HISTORY OF ACADIANA

RICHARD
The area was once known as "Light and Tie" because horses had to be hobbled, not tied, on the treeless prairie.

MOWATA
The name is an abbreviation of Morewater, which was important in the days of heavy rice irrigation and by steam trains.

ST. LANDRY PARISH

CHURCH POINT
The church here stood at a big bend that formed a point in the bayou, thus the name.

FAQUETAIQUE
The word comes from the Choctaw words 4ba, tek, which means "turkey hen."

BRANCH
The first post office here was called Plaquemine Brûlée.

MAXIE
The Star post office was established here in 1906. It became Maxie in 1907.

EGAN
This place was known as Jonas Switch, then Carol Switch, then Abbot before William Egan gave it the name.

ROBERT'S COVE
The Germans settled here, but it is named for Benjamin Robert, a native of Wales.

BAYOU PLACQUEMINE BRULÉE

LAFAYETTE PARISH

RAYNE
The people of Rayne were the first to push for the creation of Acadia Parish.

CROWLEY
It got its name when Patrick Crowley moved the railroad depot to W.W. Dossen's new prairie town.

ESTHERWOOD
This was named Esther Wood for one of Lafitte's pirates.

Vermilion Parish

MORSE
The post office here was first named Lorna. It became Morse in 1900.

EBENEZER
The name comes from the Bible and means "a commemoration of divine assistance."

Above, Crowley City Hall about 1900.

At right, the Acadia Parish Courthouse sits at the end of Parkerson Avenue in this view of Crowley about the turn of the century.

This brick building housed Crowley High School about 1900.

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Louisiana rice industry began on Acadia prairies

Crop became mainstay after railroad opened markets of the world

Long ago, the prairies stretching across western Acadia were filled with a wild prairie grass that fed herds of buffalos and, later, wild cattle. Early travelers described the scene in poetic terms, comparing the tall, wind-ruffled grasses to the gentle waves of the ocean.

The first Europeans to arrive raised cattle on these grasslands. But later, when the Civil War was done, and the cattle industry began to falter from a fever brought in by Mexican beef, the earlier settlers would watch as Germans and Anglos came from the Midwest to Acadia by the railcar-full. These immigrants began to replace the wild prairie grass with another one that would become a south Louisiana staple: rice.

The grain had been grown elsewhere in the United States since about 1865, when a Spanish ship put into the harbor at Charleston, S.C., broken from a storm and in need of repairs. When the repairs were done, the ship’s captain left behind a small quantity of “Golde Seedle Rice” that he had brought from Madagascar.

It was reported by settlers that the low-lying marshlands and rich soils of the Carolinas and Georgia were fertile fields for the “Golde Seedle.” Daily tides naturally flooded the fields with fresh river water, irrigating a crop that would grow where no other crop would.

By 1870, rice was established as a major crop in the Carolinas. But hurricanes, the Civil War, and competition from other crops eventually took their toll there, and rice moved westward, to Louisiana, her neighbor states, and to California (to feed a growing Oriental population that had come there during the Gold Rush).

Rice production began in earnest in Louisiana shortly after the Civil War. Many “sour river” farmers, who now had to pay for what once was slave labor, switched from sugar cane to rice because it required fewer hands and less water. A few years later, when Louisiana sugar cane began to wither from an exotic disease (and from stiffer competition from the Caribbean and South America), even more planters changed crops.

Rice production prospered along the Mississippi River into the 1880s, until tariffs again made sugar an attractive alternative. Mississippi River planters moved back to sugar, opening opportunities for the rice farmers of South Louisiana.

Part of that was because of a gift from nature. Because Texas and southern Louisiana have warm climates and long growing seasons, rice can usually harvest rice fields twice. We plant the fields in March or April and harvest the first crop in July or August (depending upon variety; the crop matures in 100 to 130 days). The fields are then reflooded and the stubble left from the first harvest grows into new plants, which can usually be harvested in late October.

When rice first came to the prairies, Cajun farmers planted small crops in places that couldn’t be plowed—along coulees and ditches, next to bayous or in ponds. Sometimes these rice ponds would start as small water trough dug for livestock, but cattle and hogs would trample its edges until it was just right for rice patch. The Cajuns just threw rice into the standing waters.

