The following article upon the early history of the Catholic church in Lake Charles appeared recently in issues of the New Orleans Morning Star. The older readers of the American will recognize one or two slight inaccuracies, but the articles themselves constitute a valuable contribution to the early history of Calcasieu and Cameron, much of the record of which is rapidly being lost.

It is now 53 years since the order was given to the two Raymonds by Archbishop Blanc to bring succor to the 45,000 Catholics, dispersed all over the immense area of St. Landry, Acadia, Calcasieu and Cameron.

Long since the cold, grim reaper has played his merciless sickle amongst the devoted band of missionaries, their eloquent tongues have been silenced; their weary feet, often sore from tramping through dense forests and hurrying over the trackless prairies, have been resting — for these many years — in St. Landry's cemetery or on the quiet shores of the placid waters of Fausse Riviere.

The only surviving member of that heroic band of missionaries is the Rev. Francois Raymond, at present chaplain at the Convent of the Holy Family. The experiences of Father Raymond, whilst starting these missions 50 years ago, will form the subject of this article.

The subject of this sketch, the Rev. Francois Raymond, arrived in Louisiana in November, 1854, together with his brother, the late Dr. Gilbert Raymond. In January, 1855, they took charge of the extensive parish of St. Landry, where Father Raymond toiled and labored zealously for the next 35 years, January 1855, to October 1889. The immense country, lying between the Mermentau and Sabine rivers, formed part of the parish.

The first priest on record, who passed through Calcasieu, was a missionary from Texas, journeying to Opelousas, and thence making his way to the Crescent City. On his way he haphazardly christened a certain number of children whose names he entered on the registers of St. Landry's church. This happened in 1852, Archbishop Blanc requested of the Raymonds that they should give their special attention to Calcasieu.

To facilitate matters, he gave them power to act as his vicar generals. The bishop of Galveston, too, conferred the same powers upon the Raymonds for the whole of Texas.

Early in 1856 Father Francois set out upon this distant mission, well provided with letters of introduction to the principal inhabitants of Lake Charles. He left Opelousas at 3 o'clock in the morning on horseback, his saddlebags being well provided with the things needed for this first missionary venture.

The mail carrier, a man by the name of Welsh — a son of the founder of the town of Welsh — piloted the young priest during the first part of his journey. They traveled west, as far as the Bayou Mallet, following that stream until they reached Pointe-aux-Loups.

At the Pointe-aux-Loups Springs they took a late breakfast — a late dinner would be nearer the mark — they being hospitably entertained by the late Xavier Cart, then the proprietor of the resort.

Having rested a short while they again saddled their ponies, crossed Bayou des Cannes; traversed the Prairie Mamou, and arrived at sunset at this ferry of Mr. David Miller. Soon they were ferried across the Nez Pique and accepted the hospitality of Mr. Miller for the night.

Houses, at that period, were few and far between, nor did they afford much space. After supper they were shown to their bedroom where three beds had been provided for seven travelers.

Young Father Raymond little relished the idea of imitating the proverbial sardines; hence he preferred to pass the night on a homemade chair. Its unannounced hide, however, afforded scant rest to the tired limbs of the weary rider.

Early the next morning he was up and on horseback. With difficulty could he muster his recalcitrant legs into the stirrups, nor did his seating capacity find much comfort upon the hard saddle.

With indomitable courage, however, he stuck to his elevated station, being well upheld on every side by his numerous saddlebags.

The afternoon saw him at Bayou Anglais — or English Bayou, as it is termed now — glad to escape from his uncomfortable rocker. The hospitable home of Arsene LeBleu proved an oasis to the tired horseman.

Father Francois was so well received that, even today after a lapse of more than 50 years, his heart goes out in thankfulness to these good people.

The following day one of Mr. LeBleu's sons, Joe, the present head of the police Jury of Calcasieu, was detailed by his parents to accompany the priest to the hamlet of Lake Charles.

Mr. Arsene Saillier, a son of the founder of Lake Charles, received the young priest with open arms. His house became Father Raymond's headquarters till the church was built. His first visit was to Arsene's mother, the widow of the late Charles Saillier, who lived with her daughter, Severine.

Everywhere he met with a cordial reception by the inhabitants who well appreciated the presence of a priest amongst themselves; for the christening of a child meant a six days' journey to and from Opelousas in a "charette a bœufs" or oxcart.

The following article upon the history of the Catholic children whose names he entered on the registers of St. Landry's church. This happened in 1852, Archbishop Blanc requested of the Raymonds that they should give their special attention to Calcasieu.

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