Catholic churches and cemeteries are vital, interesting part of historical Acadiana

The religious undertones of this area are as thick as the French heritage Acadiana is known for. Many of the folktales, festivals, and traditions were heavily influenced by the religious beliefs of the settlers. Some of their churches in which they worshiped are still around today. They are full of history as well as beautiful. One cannot tour historical sites of Acadiana without visiting some of these historical religious attractions.

A number of interesting Catholic churches are located in south central Louisiana. Pre-eminent among these of course is the Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist in Lafayette. Completed in 1916, its colorful red brick with white trim exterior quickly attracts the eye of the visitor.

In St. Martinville, St. Martin de Tours Church has been in continuous use since 1831, probably the oldest Catholic church in continuous use in the state of Louisiana. Although the church has been renovated many times, parts of the original structure still in use date back to 1831. Memorial monuments and graves near the church commemorate the early settlers who first came to this bayou town in 1756.

Another of the older centers of Catholicism in this area is the small community of Grand Coteau. There the Academy of the Sacred Heart, a girls’ school founded in 1821, and St. Charles College, started as a boys’ school in 1836, are steeped in history. There are ancient cemeteries attached to both institutions which are fascinating to visit. St. Charles Church, the parish church for Grand Coteau, is also of historical interest.

An unusual cemetery can be found across the street from St. Joseph Church in Rayne. It was featured many years ago in the Ripley’s “Believe-it-or-not” because the graves are all laid out from north to south, instead of from east to west, as cemeteries are traditionally.