The Sarto Old Iron Bridge across Bayou Des Glaises near Big Bend was constructed in 1916 and closed to traffic in 1989. In 1990, it was designated a historical site.

People were still driving across it in 1989. That's when the bridge was closed, when cypress posts were placed at its entrance to prevent pedestrian and motor vehicle traffic. Still, the bridge stands. No one would dare tear it down, even if it didn't have the distinction of being the first bridge in Louisiana to be placed on the National Registrar of Historic Places.

La Commission des Avoyelles is the organization responsible for a planned renovation project. Bridge repair will require money, and the Avoyelles Parish Police Jury, which still owns the bridge, has obtained a grant to do it.

“We've been working on this project since 1989,” says Carlos Mayeaux, commission president. There are some people who remember standing on the bridge when automobiles passed, and they had to stand flat against the railing, they say.

Adam Ponthieu opened his general store at one end of the bridge in 1927, the year of the Great Flood. He also served as the postmaster of the Big Bend area until 1994. Ponthieu donated his store to the historic commission before his death in 1996.

The commission has since gotten Avoyelles Parish Detention Center inmates to paint the building.

“We've had many artifacts donated by the Adam Ponthieu family,” Mayeaux says. “Everyone used to call him Mr. Old Iron Bridge.

“He and Eleanor Blakewood Marshall, who has also passed away, researched the old bridge. They were early advocates of restoring, and Mr. Ponthieu was very interested in seeing it fit to be used again, at least for pedestrian traffic.”

The idea is to create a scenic byway in Avoyelles Parish with the bridge somewhat in the center.

“People come here from all over,” Mayeaux says. “This is a popular bicycle loop. We'd like to tie it all in with store and post office and pictures of the Ponthieu family.

“We're going to whitewash the walls on the inside, and display old things from the store as they appeared when the store was open. We also have all of the old post office records, and we'll have those on display, too.”

Historic bridge may become focus of scenic byway

By ROBIN MILLER
Alexandria Daily Town Talk

BIG BEND (AP) — There are no love stories here, or none that are told. But there are stories. Lots of them.

Tales of floods and cows and old stores and post offices in this Avoyelles Parish area. Memories of how people lived here and the disasters they accepted.

Rivers rose, and their waters had no place to flow but outward, drenching land and livestock. And the only escape route available was the Sarto Old Iron Bridge.

But the bridge was new once, and Bayou des Glaises was a busy waterway once, a route used for transporting cargo to small communities. It also bore the brunt of raging flood waters of the Red, Atchafalaya and Mississippi rivers.

Entire communities were forced to evacuate to higher ground. Livestock and valuable material also had to be moved.

They needed the Sarto Old Iron Bridge.

There was no creaking when the Avoyelles Parish Police Jury built the bridge in 1916.