Abbeville is Fascinating

By Dean Tavis

Delightfully French in its accent, bearing still a touch here and there of the long-ago Spanish, and a touch here and there in its story of the pirates who landed on its coast and came up its streams—always typically Southern Louisiana in its happiest, most enchanting mood—is old Abbeville. It is the seat of the Creole parish of Vermilion, lying on the stream of that name about 20 miles, as the Pelican flies, from Vermilion bay. In its beginnings, before the first church was built, it bore the musical name of La Chapelle.

Here, under a great host of southern oaks, shading the pavements of its sometimes narrow, sometimes wide, and always inviting thoroughfares; guarding quaint little homes and mansions alike, is all the peace of the Acadian country... And here is all the happy melody of life a truly lovelorn people in an alluring land.

The year is 1844. Father Megret, a missionary priest of the Order of the Capucians, who has come to the New World from his home at Abbeville on the Somme, is stationed in the little church at St. Martinville. Father Megret had had his eye upon the country to the south of the Teche for a good while. In his truculent piety, manned by two Canadian French guides, the priest has traveled far down the streams and up the bayous on missions for the pioneer French Catholic people.

He has learned that there are many settlers along the waterways and prairies in every direction who are entirely without benefit of the church, save on the rare occasions of visits such as his own. So the missionary sets out to build a church for those people in about the center of what is now Vermilion parish, though that was 12 or 14 years before the parish was established.

Perhaps he had in mind a town which would grow up around it. He and his guides, the priest in brown cassock and the Canadians in homespuns, occasionally singing their songs of the country far to the north, came to a spot called Perry's Bridge—now Perry. The bridge lay across the Vermilion.

The spot suited the kindly cleric, and he proceeded...
M. Megret was unsuccessful. Perhaps the owner was an ungodly man. Maybe he was only miserly. He refused to sell the priest any land for his church save a plot which, plainly, would overflow when freshets came down the stream.

It was late afternoon, almost dusk, as the story is related, when the trio reached a pretty bluff. The priest had noted the spot before, and he felt rather welcome as he stepped from the prologue to the bank.

It was in that moment that Abbeville was born, and it assured the formation of what was later to be Vermilion parish. For Megret built his church there, and around the church grew the little settlement, then the village, and finally the most interesting of Abbeville.

He would not name it for himself, but for the city he came from in France, and La Chappelle was forgotten and Abbeville went on the last maps of Louisiana before the turn of the half century. Naturally, when you turn to the story of Abbeville, and in their libraries its friendly people tell you its enticing story, the name of Pere Megret is the first to be brought up.

As Abbeville centers its parish, the parish lies in the center, the very richest portion of the western half of southern Louisiana. To know Abbeville one must vision Vermilion.

To the west lies the long reach of Cameron parish, running all the way to Sabine lake. To the north lies Acadia and Lafayette parishes, and on the east Iberia. To the east across Vermilion bay is old St. Mary parish. To the northwest a little tip of Jefferson Davis parish touches its border.

Roughly, the parish is 50 miles deep and nearly as broad. Vermilion bay, lying at its foot, may be called a part of Atchafalaya bay, exposing the western edge of the thinly populated parish of Terrebonne, mecca of the trapper, the hunter and the artist and the writer who seeks the most beautiful colors of the Louisiana coast.

Part of the charm of this domain of the bayous lies in its touches of somberness. Even in the most brilliant sunshine you sense its darker days, those of the war and its storms, for they have swept across it. Its families are old and where you find old families you find rich lore. It was here that Col. James Bowie lived for a time, and in his camp at the mouth of the Vermilion, knew and traded with Lafitte the pirate for slaves.

With the settlement of Vermilion the Acadians came in from the older parishes. There are found here many of the same names you find in St.
Abbeville Has Modern Hospitals

Photo by Knight's Studio, Abbeville, La.

Complete, modern, and incorporating the latest equipment to be found in the metropolitan hospitals, is the Abbeville Clinic, shown above, which was used a few days ago by H. A. Ehrhardt and Dr. Shelly Meseder of Abbeville. State patient rooms, two wards, two private offices, two treatment rooms, an X-ray room, a laboratory room, a diet kitchen and operating room. The Clinic is opened to all medical practitioners for consultation and for hospitalization.

Among the first residents of Abbeville—the site of 40 persons for which Fray Kogues paid 230 pesos towards its 11,000 acres of the 19th century by the French, and where several early names in the village were of French origin. What was the earliest farm? Was it an estate or a homestead? What was the first crop raised? What was the first house built? Who were the first settlers?

Representative in the investment of $3,600,000 in providing additional modern hospital facilities for Abbeville and Vermilion Parish residents is the new hospital building erected by Dr. A. A. Conner of the hospital in a block located in Abbeville and Vermilion Parish. The building includes the following rooms, six patient rooms, an X-ray room, a laboratory, a diet kitchen, a private consultation room, and a smaller city near the office. The hospital, a sprawling building of the community, was recently remodeled and equipped at a cost of several thousand dollars.

Among the last equipped hospitals in Southeast Louisiana is the Palm Hospital at Abbeville, La., owned by Dr. P. J. Miller, well-known Vermilion Parish physician. The hospital has two operating rooms, a receiving room, a ward, and a large physicians' room, a diet kitchen, and a small laboratory. It is the latest addition to the most complete hospitals of the community.