WELCOME

to the Judge L. H. Perez Memorial Park

YOUR visit to the Park begins at the Museum, itself of historic significance. It was the boyhood home of the Judge, moved to this location from Ollie across the road. You will find the Museum a storehouse of Judge Perez and Plaquemines memorabilia, with entrance to the Park down its front steps. All of this magnificent tribute to a great man dedicated to the people of Plaquemines Parish, Louisiana, and the United States, was built at a cost of about $1,000,000 raised through contributions from the many friends of the late Judge and Mrs. L. H. Perez and the Parish of Plaquemines. The statue, lagoon, and plaques, along with the Museum, are of great educational benefit and reminders of the unique historic significance of Plaquemines Parish and its people. Enjoy your visit to the Judge L. H. Perez Memorial Park. It is located 10 miles down the road from Belle Chasse.

Dedicated July 16, 1977, with the Honorable James O. Eastland, President Pro Tempore of the U.S. Senate from Mississippi, and the Honorable F. Edward Hebert, Chairman of the Armed Services Committee of the U.S. House of Representatives from the First Congressional District in Louisiana, which includes Plaquemines Parish, both longtime friends of the Judge, making the principal addresses.

A feature attraction of the program was the unveiling of the heroic sized statue of Judge Perez — shown on the cover — by his four children, and his children’s children. The statue is the work of the nationally famous sculptor, Donald De Lue of Leonardo, New Jersey. The plaques were written and illustrated by John Chase, distinguished Louisiana historian and cartoonist.

Numbers on the map above indicate locations of the 16 historical markers alongside the walkway around the lagoon, shaped to match the configuration of the River through the Parish.
THE PLAQUES

WHEN these sixteen markers were in the planning stage, a major problem presented itself. How could a few words and a cartoon, all each plaque would accommodate, possibly do credit to the 16 places they marked?

The answer is they couldn’t. But what they do is provide 16 chapter headings to a longer story this fascinating Delta has to tell. With Plaquemines’ enviable position at the mouth of the world’s richest river valley, the Parish is matchless among other Gulf Coast regions in its historical past and the boundless potential of its future. Those acquainted with Judge Perez know he was aware of this, and that for half a century he was similarly matchless in preserving that fabulous past and promoting the Delta’s natural advantages to best serve the people who inhabit it.

Perhaps, then, it is just as well that these plaques, with their capsuled comments, go no further than simply to pinpoint. That is probably what the planners of the Judge’s park had in mind from the beginning, and it’s a pretty safe bet that would have been the Judge’s point of view as well. It is hard to imagine him not agreeing that his fifty long years of leadership provided but a head start, albeit a giant-sized step forward, but it will remain for the energies of each succeeding generation to reap the continuing harvests of their bountiful legacy in the years and years to come.

Many have contributed to these “pages of Parish history.” Much research was done, many older residents interviewed for their rich recollections. The Memorial Park commission was at all times an enormous factor as the work progressed.

Now that they are all done, and the plaques all placed in the Park, if these enduring bronze “pages” make any contribution in reminding Plaquemines folks of today and the tomorrows of all they’ve got going for them — well, they will have added to what this Park honoring Judge Perez is all about.

...Pages of Parish History
BELLE CHASSE RINGS THE BELL...

Gateway to the parish's populous west bank via four-lane Highway 23, Belle Chasse is also Plaquemines' largest community and has been industrially important since the Intracoastal Canal came in 1958. Its Calender Field during World War II was used by Navy bombers to stalk Nazi subs in the Gulf of Mexico. Indeed, Belle Chasse rings the bell in more ways than one. Since it began in 1808 as Col. Joseph Degoutin Bellechasse's plantation, even its name has grown into two words. In 1844 it became the plantation home of Judah P. Benjamin, one of America's great legal minds... and a Secretary... of the Confederacy. Four years later, Benjamin had the great plantation bell cast, tossing 200 silver dollars into the molten metal "to sweeten its tone." Even sweeter has been the solid growth of Belle Chasse since the parish administration of the Judge began in 1919.