Plumes such as this one brought water to turn the prairie green. (Photo from Freeman Collection/USS archive)

What came up they called “Providence Rice.”

German immigrants to the prairies of what would be Acadia Parish were first farmers in southwest Louisiana to raise rice for market and to grow rice on high land.

The St. Landry Democrat of Sept. 18, 1880, wrote:

“At the lower end of Faquaquet Prairie, at what is usually called ‘German Settlement’ the land has always been considered completely worthless. But this year about 4,600 barrels of rice will be produced in that neighborhood and within a very small compass, not extending up the prairie, which is quite narrow here — not more than three or four miles. This rice in the ‘rough’ will net about four dollars per barrel. So we have here a small neighborhood where they used to produce absolutely nothing for sale, a revenue of $16,000. The rice lands in this neighborhood, the marshes, which were once considered not only worthless but a nuisance, are now the most valuable; and it will not be long before they cannot be bought for any reasonable price.”

The crop became an Acadia mainstay after the railroad cut across the prairies in 1881, connecting New Orleans to Houston, and the prairies to larger markets. Rice from the Nicholas Zambahker farm at Robert’s Cove was the first to be shipped by rail to New Orleans. The rice was brought to Bayou Plaquemine Brûlée by wagon, loaded on a boat, then reloaded on wagons for the remainder of the trip to the railroad. As the crop began to grow, the railroad companies saw its potential and began looking for people to settle the land.

One of the most effective of the promoters was S.L. Cary, a native of Iowa hired by Louisiana by railroad advertising. He moved to the newly organized town of Jennings in 1883 as station agent for the Southern Pacific. In 1884, he became a land salesman for the company, touring Iowa and Illinois to recruit farmers for the Louisiana lands.

Cary told his friends in Iowa that there were 5 million acres of marsh and overflowed land that could be bought for 12 cents an acre.

Another 3 million acres were eligible under the federal Homestead Act, in 160-acre patches, for as little as $14 down and the payment of another $9 at the end of five years.

Farmers who heard the pitch became even more interested when, in 1886 and 1887, a dry summer and severe winter all but wiped out their crops in the Midwest. They decided to accept the railroad’s offer of a ride to Louisiana.

By 1893, Cary’s “Iowa Colony” in Louisiana was flourishing, and so were their rice crops.

Ironically enough, it would be British capital that would finance the land boom once the railroads had opened the Cajun prairies. The London-based North American Land and Timber Co. (with home offices at 12 Downing St., London — next to the British “White House”), for example, swamped the market. In fact, they pumped an estimated $1.5 million acres of land in what is now four parishes, paying 12 cents an acre for marshland and as little as 75 cents an acre for prairie.

The North American Land Co. agent in Louisiana, J.B. Watkins, was one of the most enterprising promoters to hit Louisiana since John Law. He bought a newspaper in New York to publicize his land developments and later moved it to Lake Charles. It was the forerunner of today’s Lake Charles American Press. He outfitted a railroad car with Louisiana products and land company brochures and toured the Midwest. When yellow fever and malaria scares threatened to keep settlers away, Watkins organized the Telegraph Medicine Co. to advertise and sell an anti-malaria medicine.

It all paid off. More farmers came from Iowa, Illinois, Kansas, Michigan, and all across the American Midwest — at first expecting to farm wheat and corn here, as they had always done; they soon found that the Louisiana subsoil held too much water for those crops. But they also found that the soil could be cultivated with the same steam tractors, harrows, plows, and threshers they had always used. They looked at the Cajun rice patches and found their new crop.

By 1866, Southern Pacific was shipping 2 million pounds of rice from Acadia to New Orleans. Six years later, those shipments had grown to 100 million pounds and that began to create a problem.

Rice needs a lot of water. By the 1890s, over-cultivation meant that the crop needed more water than natural bayous could supply. The answer would be canal and pump companies, the first of them formed in the area around Crowley. When fields were too far from canals or bayous, water was supplied by deep wells.

About this time, farmers on the Cajun prairies began also to adopt the “modern” rice methods, starting as sharecroppers on land owned by the water companies. The companies put up seed and water and took one-fourth of the crop.

