DISCOVER ALEXANDRIA PINEVILLE LOUISIANA

ALEXANDRIA-PINEVILLE

Founded in 1700's - first occupied by French soldiers, later becoming a Spanish settlement. Scene of much Civil War activity. Still retaining part of its “Old South” atmosphere.

Brochure courtesy of
Historical Association of Central Louisiana.
The known history of Alexandria-Pineville dates back to the early 1700’s when the first outpost was established on the banks of the Red River at a site now occupied by the Rapides Cemetery.

The French called their settlement “Les Rapides”, named for the rapids or falls which were on the river at this point. Later, the Spanish came in and renamed the area “El Rapido”. When the state was admitted to the Union and divided into parishes, this section was called “Rapides”.

Early settlers found the Red River Valley perfect for cultivating various crops and the fertile lands on the Alexandria side of the river gained fast in population during the first part of 1800. The town itself was laid out in 1803 by Alexander Fulton.

It was in Pineville that the forerunner of Louisiana State University opened its doors in 1860, under the direction of William Tecumseh Sherman. Sherman resigned when Louisiana Governor Thomas Overton Moore led the state into secession, seized all arms and stored some of them in the seminary. The college closed during the war, reopened in 1865, burned to the ground in 1869 and moved to Baton Rouge. The site is on LA Highway 165, approximately three miles north of the O.K. Allen Bridge.

This bridge is built over the area where a limestone ledge, three miles wide across the river, caused the falls. In low water stages, parts of a unique dam, constructed during the Civil War to raise the water level for Federal gunboats to pass, may be seen. Known as “Bailey's Dam”, it had a large influence on the Red River Campaign, during which much of the area was burned to the ground.

Adjacent to the dam is the remains of Fort Buhlow, which was constructed in 1864 to repel an anticipated third invasion by Union Troops. Fort Randolph, built at the same time a short distance down-river, is on the grounds of Central Louisiana State Hospital.

The road through Central Hospital leads to Shamrock Street on which the Alexandria National Cemetery is located. Pineville is noted for its cemeteries, including Rapides Cemetery, Episcopal, Hebrew and Methodist in the same area.

Mount Olivet Chapel, built in 1850, located on Main Street, is listed on the National Register of Historical Places.

Louisiana College, off Main Street on College Drive, traces its history back to the old Mt. Lebanon University, founded in 1852. It was established in Pineville in 1903.

All buildings, including the libraries, courthouse and businesses in the original Fulton plan were destroyed during the Civil War, and when George Armstrong Custer
Kent House, built in the late 1700's, has been restored and is open to the public. Located on Bayou Rapides road, just off MacArthur Drive, it is completely furnished. Also in the historical complex are several other buildings, including a slave cabin, a milk house, carriage house and barn.

Mount Olivet Chapel, on Main Street in Pineville, was one of few buildings which remained standing following the Federal invasion in 1864. It is said to have been spared because it housed Union officers.

was sent to Alexandria in 1865 to help in "Reconstruction" of the area, he lived in a house which was then outside the city and had been headquarters for the Federal troops while they occupied the area. The house was later razed and the St. Francis Xavier Cathedral erected on the site in 1898. This beautiful edifice is on the corner of Fourth and Beauregard.

It was in the same year that Col. George Bolton, a
Confederate veteran, built the Rapides Bank on the corner of Main and Murray Streets. Today the building houses the new Alexandria Museum. Hub City Hardware and the Fair Store on Main Street were also built in the same period. On the corner of Casson Street is a marker denoting that the first railroad west of the Mississippi had its terminal there. The small line, which ran from the Red River to the plantations as far south as Lecompte, was established in 1837, but became a part of Bailey's Dam when all machinery, bricks, lumber and other material in Central Louisiana was used in the dam's construction.

The Bentley Hotel, on Second, Third and Jackson Streets was built in 1908 and has remained a favorite landmark. The Paramount Theatre, also on Third Street, was built around this time and known as the Rapides Club and Opera House until movies became popular in 1920's.

Charnley House, 1128 Fifth Street, the oldest building in Alexandria, is located opposite the Alexandria Historical and Genealogical Library, constructed in 1907 from donations received from S.S. Bryan and Andrew Carnegie Foundations.

The year 1882 brought two railroads to Alexandria, and the first depot was built on Tenth and Madison Streets. Still standing and in need of repair, it predates the Texas and Pacific Railroad Station on Tenth Street by more than 30 years. Many of the hotels and restaurants which sprang up around the stations are still standing, including two at the corners of Tenth and Jackson, and the Europe Hotel at Beauregard and Tenth. Tenth Street marks the end of the original Fulton grant.

Alexandria still has several of its quaint brick streets, built before the turn of the century. Still left are Jackson from Bolton Avenue to 24th; Foisy from Monroe to Casson; Lee from Hill to 27th; Marye from Bolton to 27th; Monroe from Fourth to 18th and again from 12th to Bolton. On some of these, particularly on Monroe Street, can be seen the remains of the tracks of the first steel railway operated from 1890 to 1899.

There are several interesting spots on the outskirts of the city. One of these is Kent House, completed in 1800 and open to the public. It is located on Bayou Rapides Road, just off MacArthur Drive. Inglewood Plantation, as well as the site of the home of Governor Moore, Rosalie Plantation House and Rosalie Sugar Mill are on Highway 1208-1, off Highway 165-71 south. The homes are private but the sugar mill, listed on the National Register of Historical Sites, is open to the public.

A 64-page pictorial guide, outlining these and more attractions in Central Louisiana, is available from the Historical Association of Central Louisiana, P.O. Box 843, Alexandria, La. The price is $2.00.