A STAR IS BORN

At a plantation appropriately called Star, a seventh child was born to Roselius and Gertrude Solis Perez, both descendants of old-time Lower Delta planter families. On July 16, 1891 the stork brought Leander Henry Perez who would grow up to star in constitutional law, and in a fifty-year star-studded dedication to the people of Plaquemines. He was six when his father moved the family to Ollie. Lêlé, as he was affectionately called, went away to Holy Cross College, LSU and Tulane... He regarded Ollie as his home until he married Agnes Chalin in 1917. There were other houses—at Pointe à la Hache and Promised Land—but Idlewild, their last—they loved best. They're still together there in a quiet chapel on its grounds. Judge Perez died March 19, 1969, his beloved Agnes preceeding him in death but two years.
PARISH SUPERDOMES

PLAQUEMINES has been famous for its many Superdomes since 1931 when the first producing oil well was brought in on the Lake Washington salt dome. During the following fifty years these super salt domes produced over two hundred million barrels of crude oil, twenty million barrels of condensate, and over six hundred billion cubic feet of gas. All this, plus sulphur, to make Port Sulphur the World's largest sulphur port. The mineral industry became the backbone of the economy of the Parish providing thousands of jobs and millions in payroll. These great super salt domes—onshore and offshore—make Plaquemines mineral riches exceed that of any of the 64 Louisiana parishes and represents more than one-fourth of the state's mineral production. On July 4, 1968, at Fort Jackson, all the industries of the Parish paid special tribute to the Judge for his many years of cooperation.

If oysters could talk—
they would yell...

HOORAY FOR

EMPIRE

"HOORAY," too, for the Slavonians who remembered oyster cultivation in the Old Country, and carried the art further in Plaquemines. The map locates (A) the natural reefs on the East Bank where oysters are seeded, and (B) the Bay Adams—Bayou Cook area; where, the tireless Slavs found, skinny seed oysters best matured into those famed gourmet delights called generically "Bayou Cook Oysters." So they brought them there. Before 1900, a more convenient route—that's (C) on the map—was opened. Capt. M. P. Doullut developed the Empire and Ostrica locks on each side of the river, with their connecting canals back to (A) and (B). So a "hooray" for the Captain—and another for Judge Perez. In 1936, he persuaded the State to buy the two locking systems and make them free, thus further benefiting oystermen as well as countless fishermen the area now attracted. Empire was called "Doullut's Post Office" in the beginning. Legend tells us it got its name from one of the first gasoline launches, the EMPIRE, that towed oyster boats past the town so many years.
LEGEND HAS IT WHEN SEVEN BURAS BROTHERS LIVED HERE . . .

BURAS

BURAS became the name of this place, especially after they all married Delta girls. Later, when large families grew up and sought mates, further union of the ethnic groups—Slavonian, German, Spanish—which characterized early Parish settlement, resulted. Steady growth of Buras soon warranted establishing Plaquemines' second Catholic church, uniquely named "Our Lady of Good Harbor." In 1864, its first two christenings record babies named Buras and Zibilich. At this time, too, the fertile soil of the area beckoned many a Buras fishermen, and the Parish's widely acclaimed citrus industry had its beginning. Buras had become Plaquemines' second largest community, for the most part residential and a shopping center for Deep Delta folks still engaged in fishing and agriculture, as well as the thriving minerals industry.

No. 5

FORT JACKSON

Following the Battle of New Orleans January 8, 1815 when Andrew Jackson became a national hero, he urged building a second fort at Plaquemines Bend. In 1832, at a cost of $554,500 and ten years work this fort named for him stood ready with its 20-foot walls and 69 guns to bolster the defenses of New Orleans. Although named for a general who won his battles, in 1862 Fort Jackson lost the only one in which it was engaged, trying to stop Farragut's steam warships from coming upriver en route to capture New Orleans. Plaquemines Parish Commission Council headed by Judge Perez commenced restoration of the fort and its 81 acre grounds as a historical and recreational area for the people of the Parish—and at costs considerably greater than what the U.S. government paid to build it in 1832. Since 1970, Plaquemines' popular Fair & Orange Festival has been held here.

