EARLY WATER WAYS TO THE ATTAKAPAS
ST. JAMES TO THE TECHE

Let us consider how the first traders entered into the Attakapas. The route was not via New Orleans, but the section was reached by using small crafts and going through Bayou Plaquemine or through "LaFourche-Des Chetimachas" and proceeding on to small intricate waterways. These were filled with obstructions and some places were laden with crocodiles. As we have pointed out the pioneer trader of long standing, Blanpain, and his associates were located at "Les Oumas," St. James, 66 miles above New Orleans. Blanpain had, as we said, lands on both banks of the Mississippi River. It is hardly likely that these men with their small crafts - Keel boats - proceeded up the Mississippi river to Bayou LaFourche (Des Chetimaches) or to Bayou Plaquemine to start on their way to the Attakapas when they could connect to these 2 bayous by other small nearby waterways.

Some early maps, as Crenay's, only picture LaFourche des Chetimachas and not Plaquemine Bayou.

Du Pratz in 1757 refers to the Plaquemine as not comparable to Manchac and LaFourche. A portage was necessary from the River to Bayou Plaquemine or Bayou Jacob, we are told, in a report by Bayley "Facts on Bayou Plaquemine", published 1858 in Baton Rouge, and Judge Baker of St. Mary substantiated this. He was formerly a member of the old Board of Public Works and for 45 years a resident of the Attakapas. He assured that both Plaquemine and Jacob were but overflowed coulees entirely covered by a forest of cypress trees which were cut down and the stumps recut several times (as the bottom was
washed away around these stumps) by the inhabitants and the employees of the Navigation Co. of the Attakapas. Capt. Mayo under orders of the old Board of Public Works, with the State hands, superintended the cutting down of said stumps, in more than one instance. Cypress trees could not grow in the bed of an original pass of the Mississippi River.

"The cutting of a road through the canebrakes and forest, and the digging of a small ditch or canal therein leading from the Mississippi into either the head of the Plaquemine or Jacob is alleged to have been done, in the year 1770, from the Mississippi, by Joseph Sorrel and appears to be well substantiated: indeed it is rendered probable by what must have been the circumstances of the case. Judge Joshua Baker corroborated what had been stated by John C. March with regard thereto". The report goes on to say that Bayous Achafalaya, Plaquemine, and LaFourche are not alluvial deposits hence that these Bayous are not original outlets but mere drains and that they depended on erosion of the river banks to be connected to the River. (As per reference - Report on the Mississippi River, page 400, Professional Papers on the Corps of Engineers U.S. Army No. 13. Professional Papers-Corps of Topographical Engineers U.S. Army No. 4. Published by authority of the War Department Bureau of Topographical Engineers - 1861.)

We note that Joseph Sorrel was one of the earliest ranch owners in the Attakapas. He and Berard are mentioned by Robin to have entered the region with Masse. Dr. Harry L. Griffin in his book "Attakapas Country" lists a cattle brand for Joseph Sorrel as of 1758.
Let us proceed, during the early eighteen hundreds, with Robin as he describes his travels to the Attakapas entering the area by way of Bayou Plaquemine which was very navigable at that time. (Due to floods and to Grand River and Bayou Sorrel being completely chocked up, Bayou Plaquemine was closed 1865. It had been dammed in the Fall of 1826 due to floods, and opened again.) To proceed with Robin, whose descriptions are enchanting, we seem to enter a garden of Paradise. Exquisite scenery, enchanting vegetation surrounded. From Plaquemine the travelers entered the Atchafalaya (great or lost Water) on to picturesque Lake Natchez - (This lovely little lake abounded with the beautiful plant called Napoleone) - and back to the Atchafalaya again (coulees and other small water ways were used to proceed from one of these bodies of water to the other and these were strewn with countless obstructions, dense vegetation, intertwined branches, also there were many crocodiles in the streams.) The Principal Branch of the Atchafalaya was called Grand River and it ran parallel to the Teche and they joined not far from the sea at the smaller lake and bay leading to Grand Lake (once called Lake of the Chetimaches.) The Indians by that name resided in the section and then left these waters to live on Bayou LaFourche and moved along the Bayou on the Mississippi River about 1708 or just before that time.

From Grand Lake, at its lower end the lower Achafalaya led to Bay St. Bernard, or from Grand Lake the Teche could be entered. Travelers coming via the Plaquemine way either walked at landings (called portages) such as Fausse Pointe, Guidry, Cypremort, Sauvage or the narrow strip between Grant Lake and the Teche, or followed little connecting or semi-connecting
streams and found themselves on the Teche which they followed, up stream usually, settling in the Prairies (which were all about) of their choice, or entered other Bayous as Courtbaleau, Carron, Vermilion (once called Bayou Atchafalaya), etc. The intricate and numerable water ways led on from the Mississippi River to Bay St. Bernard or St. Louis where Monsieur de LaSalle had passed in 1684 and where Mr. Scimars de Belle Isle was abandoned by his ship in 1719. Robin states that an ancient mariner, Jean Grichion, was the first to discover these interlacing water way routes.