Crowley fields turned green again, but there was yet another battle to fight. Since there was no economical way to store rice before harvesting, it was all shipped to agents in New Orleans for milling, storage, and marketing. The agent took one-fifth of the crop. After the rice was cleaned and polished, it was sold to brokers or bids. The farmer seldom knew what price his crop would bring until it was actually sold. Sometimes the price didn’t cover his expenses.

The rice prairie declared its independence from New Orleans in 1892. Production was unusually high that year, and commodity brokers on New Orleans’ “rice row” along the North Peters Street waterfront attempted to corner the market. But the rice farmers fought back.

They formed the Farmers’ Cooperative Rice Milling Co. to fight the New Orleans bigwigs, and began shipping their crop west to a new mill at Lake Charles instead of east to New Orleans. And they began to build their own mills closer to home. By 1900, there were 10 mills in Acadia Parish alone, and 60 throughout Acadia’s rice belt — in Crowley, Bayou, Letherwood, Midland, Morse, Iota, Egan, Kaplan, Lake Arthur, and other communities.

As the competition stiffened, the country millers began paying cash for their rough rice, eliminating the commission agent. Then, they began marketing their cleaned rice directly to the consumer, cutting another middleman. But still, the price was generally set by New Orleans buyers, based on an estimate of the crop and made with no more information than a train ride through the countryside.

Then things took a head in 1907, when Gordon S. Orme of the Empire Rice Mill in New Orleans, a leader in setting the rice market, announced that the season’s crop would be unusually large and that consumption would be unusually low. He predicted that the market would be flooded and prices would be the lowest ever.

The prairie farmers reacted. The Welsh Rice Belt Journal would report that Orme had “prostituted his reputation as a judge of rice conditions.” Rice farmers held a big meeting in Welsh to chastise Orme in particular and New Orleans millers in general. The farmers agreed to hold onto their rice until they got full value for it. The railroads and the Louisiana Railroad Commission were dragged into the battle when New Orleans claimed that south Louisiana farmers were getting a rate break when they shipped their rice elsewhere. The railroads continued to cry foul — and organized the Louisiana Rice Growers Association to put up a unified front.

In 1909, the Louisiana Rice Growers and the Texas Rice Growers merged into the Texas-Louisiana Rice Growers Association, and in 1910, the organization expanded further to become the Southern Rice Growers Association. The growing associa-
Plaquemine Brûlée was first American settlement

The earliest European community in what is now Acadia Parish was probably at Plaquemine Brûlée. Some historians say it is the earliest American settlement in southern Louisiana (the other early settlements being either French or Spanish).

Plaquemine is an Indian word for persimmon. Brûlée refers to land that was cleared by burning away cane and underbrush. The first Plaquemine Brûlée settlement was probably just west of what is now Church Point. It was an area settled first by Protestants, and Methodists built the first church in the area in 1830. The settlement was probably visited by a Methodist missionary as early as 1805. Rev. Eliza Bowman was assigned to the district that year.

The settlement was named for Bayou Plaquemine, which enters Acadia Parish about 2 1/2 miles north of Church Point and virtually bisects the parish from northeast to southwest, emptying into the Mermentau River south-west of Crowley.

In early descriptions, all of the settlers along the bayou — from the northeast corner of the parish to its junction with Bayou des Cannes near Mermentau — were said to be "of Plaquemine Brûlée." Eventually, there were too many settlers and settlements, and the first Plaquemine Brûlée settlement became known as Lower Plaquemine Brûlée and the area around what is now Church Point was called Upper Plaquemine Brûlée.

Approximately half of Acadia’s early landowners were on Plaquemine Brûlée. An early reference to settlement in the area is in the St. Landry Police Jury minutes of Aug. 4, 1818, when Jacob Harmon was named overseer for a road to be built from Opeleousa to Plaquemine Brûlée.

Rev. Daniel Devinne, another early Methodist circuit rider, came to the district in 1820. "We built a church in Plaquemine Brûlée," he wrote in his autobiography, "the first Protestant edifice in the beautiful country of the Opeleousas." This was also the first church established in what is now Acadia Parish. Jesuit missionaries would not begin visiting the area until

Continued from Page 11

Fire

The R.C. Clark building was uninjured and was worth possibly $600. Mr. Derouen lost $500 in merchandise and household goods. He valued his residence and barn at $1,000. The barn was insured for $500 in the Inter-State Fire Association, of New Orleans, through the Gates & Craig agency.

