observed this year. The bayou, a lifeline for South Louisiana, was first seen in 1699 by Jean Baptiste le Moyne, Sieur de Bienville, and his brother, Pierre le Moyne, Sieur d'Iberville. Bayou Lafourche, now a thriving waterway and lined with residences along its winding course, is pictured above, combining both the beauty which Bienville and Iberville glimpsed and the additions brought about by time. The setting is on the bayou in the Lockport area.