Ellie Hebert Will Reign Over Acadian Festival

PLAQUEMINE — Seventeen-year-old Ellie Hebert, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Gary J. Hebert of Plaquemine, will reign this weekend as Evangeline during the International Acadian Festival.

The St. John High senior was presented last Sunday in a ceremony reenacting the arrival of Louisiana’s Evangeline, Emmeline Labiche, on these historic waters over 200 years ago.

The queen’s father, publisher of the Plaquemine Post, will serve as grand marshal in the parade scheduled for 10:30 a.m. Sunday.

Sponsored by the Knights of Columbus, Plaquemine Council 970, activities will begin at 5 p.m. Friday with the opening of concessions, rides, drink and food stands, commercial exhibits and entertainment.

Choirs of St. John the Evangelist and St. Clement of Rome Catholic Churches will participate in the formal blessing of the festival grounds at 1 p.m. Saturday.

Afternoon activities also include entertainment by dance groups on the festival stage, the 4-H Club Dog Show at 2 p.m. and the Lil’ Miss Acadian and Mr. Acadian contests to begin at 3:30 p.m. A dance featuring “Black Eye Susie” is scheduled for 8 p.m. to midnight.

The festival parade with 11 floats and other parade units will form at the Knight of Columbus Home on Price Street Sunday morning and proceed through the western residential section of the city, moving out to Hwy. 1 at its intersection with LaBauve Avenue and end at the festival grounds south of Plaquemine.

A nationally recognized Acadian Band, “Don Montoucet and the Wandering Aces” of Lafayette, will greet the festival parade units as they arrive.

Other Sunday events include an old-fashioned dress contest, a tobacco spitting contest, a beer-drinking contest, a tug-of-war and a beard contest.

The contests will begin at 2:30 p.m. and continue through 5 p.m. Sunday evening’s musical entertainment will include a performance by the “Troubadours” on the festival stage.

Friday’s chefs’ specialty will be chicken and sausage gumbo, with serving to begin at 6 p.m.; Saturday’s will be jambalaya at noon and shrimp etouffee at 6 p.m.; and Sunday’s specialties include Cajun-roasted chicken dinners, Cajun hot dogs, hamburgers, boiled corn on the cob and hot sausage po-boys.

NEW EVANGELINE CHOSEN — Ellie Hebert of Plaquemine, who has been selected as Evangeline to reign over the International Acadian Festival this weekend, looks over Bayou Plaquemine in a costume modeled after the Thomas Faed painting illustrating Longfellow’s poem. The 17-year-old is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Gary J. Hebert. Both daughter and father will serve simultaneously in the parade Sunday, the father as grand marshal.

Homecoming Queen Picked At Nicholls

THIBODAUX — Karen Richards, an office administration major from Houma, will reign over the 1976 Nicholls State University homecoming festivities Saturday.

The petit brunette will be crowned at 7 p.m. during ceremonies prior to the Saturday football game between Nicholls State and Austin Peay State University of Tennessee. The new queen was selected following nomination by the varsity athletes and a vote of the Nicholls State student body.

Serving on her court are Nancy Hawkins, first maid, of Houma; Mary
Greatest Contributions of French to Nation

NEW ORLEANS (UP) - The United States, which paid less than three pennies per acre for the Louisiana Territory, ultimately reaped incalculable billions in land and other resources.

The Louisiana Purchase, negotiated when Thomas Jefferson was president of the United States and Napoleon Bonaparte was ruler of France, added up to the greatest single contribution of the French to this nation.

The nation doubled its territory when the treaty was signed on April 30, 1803.

What it got for the $15 million interest eventually ran the bill to $27.267 million made Peter Minuit's purchase of Manhattan Island from the Indians look like peanuts.

The French contributions from colonial times to the twentieth century are immeasurable. But their ways times to the twentieth century are innumerable.

The French had the idea for the statue, French citizens underwrote it, and French sculptor Frederic August Bartholdi came to the United States to discuss details and the site. On the visit, he hit upon New York harbor as the ideal location.

One master contributor to the world of letters was Alexis de Tocqueville, who spent a year in the United States 1831-32 with a friend, Gustave de Beaumont, to study the penal system, and returned home where the two produced a masterwork on the U.S. system and how it could be applied to France.

But his classic work was a book about American Democracy -- "De la Democratie en Amerique." You are of the opinion that the greatest degree of enjoyment and the least degree of misery to each of the individuals composing a nation -- you can have no surer means of satisfying them than by equalizing the conditions of men, and establishing, democratic institutions.

Looking at French migrations to America through the centuries, it seems fair to say that to a Frenchman there's no place like home.

It had no direct effect on American culture, but Mary Stuart, of the Scottish royal family, sent to France to grow up, didn't want to leave when ordered home.