The residence of Elias DeRouen was destroyed by the fire, and all of his furniture and livestock was lost. Mr. DeRouen placed his loss on stock at $200, no insurance.

The McBride building was worth possibly $500, and is not thought to have been insured. Paul Hebert placed his loss on stock at $200, no insurance.

Chas. Ouldan had some lumber burned and sustained loss on stock to the amount of $300, fully covered.

A man identified in the old records only as Jeanpere had a narrow strip of land down the bayou from the Plaquemine Brûlée settlement. William Henry Perrin’s "Southwest Louisiana Historical and Biographical" reported that "Joseph Cheasoon (Chasson), alias Joannes, died several years ago in this parish at the advanced age of nearly one hundred and thirty years. When he was one hundred and fifteen years old he moved to Texas, and after living in that state several years ago returned to (then) St. Landry."
Church Point developed along Bayou Plaquemine Brûlée

Le Vieux Présbytère will become museum

The Church Point settlement developed on land originally owned by Sylvain Sonnier. His Spanish grant was described as being "in the cove of bayou Plaquemine Brûlée." Sylvain Sonnier married Magdalene Bourg. One of their sons, born about 1768, was also named Sylvain. At the time of the 1777 census, the Sonniers owned 150 head of cattle, 11 horses and mules, and 45 hogs. Sonnier probably used his Bayou Plaquemine Brûlée property as a racerie (cattle ranch). The American State Papers identify him as "an inhabitant of Beaveler," which is south of Opeleousas.

The earliest known settler in the Church Point area was Louis Latilias, who came in the 1770s. Anglo Protestants settled in the area in the 1780s. There was a Methodist church, built to the west of the town at Plaquemine Brûlée, and a settlement began to spread east along the bayou, reaching a point where the bayou made an almost right-angle turn. By then, there was a Catholic church at the turn, and the first post office established here on Sept. 29, 1833 was given the name Church Point. Jules David was the first postmaster.

The nucleus of the settlement began in the 1840s, when two grandsons of Etienne Dagle III, Joseph E. Dagle and Theodore Dagle, built homes in what is now the town proper. Other early settlers were the families of Barouss, Bergeron, Breaux, David, Guidry, Leblanc, Leger, McBride, Thibodeaux, and Wimbler.

Pierre Louis Guidry was the settlement's first merchant, who probably opened his store there around 1840. Jean Barouss, a native of France, was also a pioneer merchant, arriving in Church Point in the 1840s. Other early businessmen were Leonhard Franches and Jules David, and Ernest Dagle, all of whom were in the business at least in the 1870s, and possibly before that.

In 1848, the Jesuits of Grand Coteau were invited to establish a church in the settlement. They had been coming to the area for some time to say Mass and administer the sacraments in the Guidry home. The Jesuits bought land and a church building was secured by the Daigle brothers and hauled into town. The small chapel, measuring 20 by 30 feet, was the first Catholic church established in the Acadian Parish area. Proceeded only by the churches of Opeleousas and Grand Coteau, it was the third Catholic church to be built in St. Landry Parish.

A larger church building replaced the first chapel in 1851. Three years later the Daigles donated five arpents of land to the church, adding to the original tract bought by the Jesuits.

A school was in operation in Church Point in 1856, in a small room adjoining the Catholic chapel. Teachers were paid for two months and the school closed. A new school building was constructed in 1875. This one accommodating 35 pupils who went to class three or four months of the year. The Sisters of Immincible Conception opened a Catholic school in Church Point in 1914. The first post office at Church Point was established in 1873, with Jules David as first postmaster. The attractions of the town were detailed in an Opeleousas Courier article of May 15, 1880.

"Church Point is the name of a pretty little hamlet situated on Bayou Plaquemine, about 15 miles from Opeleousas. It is one of the healthiest locations in St. Landry Parish, and is thickly settled with industrious and neighboring citizens, mostly Creoles yet with quite a sprinkling of the American population. The town was incorporated in 1899. Pioneer merchants included Jean Barouss, Leonhard Franches, P.L. Guidry, J.B. David, Thesler Guidry, Etienne Latilias, H.D. McBride, and Moses Lantry. Just after the turn of the century, P.L. Guidry and some others began to promote the organized sale of lots in the town. The first sale was on Dec. 19, 1905, when 120 lots were auctioned and six were donated for a public school. A second sale took place in 1908, after the Opeleousas Gulf and Northeastern Railroad was completed to Church Point.

