CHURCH POINT — There's a difference between Cajun music and Acadian music. And that difference forms the foundation upon which the Acadian Music Heritage Association hopes to build a museum.

In the eyes of the association's founders, Cajun French music is a derivative of the original Acadian music. Cajun music, in turn, has spawned many other forms of music.

"We formed the Acadian Music Heritage Association for the simple fact that there is no organization that would promote Cajun French, zydeco, zyde-Cajun, swamp pop and other forms of music which have been derived from the original Acadian style," explains Todd Richard, member of the AMHA board of directors.

Richard credits Amadee Ardoin with popularizing French-Acadian music in the 1920's.

"When the Acadians first came over here, they brought their music down here. Then you had influence from your black population, influence from the Germans — which brought on the accordion — and many other influences," says Richard.

This 19th century Acadian home, located in Branch, will be renovated and moved to Church Point where it will be utilized as an entrance to the new Cajun Music Museum there.
Richard. "From there, the music has grown into traditional Cajun music, progressive Cajun music, zydeco, zyde-Cajun and what we called 'swamp pop' a few years ago.

"It's everything that started with that original Acadian music, which is the roots, that we're trying, not so much to define, but to represent," Richard continues. "We want to be able to represent all the different branches that have come from it, not excluding anyone."

That's the difference between the Acadian Music Heritage Association and the Cajun French Music Association.

"CFMA is a very good organization," says Richard. "It has done a lot for the music industry, as far as traditional Cajun music is concerned. But we saw the need for our organization to represent artists not represented by CFMA."

Richard acknowledges that CFMA had the original idea for a museum. "They wanted to open up a Cajun Music Hall of Fame, but CFMA represents strictly traditional Cajun music," Richard explains. "We didn't want to be categorized with just 'traditional Cajun' music because you have a lot of zyde-Cajun that's coming out now. It's known as 'nouveau Cajun' with bands like Jambalaya and other bands from around here performing it.

"That's where we got in conflict," Richard continues. "Like I said, CFMA is strictly traditional Cajun music and there's nothing wrong with that — but we didn't want to limit ourselves to just that. We wanted to give a voice to zydeco and to the other (styles) not represented by CFMA."

And the musicians are supporting the idea.

"We went and spoke to all the musicians that we know of — from the best-known to the least-known — from all the different branches," says Richard, "and all the artists supported Church Point as the site for this (Acadian music) museum and this organization to represent them."

AMHA is in its second year of existence, and Richard and other members have been active in promoting Church Point and the concept of an Acadian music museum.

"We got legislation passed which named Church Point as the official site for the Acadian Music Heritage museum," explains Richard. "We also had legislation passed naming Church Point as the official 'Home of Cajun Music' because so many musicians have come from here."

Accepting that the Acadiana area has bred a number of great musicians, Richard notes, "Church Point has had a great influence on Cajun music because of all the people that came from here. There are other greats from around the area, but so much came from right here."

Richard explains that the organization currently has a building to use as a "beginning" for a permanent museum.

"It's an early 19th century Acadian-style home and it was donated to the organization by Carrol Smith," says Richard. "We hope to renovate the house and use it as an entrance into an Acadian music 'complex,' but that's long-term."

The immediate problem is that the building is now located in Branch and must be moved soon or it could be lost.

"It's on the property of a store in Branch and the store owners have plans to expand," Richard explains. "We have to get the land for the building and get it moved. If we don't raise funds, we could lose the house."

The organization is tentatively planning two major fund-raisers in the coming months.

"Naturally, we'll have one in Church Point, and possibly, one in Lafayette," says Richard. "At these functions, we'll showcase the different varieties of musicians from this area. A bunch of them have agreed to play for us for the benefit of the organization."

Looking to the future, Richard hopes to see the museum as a local attraction.

"After we get the museum open, we want to start possibly having workshops, or music shops," he says. "We'll showcase a particular artist each month and, hopefully, be able to showcase as many artists as we have around."

A number of exhibits is already planned for the museum also.

"We've had people like the families of Iry LeJeune, that wanted to give us artifacts, you know, like their first records, or accordions and fiddles, that we can display in the museum," Richard said. "It's going to be a kind of a cultural-type center — that's where the term 'heritage' comes in."

But Richard admits that those are long-range plans. For now, the organization is focusing on increasing membership.

"In order to be 'physical' we need membership," he says. "In the past, we worried more about getting a band together and getting a store, now we want to concentrate on membership, that's what makes an organization strong."

And even if they can't raise the necessary funds and the house is lost, Richard feels confident that this organization will prosper.

"Sure, it would be a setback (losing the house), but it wouldn't be the end," he says. "As long as there's a need to promote and preserve this music and this culture, there will always be a need to preserve the culture — we will grow."

Anyone wishing more information concerning the Acadian Music Heritage Museum may contact Richard at P.O. Box 214, Church Point, 70525, or call him at 684-6006 or the Chamber of Commerce at 684-3030.