Mary supposedly said of her sadness at departing her adopted land, "Adieu, pleasant land of France, Oh my country, the dearest place in the world." And that was in the 18th century.

So far as resettlement in great masses as with other groups who came to stay, the French -- with few exceptions did not. The French came to America early to America for a lot of reasons, originally either prompted by trade with the Indians, the thrill of exploration, and later, in the case of the Louisiana territory, land acquisition for "le roi.

Unlike other ethnic and national groups, they were not driven from their homelands by religious or political persecution, or both. Two exceptions were the Acadians and the Huguenots, a small portion of all migration -- and more about them later.

There's not an intended melding of what made America. To this day, the French or those of French ancestry make up a small portion of the U.S. population, no wonder.

As George Godelfin, an international businessman, put it, "There has been no special reason to leave France...no famine, no persecution.

Godelfin, a Frenchman living in New York, holder of the Legion of Honor, is president of Guerlain Perfumes, and is active in the French-American Chamber of Commerce.

The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that 8 percent of the U.S. population is of French ancestry, about 2.6 percent of our total population of nearly 220 million.

Only the Polish and Russian groups are lower -- 2.5 and 1.1 percent respectively.

In contrast, there an estimated 28.5 million of English-Scoth-Welsh descent, the highest number at 14.4 percent. They are followed by the Germans with 25.8 million or 12.5 percent.

But small numbers don't diminish the contributions to America's society, whether the United States went to France or the French came to America.

The French have helped shape every facet of our way of life. They've influenced our literature, the arts, architecture, food, language, law -- the Napoleon code, a liberalization of civil law, entertainment from opera and symphony to the can-can and Folies Bergere.

"It is in the fields of manners, fashion and cooking that the French have exercised their greatest influence on American culture," writes Carl Witte, historian, in "We Who Built America; the Saga of the Immigrant."

"This influence was apparent as early as 1800, as a result of the great interest on the part of American Republicans in the progress of the French Revolution."

Witte continues, "French dancing, language and fencing schools, dishes, customs, dress, books and music immediately became fashionable. Inns and taverns were renamed hotels and ordinary American cooks and bakers became chefs who ran French chefs in American newspapers.

"Philadelphia had a circulating library of 1,250 volumes in French and French newspapers appeared in leading cities."

"But it was not culture so much as the great real estate bargain this country got with the Louisiana Purchase.

Out of this original $15 million empire, ultimately the nation carved in, entirely the states of Louisiana named for Louis XIV, Missouri, Arkansas, Iowa, North and South Dakota, Nebraska and Oklahoma. In addition, the area included most of the land in Kansas, Colorado, Wyoming, Montana and Minnesota.
Inez Catalan, left, and Marce Lacouture sing traditional folk songs that Catalan sang as a child. Lacouture has been recording and learning songs in French at Catalan’s home in Kaplan.

Pair raise voices to preserve Cajun songs of old

By CHRISTINE WORD
Advocate correspondent

LAFAYETTE — The voices of Inez Catalan of Kaplan and Marce Lacouture of Broussard blend to preserve the French songs of days gone by.

They sing home music, folk songs of Acadiana, some hundreds of years old.

Catalan, 79, learned them as a child from her mother. Lacouture learned them much later when she was looking for her Cajun roots.

Lacouture, 43, is originally from Austin (her Acadian French grandparents settled in parts of Texas after leaving Louisiana in the early 1900s to find work), and she was raised in an Air Force family and moved around often. She lived in Europe three different times before she was 12 and was interested in cultures of all kinds.

“It wasn’t until my late 20s or 30s when I started realizing that I didn’t know anything about my own,” she recalled.

She read whatever she could find on Cajun culture, and she came across a book in the Austin public library called “The Cajuns.” In it, she found a picture of Catherine and Ed Blanchet of Meaux and was drawn to it. The caption said the Blanchets ran a Cajun culture school.

“I just had a feeling that I needed to meet them,” she said.

A year later, she jumped in a pickup with a friend and showed up unannounced on the Blanchets’ doorstep.

Catherine Blanchet, now 71, introduced Lacouture, a professional singer, to the home music which she had studied and collected for almost 20 years, starting in the 1930s, compiling them into a thesis in 1970.

“Catherine’s life work has just been invaluable,” said Lacouture, who lived with the Blanchets while studying the French songs.

In their country home near Meaux, the Blanchets are visited by people from around the world. When she was music supervisor for the Vermilion Parish school system, teaching vocal music in 18 schools, she felt the children should be proud of their French heritage, although she’s of English and German descent. She taught them songs, and in turn the children brought her songs from their homes, and she recorded 50 for her book.

She also wrote “Les Danses Rondes,” a compilation of round dances with instructions.

“The difference between a folk song and any other song is you know who wrote the other song,” Catherine Blanchet said.

She classifies songs into two groups, one for dancing and the other sung without instrumentation.