The railroad track reached Church Point on April 19, 1907, and by year's end the town could boast, besides the new railroad depot, a new hotel, a new printing office, a dozen or so new homes, warehousing for the goods the railroad would haul, and other new construction.

Early this century, Church Point was in the center of the Acadian Parish cotton industry and boasted four cotton gins at one time. The belt wove eventually did in much of the cotton crop there, and farmers turned to corn, sugar cane and rice.

A vegetable and fruit canning plant was set up in 1913, and that first year processed 40,000 cans of blackberries, figs, tomatoes, sweet potatoes, and cane syrup.

Le Vieux Présbytère in Church Point is being renovated to become a museum. (Photo by P.C. Zizza)

### Internet

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Estherwood’s first resident may have been a pirate

The Estherwood area had two earlier names, Tortue, after the Indian chief, and Coultre Trief or Triv. The Coultre Trief name involved Jean-Baptiste Trief, a mysterious person believed to have been one of Jean Lafitte’s pirates, who built a cabin on the coulee, about six miles west of Crowley, about 1816. He was described as a “tall, dark, sinister-looking” man who wore large earrings like pirates once did.

There are several stories about how Estherwood got its name. A likely one is that it is the combination of two names: Wood, for a Dr. Wood who was once prominent in the area, and Esther, for the wife of a railroad executive.

Jacob Kollitz and A.D. LeBlanc established stores near the Trief cabin in the early 1890s, and a little settlement began to grow around them. Kollitz also operated the 15-room Estherwood Hotel for a time, but it closed in 1907.

Joseph Roy was the first postmaster at Estherwood. He was appointed May 3, 1881.

The settlement began to grow just after the turn of the century with the Miller-Morris Canal, one of the first large rice irrigation systems, which helped establish the rice industry in the area, followed in 1900 by the opening of the Eureka rice mill at Estherwood.

By the spring of 1900, there were more than 30 residences in the town, new streets were being graded, and sidewalks were being put down. The town got a further impetus, when Abrom Kaplan — a pioneer developer in Acadia and Vermilion parishes — and some other businessmen organized the Estherwood Development Co. and began to promote the place. In addition to town lots, the company owned 1,000 acres of rice and timber acreage in the area. The development company held two auctions for town lots.

Estherwood’s first church, the Methodist Northern, was built in 1900 and a regular pastor was assigned there in December 1901. Catholic services were first held in the village in 1904 in the home of Agricole LeBlanc. A chapel was finished there in 1910 and ministered as a mission of St. John the Evangelist Church in Mermentan.

A new school was also built there in 1900, possibly the first in the town.

Estherwood was incorporated as a village on March 12, 1901, and Henry Foted was elected its first mayor.

Solomon Wright was ‘Burbank’ of industry

Innovator developed seed rice that saved Acadiana farmers

Solomon Lusk Wright achieved lasting fame as the developer of domestic seed rice that revolutionized the rice industry.

Born in Rockville, Indiana, on April 26, 1852, Sol Wright spent 10 years farming wheat at Albany, Oregon, before coming to Acadia Parish in 1890. He was successful as a rice farmer from his first year. The first harvest from his 320-acre farm five miles southwest of Crowley brought him $1,900 that year — $400 more than he paid for the farm.

Less than a decade later, Wright was recognized as one of the leading farmers of the rice belt and as an authority on seed rice, solving a problem that plagued the Louisiana rice industry.

When Louisiana’s rice industry began to grow, there were only two varieties of seed rice available: Japan and Honduras. Each of these did well for the first and second year, but new seed had to be imported for a third year’s crop.

In 1903, Wright announced that he would raise only seed rice. He had been selling Japan seed since 1901, and would concentrate first on that. But he would also concentrate on developing a seed rice that would last long, and that did not have to be imported.

Wright was not a scientist. He was a farmer. In breeding rice, he followed the same principles as in breeding animals, first of which was to use the best breeding stock available.

To find that stock, he opened thousands upon thousands of grains of rice, carefully selecting grains that came closest to what he wanted. These he would plant the next day. When they bore fruit, he would be examined for the best grains to be replanted once again.