Professional Papers of the Corps of Topographical Engineers describe the Teche as a small stream that rises in the gray soil of the pine lands West of Washington. Its length from the town to its mouth in Grand Lake is 140 miles. A mile and a half below Washington, Bayou Courtbaleau, upon which that town is situated, sends off Bayou Carson, 100 feet wide, to the Teche. Six miles below, it sends off Little Bayou 14 or 20 feet wide which likewise joins the Teche. The Banks of these bayous are composed of red alluvial soil characteristic of Red River and the banks of the Teche. From the junction of these bayous to the mouth in Grand Lake, the same soil is found.

As the Acadians moved up the Mississippi River from the first Acadian Coast and formed the Second Acadian Coast at Donaldsonville and settled on the Iberville Coast at St. Gabriel and spread out in all directions, traveling along Bayou LaFourche from the River was popular. However, early French traders, settlers and then the first Acadians who started to come to St. James as early as 1754, (St. James Church Records), merely took a
short and passable route using the water ways and swamp ridges in St. James to the road and they soon found themselves in Assumption without having to pass through Ascension. The routes from St. James to Bayou LaFourche were many and offered a quick trip. In fact, during dry weather one could walk over the swamp with ease, if one knew the trails. Today this seems to be an impossibility but the geography of this section was different then.

For instance, there were no levees, and the coulees leading from the River drained the waters directly to the swamps, and the swamp prairies were not overgrown with vegetation and inaccessible and impenetrable as they are at present. Ridges were high and used by the Indians to travel from Bayou LaFourche to the River and from the River to the Bayou Lands. (See Franklin Map 1699) The first settlers lived near the Indian villages along the Mississippi River as we can see by consulting early maps, as Broutin 1721-1731. Part of Highway 20 leading from Vacherie in St. James to Thibodeaux on Bayou LaFourche was built along the ridges. Parts of the old route, no longer used, can still be seen, high land in the swamps. Bourgeois in "Cabanoccy" quotes from Boucry and Aime Diaries: "In 1844 there was 65 days of drought: men could cross the swamp on horseback."

At Grand Bayou, crossed by Highway 20, Highway 47 branches off leading to Laurel Valley section of Thibodeaux. This route is an old trail through the swamp following a ridge. (See note on Chemin Militaire) Back of the town of St. James were high prairies in the swamp lands. These pastures offered refuge to wild ducks coming from the East to migrate. The Indians named the Section "Cabhonoce," (Sleeping place of ducks). When the Spanish
government took over they included all the section in the Cabahonoce Post; the section which formerly had been included in the "Post of the Oumas". At Public Works there is a large, wonderful map in Tube No. 3; by H. A. Powell, 1841. On this map, four Cabahonoce Prairies are well pictured. One prairie is immense and spans the back of the Bayou LaFourche Lands from the Assumption-LaFourche Parish Line extending from Choupique to Chackbay area in LaFourche. The prairie is bounded on the swamp end by Couteau Frene and the High Lands along Grand Bayou in LaFourche Parish. Couteau Frene leads to the rear lands of Bayou LaFourche which lie across Bayou LaFourche from Labadieville. Chackbay, (Chakbay, Chegy by various spellings), extends from Mike Legendre's place on Highway 20 to the Chackbay Church; the section from the Church to Thibodeaux area is known as Choupique.

It is not surprising that Blanpain and his associates settled at St. James. Let us consider the many water ways back of the Cabahonoce Post (St. James) formerly Les Oumas, 66 miles above the river from New Orleans.

We find Bayou Cabhonoce, a small water way which took its source from the Mississippi. Then, in back of the Post, we find Bayou DeTravers (Traverse), Citaman (Citamahan), Verret and other bayous also many coulees. Bayou Pirogue led to Citman and this Bayou land to Chevreuil in LaFourche Parish. From Chevreuil waterways led to Lake Des Allemands.

Citaman also led in the opposite direction to Bayou Verret which flowed into Assumption. The high back lands to the rear of Bayou LaFourche, in the area known after the advent of the Spanish as Valenzuela Post (Between Belle Alliance) and Plattenville of present day almost joined those of St. James to the Back of Welcome, section known as Louderdale and also the Minnie
Plantation- Bayou Verret flows between these lands. Bayou Verret also led to Brule Maurin situated on lands back of Bayou LaFourche between Donaldsonville and Belle Alliance Plantation. Once the traveler had reached Bayou LaFourche he was well on his way to the Attakapas regions. During his travels the voyageur used portages, waterways, trails.

At a site back of present day Napoleonville, a small coulee led to a Bayou which led from Bayou LaFourche to Lake Verret. The water way when deepened became a canal and the cite where it joined Lake Verret was known as the Attakapas Landing. Christopher Bryant's land (Sec. 37 old board) gave on Lake Verret and the Canal or Bayou passed through his land reaching Lake Verret at a point just about at the half point of his land facing the lake. According to Assumption Parish, Book 4, a recluse name Moreau lived for 30 years along the Lake at a time before settlers came that way. Lake Verret and Bayou Verret took their names from the Nicholas Verret family of St. James and Assumption Parishes, where father and son served as sommandants.