Some of the songs are from Normandy, some from Acadia and some were made up in Louisiana. Different types of home music include entertainment, ceremonial for funerals, drinking songs, children’s songs and bawdy songs.

A recurring theme is “Oh ya yie... (the woman has deserted the man) and he is mourning,” Catherine Blanchet said.

She introduced Lacouture to some of the old folks who still sang the songs, including the late Lula Landry, and Inez Catalan.

“The difference between me and Inez is I’m a folklorist; she’s a folk,” Blanchet said.

Lacouture claims to be somewhere in the middle, treasuring the songs and performing them for the people rather than preserving them for posterity.

Listeners might well wonder about the unlikely duo. Singing the same songs each in their own way creates a lively sort of rapport.

Lacouture remembers the first time she met Catalan.

“I was going to impress Inez with one of her songs I’d learned from another woman,” she said.

Lacouture sang while Catalan listened with a skeptical ear.

Catalan admits she was not impressed.

“I say ‘Girl, have you been singing that song to people?’ I say ‘You messed up the whole thing!’ She laughed and laughed,” Catalan said.

Lacouture had learned the words, the melody and the story, but had not learned the significance of the subtleties written between the lines, and she sang with the wrong cadence and tone.

“No one will ever be able to sing songs that Inez learned as a child the way Inez sings them,” Lacouture said. “She’s a storyteller. Her life is the story. The reason Inez is such a living treasure is not because she knows lots and lots of songs, but because of who she is.”

Catalan has performed for years, and her appearances include the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington, D.C. Like Catherine Blanchet, Catalan receives visitors from around the globe. She says her front door is an extension of Interstate 10, and she likes to open it and see who comes in.

When they sing together, Lacouture sets the historical context for the audience, admitting she’s not fluent in French. She says she gets helpful feedback from appreciative Cajuns in the audience.

“It’s a bit of their past that the see they can hold on to.”
New Book Features Cajun Folk Songs

By BUFFY GILFOIL
Advocate Correspondent

LAFAVETTE - "Chantez Encore," a new book, the Gilmores respect full songs, should be available at bookstores by Dec. It will share some of the same features as an earlier collection, "Chantez, La Louisiane!" bub translations of the songs. Notes in the first book focus on moods of the songs and the second book are more specific. This is not meant as an attempt to set the research they are doing apart. The authors feel their book will be a "Bible" for Cajun music. "It will contain twice as much music as the first book," Mrs. Gilmore notes is a "shrill, nasal sound." He says "It will share some of the same features as an earlier collection, "Chantez, La Louisiane!"

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WEAVING DEMONSTRATIONS are just some of the old time skills that you can see demonstrated at Lafayette's newest tourist attraction—Vermilionville. (Photo by Geneva Griffith)

VERMILIONVILLE BORN

Lafayette opens new tourist attraction

By GENEVA GRIFFITH

Newspople from all over the state were treated to a preview of the new Vermilionville tourist attraction on the banks of Vermilion Bayou at Lafayette Saturday. Those attending the Louisiana Press Association convention were the guests at a Saturday night reception at Vermilion with many restaurants cooking their specialties for the convention goers. The official opening of the bayou attraction was held Sunday. The new complex heralds a new, exciting era in the preservation of the unique Cajun culture. Its purpose is to preserve and portray the elements of the cultures which settled the Attakapas area of Louisiana between 1766 and 1850. It is set on 22 acres on Vermilion Bayou, just off Surrey Street adjacent to Beaver Park. The entertainment and living history attraction features original Acadian and Creole structures, one of which is listed in the National Register of Historic places. There are replicas of a Creole plantation home, overseer's cottage, cotton gin, chapel, a presbytery, a house, and blacksmith shop. Visitors are welcomed at the Visitor Center, modeled after an 18th century plantation home, which also contains the visitor orientation area, gift shop and offices. There is a restaurant featuring Cajun and Creole cuisine, with a charming view of the bayou. La Chapelle (the chapel) will host weddings, services in French, and other religious occasions. Entertainment abounds in Vermilionville, from strolling musicians to festivals and celebrations of events such as Mardi gras or a boucherie. A cooking school features costumed interpreters demonstrating Cajun and Creole cooking methods. A blacksmith works at his anvil making tools; craftsmen are busy making violins, doll furniture and many things that their ancestors crafted; and women are busy quilting the way their grandmothers did—on frames hung from the ceiling. Old fashioned ferry will take one across the bayou by an attendant using a hand pole. The performance center features daily entertainment, including Cajun and Zydeco music, Cajun dancing, storytelling and Cajun humor. Visitors are urged to stroll along the paths from one house to another and visit with the guides and workers who are dressed in period clothing and love to chat with everyone along the way. The attraction is open from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., 7 days a week and is well worth the time for a mini-vacation right here in our area. It will be a treat for the family to relive the days of their ancestors, or to view how the first settlers lived and worked when they arrived in Southwest Louisiana.
THE STREETS of Vermilionville look like a scene set 100 years ago in Bayou country. One of the performers and his goat are shown above. (Photo by Geneva Griffith)
STROLLING CAJUN musicians can be found throughout Vermilionville, Lafayette’s new scenic attraction. (Photo by Geneva Griffith)
North meets south
Louisiana combines cultures

By CAROL RUST
Houston Chronicle

Louisiana is like two different countries.