The result was Blue Rose rice, which, according to a contemporary description: “...not only made the highest yield per acre, but it stood the highest test in the mills. There was less waste and more clean product. A barrel of rough milled a hundred pounds of head rice, and commanded the highest price.”

The yield was at least 25 percent greater than other varieties. The stalk was fuller and stiffer, that not only made it easier to harvest, but also itself provided a rich cattle feed.

Within a few years, Louisiana prairies were planted almost exclusively with Blue Rose rice. Farmers said he had saved the Louisiana rice industry.

Iota was first called Cartville

Construction of the Southern Pacific branch line from Midland to Eunice created some new place names in Acadia Parish. At a point about two miles east of Pointe-Chouchou Springs, the railroad angled off to the northeast toward Eunice, and a new railroad station was christened Iota. Until that time the post office, established on Feb. 6, 1884, had been known as Cartville, and was located in the Samuel Cart store. After the railroad came through, the post office was moved about a half mile to a general store run by George Wright and Joe Sabatine. The post office name was changed to Iota on May 1, 1900.

Two of early St. Landry’s best-known political figures were Acadia Parish landowners. They were Louis Louallier and George King, whose adjacent tracts of land were located among three miles northeast of Iota.

Louallier, a native of France, was a member of the first police jury of St. Landry in 1811. He was a member of the Louisiana Legislature under governor W.C.C. Claiborne. Louisiana’s first American governor, and was termed “a most efficient member.”

After the Battle of New Orleans, Louallier published an open letter in the Courrier de la Louisiana objecting to General Andrew Jackson’s orders which directed all Frenchmen in New Orleans to leave the city within three days. Because of the letter, Louallier was arrested and jailed as a spy.

George King, born in Virginia in 1769, was kin to William Rufus King, who was elected Vice President of the United States in 1825. George King came to the Opelousas district in 1805 as the first territorial clerk of court. In 1806, Gov. Claiborne appointed him the first St. Landry Parish judge, a position he held until 1842. He died at his home in Opelousas.

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Mermentau area was ‘den of pirates and smugglers’

In the last quarter of the 18th century, there was an Attakapas chief by the name of Nementou. On April 16, 1784, he sold land on bayou Plaquemines Brule to Antoine Blanc. Nementou is later mentioned as the chief of a village on the river of the same name. Eventually, through a clerical error, Nementou became Mermentou and this was then corrupted into Mermentau through confusion with the French word mer, which means “sea.”

The Mermentau area was once reputedly a refuge for smugglers, outlaws, slave runners, and pirates. It was a crossing point for brave travelers on the Old Spanish Trail, but had such a bad reputation that until well after the Louisiana Purchase no one would go to the area to find out how many people lived there.

John Landreth was a surveyor who was sent from Washington, D.C., in 1818 to look for timber in Acadia. That could be harvested for use in building Navy ships. He kept a journal and had this to say: “These places, particularly the Mermentau and Calcasieu (sic) are the harbours and Dens of the most abandoned wretches of the human race... smugglers and pirates who go about the coast of the Gulf (sic) in vessels of a small draught of water and rob and plunder without distinction every vessel of every nation they meet and are able to conquer and put to death and every soul they find on board without respect of persons age or sex and then their unlawful plunder they carry all through the country and sell at a very low rate and find plenty of purchasers.”

During the Civil War and the years immediately after it, there were widespread reports of bushwhackers, robbers, and other fugitives hiding in the Mermentau woods, and tales of hidden treasure in the area. According to one of the stories, a man named Frank Quebeaux once found an iron pot filled with coins. The cache had been hidden between four copal (sweet gum) trees that had grown close together.

One of the earliest known settlers was John Webb, an English seaman, who came in 1827. It is said that Webb was a member of the crew of Admiral Horatio Nelson’s flagship at the famous Battle of Trafalgar (Oct. 21, 1805), in which the British defeated French and Spanish fleets, but during which Nelson was killed. Webb lived in an area that came to be known as Webb’s Cove, near the junction of the Mermentau River and Bayou Quebeaux. Cornelius McNaughton, who was running from the law in Quebec, joined Webb there about 1837.