No. 6

ALSO, convenient to visit alongside Fort Jackson towers a gleaming white 60-foot monument to LaSalle, who discovered the mouth of the Mississippi in 1682 and named all its huge valley "Louisiana." The Plaquemines Parish Commission Council dedicated the monument April 9, 1967, exactly 285 years after LaSalle made this history. Then, on March 3, 1972, the Council dedicated a nearby plaque marking historic "Bayou Mardi Gras" at Fort St. Philip across the river. This dedication was made 273 years after Iberville's party camped at the bayou in 1699. He named the bayou because they did. It is the first place name of other than Indian origin in all the valley LaSalle named Louisiana in 1682.
Early maps show a thin spit of land between present-day Venice on the River with the Gulf behind it. Before the locks and canals at Empire tied together the East and West banks of the river, all the fishermen, oystermen, hunters and trappers came this way. They all “jumped” boats over the spit—as we see here. In time Ol’ Man River literally spit away the spit of land, forming Grand Pass. An early settlement here, first called “The Jump” was named Venice in 1892, some say because they all stood up in their boats to pole them much like Venetian gondoliers. But however dim may be accounts of Venice long ago, its recent history has been shiny bright. Here at the end of double-laned Highway 23, it has become the bustling port of supply for countless rigs in Plaquemines’ fabulous offshore oil industry. The area still remains a Sportsman’s Paradise, with a boundless variety of game and fishes. This was a favorite neighborhood of the Judge.

UNCLE SAM failed to lay claim to Louisiana’s tidelands for almost 150 years, but after several oil fields were discovered offshore he decided to sue Louisiana in the U.S. Supreme Court. Litigation that followed was defended by Judge Perez, an outstanding constitutional lawyer. It was probably the Judge’s greatest single public service, not only for the people of Plaquemines, but all Louisiana. Look at the map. Under the U.S. Constitution, when Louisiana was admitted to the Union in 1812—the Judge pointed out—its gulfward boundary was fixed at three marine leagues from its coast as established in 1807 by the U.S. Treasury. Washington bureaucrats wailed and raged, calling the boundary “Leander’s meander.” After the Judge’s death, Uncle Sam finally prevailed, and Louisiana lost billions in revenue and its state’s rights over the tidelands.
ALWAYS THE RIVER

Not accidentally is the Judge pictured in his Park facing the lagoon. It is modeled, as you see, to resemble the River through the Parish, where Ol' Man River's waters swing their last 100 of 15,000 navigable miles of a great river system. Annually, fourteen trillion cubic feet of these restless waters flow through this community, with the shipping of the nation's second seaport afloat—of which Plaquemines is the seaward estuary. Oh, yes, for the fifty years of his leadership, the Judge kept a wary eye on unpredictable Ol' Man River. Cooperation with Federal services to keep him in his bed was routine. Early in his administration he replaced a rickety wooden ferry at Pointe-a-la-Hache with a steel hull craft to provide 18 hour free service, then added another at Belle Chasse in 1959. There's always a river, the people of the Parish know, and since the Judge's time there has always been a way to get across it.

J THERE HAVE BEEN FIVE... and if you count Pilottown—where river-wise pilots, with the cooperation of U. S. Engineers and Coast Guardsmen—carry on the struggle to make Ol' Man River keep his mouth open to commerce—there have been six Balizes, a name meaning "beacon" or "lighthouse." The colonial ones—Nos. 1 and 2—lasted 130 years, until Northeast Pass grew shallow and ships grew bigger. No. 3 was the way in during Civil War Times, and Admiral Farragut had more trouble coming up Southwest Pass than he had passing Forts Jackson and St. Philip. In 1876, Capt. Eads' jetties made narrow South Pass—No. 4—the way into the river and it remained the main channel for 33 years, until jetties installed in wider Southwest Pass—No. 5—made it the entrance beginning in 1909. Plaquemines' historic lower delta remains a battleground between Man and Ol' Man River. No beacon, or Balize, will ever likely sign an armistice in the fray.