Anyone who hails from anywhere north of Alexandria is regarded as a "Yankee" by anyone south of there. The rolling red dirt hills and towering pines of North Louisiana contrast greatly with the flatlands of South Louisiana, thick with low undergrowth and dissected by meandering fingers of water.

And the cultures are just as different.

In the north, predominantly Scotch-Irish and English stock attend mostly Protestant churches that sometimes seem to dot every corner in small, conservative towns. In many North Louisiana cities, the sale of alcohol is forbidden.

In South Louisiana, many adults grew up being told it was a mortal sin to ever enter anything but a Catholic church. Many are descended from the French who settled on the Louisiana coast once the British exiled them from Nova Scotia in the 1600s. Spanish, Irish and black descendants are also ethnic brush strokes of the South Louisiana picture.

You can buy beer at just about any corner store in the south. There's even a chain of drive-through daiquiri stands in South Louisiana, where a general partying spirit contrasts with North Louisiana's early-to-bed, early-to-rise prudish stereotype.

North Louisianans speak with a sort of East Texas twang. Heavy Cajun accents flavor the English in South Louisiana, where it is just as ordinary to hear them speaking Cajun French.

"Lache/er pas /a potat - literally "don't drop the potato" - is Cajun for a North Louisiana version of "Keep on trucking."

The two cultures have co-existed - mostly peacefully - but with many exaggerated perceptions or outright misconceptions.

In 1988, Carola Ann Andrepont of Opelousas, in the southern part of the state, got the idea for a cultural exchange program between the two parts of the state, mainly from her family's participation in an international student exchange program.

They had been a host family for foreign students for the past five years.

"It started out as a joke," she said. "We were talking about the state like two different countries, and then we started thinking it might not be such a bad idea for the two cultures to get to know each other."

In November of 1988, the first exchange occurred between Ruston to the north and Opelousas.

Twenty high school students from each town "changed places" for a week. They applied through their schools, and they were graded on their "visit" by their daily journals, the pictures they took and how well they presented it to their classmates when they returned.

The project was a success, and the Louisiana Office of Tourism took over the project on a larger scale. The first large exchange started three weeks ago and will continue through the spring semester. It involves about 30 towns, matched according to similar city populations.

Some of the matches include Alexandria and Kenner, outside of New Orleans, Monroe and Lake Charles, and Winnboro to the north and Gonzales to the south.

Andrepont said the first batch of students all commented on the food. Ruston's fare was too bland for the students from southern Louisiana. "They have gumbo, but you can see right through it," one student said. And South Louisiana's cuisine caused some students to sputter from the spiciness.

Andrepont recalls the southern students first visit to a Baptist church.

"You could see them looking around for the kneelers," Andrepont said and chuckled. "And when we got out, one student said, 'Can you believe that priest was wearing a suit?'"
Louisiane

**Vermilionville ouvre ses portes**

Vermilionville, un parc touristique à vocation culturelle, a ouvert ses portes, dimanche 1er avril, en présence de nombreuses personnalités, dont le vice-gouverneur Paul Hardy et de 3 000 visiteurs et invités. Vermilionville, l'ancien nom de Lafayette, est un musée vivant de la culture acadienne Louisianaise du siècle dernier.

Après une messe en français et en latin puis l'officiel sciage d'une bûche (version rustique de la coupure du ruban inaugural), l'assistance a pu apprécier le résultat de nombreuses années de préparation et d'un investissement de 6,5 millions de dollars. Vermilionville est la reconstitution d'un village acadien où des figurants costumés cuisinent, tissent, forgent et chantent à l'ancienne mode et, pour la majorité, en français.

Le respect des traditions et de l'authenticité a bien sûr dû compter avec des contingences commerciales toutes contemporaines: les caissières en gardes-soleil d'époque utilisent des ordinateurs, le gombo est servi dans des tasses en plastique, les figurantes portent du maquillage et l'air conditionné a été installé dans la demeure d'Armand Broussard, une des deux maisons originales transportées sur le site.

"Nous voulons présenter toutes les facettes, passées et présentes, de la présence acadienne en Louisiane; c'est pourquoi Vermilionville combine l'ancien et le nouveau. Nous avons la tête tournée vers le passé mais nous ne voulons pas y être enterré", déclare son directeur, David Floyd.


Jacques Henry