Mary Alice Fontenot and Julie Landry read galley proofs of their new book.

Lafayette Authors Pen Book About Louisiana Culture

Louisiana folklore continues to survive, despite today's sophisticated technology and emphasis on science. So say two Lafayette women who have amassed an impressive collection of old beliefs, legends, folk tales and home remedies for a chapter in a new book about Louisiana culture.

The book, titled The Louisiana Experience, by Mary Alice Fontenot and Julie Landry, is published by Claitor's of Baton Rouge.

Fontenot and Landry spent two years putting together information about the unique aspects of Louisiana culture.

"Much of what we learned about folklore was contributed by young people - upper elementary and high school students," Fontenot said. "This told us that the old ways of doing things, the old superstitions, are still being handed down."

For instance, she said, a seventh grader from New Iberia gave advice on what to do in case of an encounter with a "feu follet," the mischievous spirit of the Cajun prairies. Teenagers from north-central Louisiana told stories about a half-man-half-animal that menace young lovers. A high school student from Vermilion Parish related what she believed had been an experience with a "cauchemar," a night spectre feared by people of the black community.

The state's colorful history and variety of cultural distinctions are defined in terms of Louisiana's agriculture, architecture, food, folkways, natural resources, numerous waterways and peculiar ethnic and racial mosaic. Graphic photography provides a pictorial continuity for the easy-to-read text. Many of the photographs were taken by local photographers P.C. Piazza and Greg Guirard.

A map section by Dr. Timothy Reilly of USL contains eight original maps which show the location of parishes, the French Triangle, products and resources of the state, the main waterways and highways, the Florida parishes and the location of present day Indian tribes.

The chapter devoted to waterways gives readers a new look at Louisiana by following the meandering rivers and bayous, from Shreveport to Grand Isle, and across the coastal wetlands for an examination of the natural wealth found there.

A Louisiana newspaper woman since 1946, Fontenot is the author of 13 other Louisiana books. Her daughter and co-author, Julie Landry, is head of the English department at the Academy of the Sacred Heart in Grand Coteau. Both are natives of the state.