Acadia Parish was ‘cradle of Methodism’ in area

The Plaquemine Brulée community in Acadia Parish had a French or Indian name, but was probably the first American settlement in south Louisiana.

Frenchmen and Spaniards had established other communities by the early 1800s, when Americans moved into the area. The settlement was named for Betary Plaquemine Brulée, which runs nearby. Plaquemine is an Indian word for persimmon. Brulée refers to land cleared by burning away underbrush.

Eventually, the new settlement was strong enough to become the Cradle of Methodism. The settlers in the lower part were Protestants. Methodist missionaries, including Rev. Elisha Bowman, had been visiting the area since shortly after the Louisiana Purchase. There was apparently a settlement of some size by 1818, when the St. Landry Parish Police Jury wanted to build a road from Opelousas to Plaquemine Brulée.

THE REV. DANIEL DEVINNE, another early Methodist circuit rider, came to the area around 1826. “We built a church in Plaquemine Brulée,” he wrote in his autobiography, “the first Protestant edifice in the beautiful country of the Opelousas.”

According to his description, the church was “about twenty-four by thirty-six feet, and on the Spanish model, roof largely projecting, and walls of wattle plaster, white-washed on both sides; the outer walls of which gave the church, at a distance, a very fine appearance.”

According to an old report in the Crowley Daily Signal, that church was known as “the cradle of Methodism in southwest Louisiana.”

A post office was established at Plaquemine Brulée in 1838, and continued under the name Plaquemine Brulée until 1890, when the name of the town was changed to Branc, for Branch Hayes, a grandson of Bozman Hayes, one of the first merchants in the settlement.

Bozman’s son, Bozman Hayes Jr., was one of the biggest landowners in the area, but it did him no good. He was killed by outlaws just before the Civil War.

According to family tradition, Junior owned a prized white mare that he wouldn’t let anyone else ride. The wash had been left drying on the clothesline on the clear, moonlit night when he heard a disturbance in his barn and knew somebody was trying to steal his mare.

When he rushed into the yard, and saw a man leading the mare away He shot that man.

What he didn’t see was a second man hidden by a bedsheet.

That man shot and killed Hayes on his own high porch.

PAIGE DATE: LYLE MOUTON cleared up hazy memories about when the legendaryITCHEL Paige pitched a perfect game when he played for the Big Chiefs. Or, more precisely, his mother did. She said it was June or July 1946. She said she couldn’t see because Lyle was a baby in arms the day they tried to get all of the Chiefs into her home to meet the great man.

(Jim Bradshaw is a columnist for The Advertiser. He can be reached at (337) 299-6515 by fax at (337) 299-6443, or by e-mail at jbradshaw@theadvertiser.com.)