Yes, we have no bananas

Fruit not the inspiration for bayou's name

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Indians lived at Banana Bayou Mound site on Avery Island 4,500 years ago according to Louisiana Prehistory, published in 1982 as the sixth volume of the Louisiana Archaeological Survey and Antiquities Commission's Series by the Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism, State of Louisiana.

Robert W. Neuman, curator of anthropology at the Museum of Geoscience at LSU, and Nancy Hawkins, outreach coordinator for the State Division of Archaeology, co-authored Louisiana Prehistory, which includes a description of the Banana Bayou Mound site and the artifacts discovered there.

Banana Bayou is located in Iberia Parish at the south end of Avery Island, which overlies a salt dome and is an "island" surrounded by water but by marshes and thickets. Banana Bayou does not appear on current maps. So, where is Banana Bayou and how did it get its name?

Shane Bernard, historian and curator of the McIlhenny Company, the manufacturer of the famous Tabasco products, had the answer to both questions. He provided a map showing the location of the bayou, so remote its name is familiar only to local residents, and he gave the following account of the naming:

"McIlhenny and Avery family tradition holds that in the late 19th century, the family leased a small part of its lands to a man named Bonin (pronounced in the Cajun French manner, BOW-NAN), who built a bridge across the bayou that eventually bore his name, Bonin's Bayou. Mr. Bonin drove cattle across the bridge to feed them in the marshland off the island. When Anglo-American oil explorers came to the island in the 20th century, however, they found 'Bonin's Bayou' too difficult to pronounce, so they changed it to 'Banana Bayou' according to the McIlhenny and Avery family tradition. (The source for the above information is Gray Osborn, a senior member of the McIlhenny and Avery family who has preserved much of the island's history.)

"Eventually the name 'Banana Bayou' lent itself to an Indian mound located near the bayou; the 'Banana Bayou Mound' is believed by archaeologists to be about 4,500 years old."

The Banana Bayou Mound site is described by Neuman as being "a low, man-made earthen mound, 80 feet in diameter. Charcoal from the mound gives the radiocarbon date of 2,400 BC at best of minus 260 years. Nut shells and fish, deer and turkey bones have been found in the lower layers of the mound.""