The Bayou started from Lake Verret and went back up to the 40 arpents line from Bayou LaFourche. It ended in Francois Prillou land, as per oldest recognized claim, and a little coulee led on to Bayou LaFourche. This connection was just above the city of Napoleonville as one travels along the Bayou from Donaldsonville. From Attakapas landing through the waters of Verret, Atchafalaya, on to Grant Lake and the Teche, settlers came on and on seeking land on which to settle. Vast as the area was it was soon abounding in settlers who appreciated the rich lands and worked hard to make the area prosperous.
What seems to be the original Valenzuela Post, as per Oldest records at State Land Office in Baton Rouge, 6 arpents, 5 toises front on Bayou LaFourche, ordinary depth, was listed in the name of Andres de Acasta and sold Ap. 26th, 1806 to Thomas de Villanueva. The Document is signed by James Mather, County Judge (Mayor of New Orleans 1807-1812) and Nicholas Verret, Jr. who served as first commandant at the Valenzuela Post. When the Post was created by the Spanish Governor Galvez about 1779-1780 the surrounding section on both sides of the Bayou through the Napoleonville area became known as Valenzuela. The author Roger Baudier, Sr. located the post below Belle Alliance and above Plattenville.

Nicholas Verret, Sr. (husband of Marie Cantrello), Lieut. Gov. of La., second official to serve as Commandant at Cahahonece, St. James, died at Plantation Home, "Cahahonece" in 1775. Three of his children, Nicholas Jr., Jacques and Auguste settled on Bayou LaForuche across from present day Napoleonville where they had large land holdings. Nicholas Jr. became first Commandant when the section was organized under Governor Galvez as Valenzuela.

He was followed in the office of Commandant by Villateau and by his brother Auguste, Nicholas Jr. died in 1817.

Marie Verret one of Nicholas Sr.'s daughters married Evan Jones (of Evan Hall Plantation at nearby McCall, Louisiana on the Mississippi River) who also served as 2nd commandant at LaFourche des Chetimaches.

A daughter of that union, Mary Ann Jones, married Bernard Xavier de Marigny de Mandeville.
CHEMIN MILITAIRE

As we drive along our modern highways in this vicinity, today, little do we realize that some of these routes were Indian paths following ridges in the swamps. The Indians, first inhabitants (as far as we know) of this country, found their way from the Mississippi River to the lands of Bayou LaFourche with ease and swiftness. As there were no levees, many small water ways or drains led from the River to the swamps and the swamp prairies were not overgrown with vegetation and impassable as they are at present.

Such a mode of travel was soon taken up by the pioneer settlers and the voyageurs who were wise enough to observe how the Indians traveled. Settlers came in profusion as the years rolled on and as civilization found its way in the primitive land, levees became a must. Higher and stronger ones were erected as time went on. New travel routes were made by man to communicate with isolated and spread out settlements and some of the old routes were abandoned because many of the water ways communicating with the Mississippi River were blocked off to prevent flooding of the land.

Today, however, we have under our very eyes, a familiar route leading from Vacherie to Thibodeaux, which represents the old and the new. I refer to Highway 20. The old route and the new one can be pointed out by older citizens who used to walk or ride horseback along the ridges. Proof of this exists at present as one can still see high land in the very heart of the swamp.

Most of Highway 20 was built on the old trail which lies in the Chackbay area and Highway 647 leading to Laurel Valley was once an old swamp trail
along a ridge. If we trace the old "Chemin Militaire", we would start from the Mississippi River at Vacherie, Louisiana, in St. James Parish and follow old Vacherion Road which is presently called Haas Lane or Town, and travel from the River to the back and turn right at a point just before we would intersect with Highway 642, a road running parallel to the River. (If it would extend that far down the road end) We would proceed parallel with the river along the 642 route, cut across present day Highway 20 (New Vacherie Road) and travel just a bit beyond and then turn left to lead directly into the swamps. As we would so travel, again Chemin Militaire would cross Highway 20 (20 makes a right turn when it meets Highway 643.)

Miles Park is located just above the site where the old Chemin used to cut 20 as it traveled towards Couteau Cheval (one can presently see an oak tree on the swamp ridge near the road) and it then ran parallel to 20, crossed Bayou Chevreuil, crossing Grand Bayou it followed Highway 647 which is an old trail, 647 brought the traveler to a fork one branch of which led to Bayou LaFourche (Laurel Valley, Thibodeaux area) and the other to Choctaw.

Miles Park is located on the rear end of what was Joseph Blanchain's Vacherie during the seventeen forties and that of Ranson, November, 1755. The original Vacherie (Cow pasture) included both front and rear Vacherie areas, and extended from just below Oak Allee to New Vacherie Road.