Eugene Eleazar, founder of Kaplan Bastille Days

A man whose wisdom and love of tradition helped develop the town of Kaplan was Eugene Eleazar, who emigrated to America from his native France in 1888.

Chairman in the town of Kaplan. In 1920, he was voted mayor.

Eleazar brought to Louisiana an ideal born of loyalty and love for his mother— the republic of France.

His idea was to observe France's independence with a local festival— Bastille Day in Kaplan. The suggestion won well with the festival-minded Acadian townsmen who spoke, basically, the same language, albeit a somewhat more archaic patois. After all, they were then removed from Mother France.

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Although Bastille Day is officially on July 14, the festival is held on the weekend closest to that date.

In the past, main events for the festival were greasy pole climbing, watermelon eating contest, bicycle race, tug of war and an old Acadian favorite, a fais-do-do.

Eugene Eleazar, founder of Kaplan Bastille Days

Kaplan was incorporated as a village in 1903. Three years later, John E. Fletcher and his parents moved to Kaplan from Perry. Another family, the Eugene Eleazar family, formerly of Rayne—immigrants from France in 1895—arrived in Kaplan in October 1906.

When John Edward arrived in Kaplan, he had $150 to his name, a new horse and buggy—a man of means in those days.

Two years later, John Edward married the Eleazar daughter, Pauline on Sept. 10, 1908. The year after the marriage, he went into farming and planted 80 acres of rice making a profit of $500. On Sept. 12, 1910, he bought out his father's interest in the farm.

In 1912, he bought the house for $110 that became their home. The house, about five years old then, was moved from its location at 206 East First Street by wagon. The Eleazars were the first family to cut to accommodate the wagon wheels.

The house has a kitchen, dining room, two bedrooms connected by a ten foot wide hall that became a living room. All their children were born there: in 1913, their son George, their daughter, Yvonne in 1919 and another son, John Albert in 1923.

During these years an open side porch facing Pay Avenue was added to the house. As time went by, the house was getting too small for a family of five. In 1953, the house was being enlarged. A kitchen pantry, another bedroom, a bathroom and a glass enclosed back porch now made the house more livable.

In January 1933, his second son, only 10, was killed in an accident riding a Shetland pony in a race with his cousin on a farm that Mr. Fletcher had leased from the school board and was being worked by a tenant. That farm is now the site of Kaplan High School.

The depression and hard times were being felt by all. As Chief of Police, he earned $20 a month and about $50 for the collection of taxes.

Yet, Mr. Fletcher worked hard as policeman, tax collector, farmer and cattle saler to pay for his two sons' tertiary education.

Their daughter continued to live in the house with her parents until she married and moved to Houston in 1955. When her three daughters were teenagers, they would spend the summer living in the house and helping their grandmother.

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The lifetime of the house is not yet over. In its present capacity as an educational and recreational building, it has been extended in capable hands.

The biography of the John E. Fletcher house

John E. Fletcher died at his home. His wife died 10 years later on the same day, Jan. 4, 1972. The house remained empty for 11 years with the exception of being lived in during the summers by the family from Houston.

In the early 1980s, an opportunity was offered to the Fletcher estate to sell the house and two lots to Iberia Savings and Loan. This property was bought by Eugene Eleazar about 1911. He wanted the building, but not the lots. He sold the two lots to his son-in-law, John Fletcher. Mr. Eleazar moved the building to Cushine Avenue and transformed it into a general store and later in the 1950s, it became Kaplan's first theatre showing silent pictures. In the late 70s, taking picture replaced silent films, the first talking pictures show in Kaplan was Al Jolson singing "Mammy".

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The church people had the house moved to its present location on Gaudry Street.

After undergoing more remodeling, the house became the Reverend Hollins Meaux Recreational and Educational Building under the guidance of Elzora White.

In its time of ownership by the Fletcher family (1912-1988) the house had withstood many storms and hurricanes, even snow and ice.

Many changes also took place—the first telephone installed in the house was in 1917. Telephone numbers were assigned to the subscribers—it was number 17. Electric lights were added. The wood and kerosene heater gave way to gas and electric heaters and cooking stove. The water cistern and outdoor pump gave way to city water. The outdoorouthouse gave way to an indoor bathroom.

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