This historical marker for the Jewish Cemetery on Main Street in Pineville was dedicated on Sunday. The marker was erected by the Jewish Welfare Federation of Central Louisiana.

Historical marker dedicated at Jewish Cemetery in Pineville

By Jim Leggett

The placement of a historical marker at the Jewish Cemetery on Main Street in Pineville Sunday was labeled a recognition of Jewish heritage in central Louisiana during brief dedication ceremonies.

Rabbi Arnold Task of Congregation Gemiluth Chassodim rhetorically asked why Jews came to central Louisiana. He answered, "There is something about central Louisiana that welcomes all people of all backgrounds."

The cemetery dates back to at least 1852 when Augusta Bernstein, the two-year-old daughter of Samuel Bernstein, was buried that year. Six other early burials were victims of a yellow fever epidemic in 1853. According to the marker, the eldest known Jewish settler in the Alexandria-Pineville area was Henry Michael Hyams whose name was in the 1830 census. Task said Hyams later moved to New Orleans and was elected lieutenant governor of Louisiana.

Mike Tudor, chairman of the Alexandria-Pineville Historical Marker Committee, said Sunday's dedication was of the 20th marker placed since the committee was established by the Central Louisiana Chamber of Commerce and Central Cities Development Corp.

"This is one we identified early on," Tudor said. "It's one of the oldest cemeteries in central Louisiana."

Pineville Mayor Fred Baden was represented by Councilman Lee Broussard, and Alexandria Mayor Ned Randolph was represented by Councilwoman Phyllis Mayo.

Broussard recalled that "at one time there was no cemetery in Alexandria" and said Sunday's dedication adds to tourism interests of both Pineville and Alexandria.

Mrs. Mayo said, "How great it is we here who are living and acting in the world have our memories."

Task said the cemetery proves that there has been an "active Jewish community" in this area for a long time. "Those buried here, their lights have gone out. We are the torchbearers. We are dedicating and rededicating life in central Louisiana. We are on the threshold of a new stage in history."

The marker was erected by the Jewish Welfare Federation of Central Louisiana.