HISTORIC PLACE NAMES of Louisiana

By CLARE D. LEEPER

Belle Chasse is some 20 miles south of New Orleans by way of the Mississippi River. The town Belle Chasse (two words) gets its name from the Plantation Bellechasse (one word) which no longer exists.

Bellechasse, translated from the French, means “good hunting.” And although the hunting around Bellechasse was excellent, that is not why the plantation of Judah P. Benjamin got its name. Bellechasse was the name of a former owner. His name was J. Deville de Goutin Bellechasse.

Bellechasse is actually the family land title, while de Goutin is the true surname. The use of the title instead of the name is not uncommon in Louisiana’s history, the two most famous examples being the le Moyne brothers. Iberville is the name by which we know Pierre le Moyne. His brother whom we know as Bienville was named Jean Baptiste le Moyne.

Col. J. D. de Goutin was a prominent figure in the early days of Louisiana. He also had extensive land holdings around New Orleans. He commanded the troops at the transfer of Louisiana from Spain to France and from France to the U.S. in 1803. De Goutin later served as a member of the council of the territory of Orleans and of the Constitutional Convention of 1811.

A later owner of Bellechasse was William C. Milne. And it was from him that Judah P. Benjamin bought Bellechasse in 1844. In 1846, according to one account, Benjamin “remodeled” the house that was on the property when he bought it. However, James Loughlin in his “Ghosts Along the Mississippi” says that Benjamin completely demolished the building that was on the property and built a new one. Loughlin adds that the interior cause Bellechasse has twice been moved to save it from the river.