OL' MAN RIVER IS RIGHT...
Every year the Mississippi also brings 670 billion tons of silt—rich American topsoil—which he began depositing a thousand years ago and today comprises the fertile acres of the Plaquemines peninsula. Thank you, America!
The name Plaquemines comes from "Piaxemines," the Indians' name for persimmon trees that grew at this bend in the river, which the French fortified in 1741 to defend the city named for Philip, Duke of Orleans. The fort is named for the patron saint of the Duke, and none can say the saint hasn't watched out for his fort. In more than 200 years, the fort has weathered over 1,000 shells the English shot at it in 1809, plus its share of the 15,800 cannon balls Farragut's Yankee ships blasted at it and neighboring Fort Jackson in 1862. In both engagements the number of Fort St. Philip's defenders totaled only ten men killed. In its early days, with the help of Ol' Man River's 4 m.p.h. current and his winding ways, square-masted sailing warships were sitting ducks for the fort. The English couldn't pass to win the Battle of New Orleans in 1809, but 53 years later Farragut's steam driven ships did. The fighting days of historic Fort St. Philip at Plaquemines Bend, which has provided the Parish with its name, are over. In 1961, the U.S. Dept. of the Interior declared it a national historical site. It is surely that
In colonial times Plaquemines Parish was the frontier guarding the vast Mississippi River Valley. Iberville realized this in 1699 when an English ship came trespassing up the river. (See the English Turn Plaque.) He ordered de la Boulaye—the first of the Parish’s six forts built—to become the first settlement on the river south of Illinois. The fort’s site is nearest present-day Phoenix, so named when it was the plantation of Edward Livingston, famous American lawyer and statesman. Here he wrote “A System of Penal Law,” basis for the penal code of Louisiana and many other states. But a fire in his study destroyed the first copy, whereupon Livingston spent two years rewriting it. “Like Phoenix of old,” it was said then, “it rose from the ashes.” Livingston left Phoenix to spend years in Congress representing Louisiana as Congressman and Senator. Later, President Andrew Jackson appointed him Secretary of State and then U.S. Ambassador to France.

In 1717, seeking investors and colonists, promoter John Law called the two million square miles of the Louisiana Province “Promised Land.” Somehow the huge Chacuachas Indian Concession, which stretched for two and a half miles along the River south of English Turn, retained that name—in part, anyway—when in 1836 it was carved into three plantations called Mary, Stella, and Promised Land. Nearly a hundred years later a young Leander Perez, recently named Judge, and his wife, Agnes, bought this house on Promised Land Plantation. Here the devoted couple reared their four children. Their lives were fulfilled in this land of promise during the forty years it was the family home. But the shouts of children did not cease. Having moved to Idlewild in 1966, they made their former home available for a school—the Promised Land Academy.
ENGLISH TURN

received its name in 1699 when the canoes of 17-year-old Bienville and his five men encountered a stalled British corvette at this deceptive river bend. “Turn back. Our many settlements and gunboats upriver make this area French,” he bluffed... The English did turn about and left the river, although Bienville and his men were the only Frenchmen nearby.... Until steam replaced sail, English Turn continued a navigational headache. Often, New Orleans bound ships unloaded here and wagons brought their cargoes on to the city... After 1900, prospering truck farms of newly settled Italians lined both sides of the river near English Turn. The area has long boasted the finest of creole tomatoes, another Plaquemines Parish industry developed during the Judge’s tenure.

TOGETHERNESS

They are two of the original 19 Louisiana parishes carved in 1807. Not only geographically, but sociologically, economically, historically and politically there has always been “togetherness” between them. One of the best illustrations of this was the life and career of Judge Perez, whose mother was a native of St. Bernard and his father of Plaquemines. Although Plaquemines born, young Leander’s career began in 1919, when Gov. Pleasant appointed him to an unexpired term as judge of the 25th Judicial District, which was then comprised of Plaquemines and St. Bernard parishes. After election to another full term, in 1924, Judge Perez began 36 years as the consecutively elected district attorney. All this time the “Judge” — he continued to be called all his life — was legal advisor to countless public bodies in both parishes. The central figure in the parish government of each, he brought abundant prestige to both through his many legal achievements on state and national levels. Small wonder, following his death, the people of St. Bernard renamed their main street “Judge Perez Drive.”
HERE, in summary, are dates in the life of the Judge, who was born July 16, 1891 at Ollie, and died March 19, 1969 at his Idlewild Ranch, six miles below Belle Chasse. He was one of eleven children of Roselius Eloi and Gertrude Solis Perez.

