By DOUG LeBLANC
Advocate state writer

DELCAMBRE — The electorate in this town of about 2,200 is divided, but along geographic, not ideological, lines.

Railroad Street is the boundary that separates 900 Delcambre residents who live in Iberia Parish from 1,300 who live in Vermilion Parish.

Delcambre residents who live along Railroad Street may choose the parish in which they will pay taxes and vote.

Delcambre High School, located in Vermilion Parish, is administered by the Iberia Parish School Board, since most of its students are from Iberia.

Delcambre voters are divided by Bayou Fuselier, Town Clerk Leola D. Mallet said.

The five aldermen in Arnaudville are all at large, so voters on both sides of the bayou elect them all, she said.

In Eunice, 100 people living in University Place near the LSU campus vote in Acadia Parish, but also vote in city elections. On the city's Board of Aldermen, University Place is represented by the Ward 3 member, City Clerk Shirley Vigle said. The remainder of Eunice's 12,500 residents vote in St. Landry, he said.

Town clerks said no serious problems are created by the divisions on election days.

"We just get the results from the (Acadia Parish) clerk's office," Mallet said.

If the mayor of Delcambre is any indication, his town is generally content with its situation.

"If I'm in Vermilion Parish, and my schools are run by the Iberia Parish School Board," said Delcambre Town Clerk Debbie Comeaux. "So we don't have much say-so with our School Board members. We've got two School Board members and police jurors in Vermilion Parish and one police juror and one School Board member in Iberia Parish."

"I'd like for it all to be in Iberia Parish, to tell you the truth," Delcambre Mayor L.P. "Chockoo" Mayard said. "I was born and raised in Iberia Parish, and for years all of my business was done in Iberia Parish, so I guess I'm a little prejudiced there."

Mayard said more problems are caused for him by having two police jurors, rather than one, in Vermilion Parish.

"When you have a problem on the Iberia Parish side, you just go to the director of public works and you can get it fixed," he said. "But on the Vermilion Parish side, you have to go to individual police jurors."

"We don't have enough voters to sway any election, so our hands are tied," Mayard said. "It seems like the fees would come in and give us a hand so we would have more of a voice in parish government."

Despite his preference for Iberia Parish, the mayor exploits the opportunities afforded by the two-parish jurisdiction.

"You get aid from one parish, then you tease the other parish until they come in with some aid," he said. "You play both ends against the middle."

"I think it makes them have a guilty conscience that we're getting stuff from one parish and not the other," the mayor said.

Mayard said he goes to the parish governments for repairs to streets, drainage and — in this town known for its shrimping industry — docks and bulkheads.

But the sluggish economy in oil-dependent Acadia will someday affect how much help those parish governments can give to Delcambre, the mayor predicts.

"All that stuff is going to come to an end one of these days, and people will have to do it for themselves, either through sales taxes or bond issues," he said.

Mayard said Delcambre residents do not divide politically based on their parish of domicile.

"If it pertains to the community, they're all for it," he said.

The mayor said the city has been split virtually since Louisiana was divided into parishes.

"Years ago, I talked to Cecil Labauve Sr., who was assessor of Iberia Parish for more than 50 years," Mayard said.

"He told me one time that both assessors got together about midway in Delcambre and agreed that was going to be the parish line. They couldn't come up with history or records to prove what it was either way."

The boundary is unlikely to change, said Lane LeBlanc, a friend of the mayor's and owner of the Delcambre Telephone Co. Inc.

"The problem is, we can't change the boundary line because the people in Iberia Parish don't want to be in Vermilion Parish, and the people in Vermilion Parish don't want to be in Iberia Parish," LeBlanc said.

"If it had been done years ago it would have been good," LeBlanc said.

"But now it's too late.

"To keep the people happy, I don't see how it could be changed," he said.