EDUCATION. He received his elementary education in a one-room school at Ollie, where Mrs. Edwige Switzer — his sister — was teacher. Holy Cross College in New Orleans was his high school following which he enrolled at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, where he received his B.A. degree in 1912. Two years later he earned his L.L.B. at Tulane University Law School.

OCCUPATION. In 1914, he opened a law office serving primarily Plaquemines, St. Bernard, and Orleans Parishes.

MILITARY SERVICE. During World War I, the Judge served his country in the United States Army.

FAMILY. He married Agnes Octavia Chalin May 12, 1917. Children born to this union are: Joyce (Mrs. Chester P. Gelpi), Leander H. Perez, Jr., Chalin Octave Perez, and Betty Ann (Mrs. Richard J. Carrere). As of 1977, there were 19 grandchildren, 11 great grandchildren.

PUBLIC OFFICE. He was appointed by Gov. Ruffin G. Pleasant on December 9, 1919 to serve as judge for the 25th Judicial District (then the 29th Judicial District) consisting of Plaquemines and St. Bernard Parishes.

In 1920, he was elected to succeed himself for a six-year term.

In 1924, he was elected District Attorney for Plaquemines and St. Bernard Parishes, then reelected for six consecutive terms. As district attorney, he was legal advisor of the Police Juries, as well as other public bodies of the two parishes.

In 1960-61, the Judge authored the charter for Plaquemines Parish, which was adopted by the voters May 16, 1961. This election changed the governing body of the parish from a Police Jury to a Commission Council.


Judge Perez was a life-long Democrat of the conservative Jeffersonian breed. An outspoken advocate of states’ rights and local self-government, he devoted more than fifty years of his productive life to the people of the parish, state, and nation. This Park serves as a reminder of his distinguished stewardship.
THE PARISH FLAG

As adopted by the Plaquemines Parish Commission Parish Council on February 15, 1978, Plaquemines' official flag was raised for the first time on June 14, 1978 over the Judge L. H. Perez Memorial Park.

With its green delta the color of growth, and the white of purity separating its double delta from the three broad bars of red, golden yellow and blue — symbolic of courage, honor and piety respectively — the flag also has great historic significance. When it waves in the Gulf breezes of the Parish, the colors of six national flags that have flown over Plaquemines Parish are unfurled.

First of these historic visitors to the Delta was Cabeza de Vaca, leading a handful of survivors of the ill-fated Narvaez expedition of 1528-36 back to Mexico. Only Cabeza and one other made it. A few years later more survivors of the no less ill-fated 1539-42 expedition of Hernando De Soto passed downriver through Plaquemines, again on route to the safety of Mexico.

These two bands, carrying the Spanish banner of Castile and Leon, were second only to Ponce de Leon's 1513 Florida trip among Europeans to explore North America.

A little less tragic were the first to bring the lily flag of Bourbon France into Plaquemines — LaSalle in 1682 and Iberville in 1699. Also different from the earlier Spaniards, they left names. At the river's mouth in the Parish, LaSalle proclaimed the name of all the Mississippi River valley would be "Louisiana." Iberville

left "Bayou Mardi Gras," his first encampment in Plaquemines — the first European name south of Illinois.

Antonio de Ulloa y de la Torre Guiral was named first Spanish governor in 1765, but didn't get around to raising the flag of Bourbon Spain until January 20, 1767. He unfurled it at the Balize, where he spent most of his time as governor of Louisiana.

Thirty-five years later the tri-color of Napoleon's France replaced it, but only until December 20, in 1803, when Louisiana was formally transferred to the United States following its purchase from Napoleon. The red, white and blue Star Spangled Banner has flown over the Parish from that day on.

But there was one intermission. On January 6, 1861, Louisiana seceded from the Union and joined the Confederacy. Then, a year and three months later, Farragut's steam warships stormed past Forts Jackson and St. Philip to capture New Orleans. On April 28, 1862, the Stars and Bars — also red, white and blue — were lowered over the Plaquemines forts.

In particular and in conclusion, we might refer you to Plaque No. 15. Had it not been for the quick wits of 17-year-old Bienvile in 1699, yet another national flag might have flown over Plaquemines.

But the English turned, and the British Union Jack never made it ashore, although the Parish flag even includes its red, white and blue among its colors.
The Judge’s monogram on the plaques is of his own design.