Jean Castex, a native of France, came to Mermentau around 1836. He opened a mercantile business in 1859, and later became one of Acadia Parish’s leading merchants. He was also a cotton and rice farmer and built what may have been the first cotton gin in the parish in 1860. A sawmill was also built at the town about that time. The Mermentau post office was established on Sept. 2, 1859.

Victor Maingaud, another native of France, came to Mermentau in 1866 and opened a dry goods store. Maingaud operated the river ferry for some 40 years, was postmaster for 17 years, and eventually owned a store, hotel, sawmill, and rice mill.

Timber and lumber from the Mermentau area provided much of the building material and fencing used by the prairie settlers. The lumber was hauled by oxcart to places as far away as Opelousas.

On May 18, 1872, the Opelousas Courier reported: “For the last two weeks the streets of our town have been almost daily crowded with carts and wagons loaded with pine, boards and shingles, coming from Poitou-au-Loup and Mermento (sic). Never has there been such a crowd at one time, and so successively we counted eleven ox-wagons in one expedition in one day this week. Eight feet pieces are worth $12 per 100; six feet pieces, $6, and shingles, $6 per 1,000.”

Many of the houses used by prairie dwellers were completely built at the Mermentau sawmills, then loaded onto wagons and hauled by ox team across the prairie. As Mary Alice Fontenot reported in her history of Acadia Parish, “When such a house was bought, the owner called his neighbors together and organized a hauling bee, or balerrie. With a dozen yoke of oxen and three wagons and willing hands, the structure was soon on its way. The loading was accomplished by taking the beds off two of the wagons. Long legs, some of them 30 feet long, were used in place of the regular coupling poles. The house was finally rebuilt in 1908. The Louisiana Western Railroad reached Mermentau in 1880. In February of that year only four miles of roadbed remained to be graded between Lafayette and Mermentau. Some 150 convicts were at work on the stretch between Bayou Blanc and the Texas line. The Opelousas Courier reported on July 31, 1880: “East of Mermentau the track is laid for a distance of 22 miles westward from Vermillionville, leaving a gap of 14 miles, which is now being tied and ironed as fast as a force of 70 hands will permit. The bridge over the Mermentau is nearing completion...”

By the end of August 1880, the railroad line from New Orleans to Houston was open for freight business. Passenger trains with sleepers attached were running a regular schedule from New Orleans to Houston by the end of September. The trains, however, did not solve all transportation problems for the area. Produce, lumber, and cattle had to be transported to the rail line. On Jan. 22, 1887, the Acadiana Sentinel reported that Vic Maingaud of Mermentau had purchased a “fine little steam tug called the Harry Bishop,” and would use it to “haul logs, freight, rice and other produce, and will soon start weekly trips from Mermentau Station to Grande Chinsire.”

Capt. George W. Caldwell began carrying freight on the Mermentau about 1890, eventually owning a fleet of small boats and barges. The barges hauled rice, oil, cattle, cotton, wood, and general freight. Capt. Caldwell also operated a commissary on the riverfront and issued metal tokens in denominations of 5, 10, 25 and 50 cents and $1. These became known as “Mermentau Money.” During the 1890s, the 96-ton Olive operated as a popular passenger and freight hauler on the Mermentau River, making round trips every other day from Mermentau to Lake Arthur. People from Crowley and elsewhere would take the train to Mermentau, then board the Olive for a weekend or round-trip to Lake Arthur. The boat was described as “a splendid sternwheel packet.” The Louisiana Press Association members and their wives, meeting in Crowley in 1894, were entertained on such excursions. Fares were 50 cents one-way or 75 cents for a round-trip ticket. Mermentau achieved legal village status on Nov. 11, 1899.
Morse was also built upon rice and railroading

When the railroad was extended southward from Midland into Vermilion Parish in 1896, a station was created at Morse, about four miles south of Midland. It was built to serve settlers who had bought land from W.W. Duson and was named for a railroad official.

A post office, known as Lorna, was established on April 30, 1886. Mrs. Belle Gault, the first postmistress, would hold the job for some 20 years. In 1898, the community included the post office and grocery store, a general store, a blacksmith shop, the railroad depot, and a warehouse.

The name of the village was changed to Morse on July 1, 1900. It was named for S.F.B. Morse, a Southern Pacific official.

J.M. Crabtree, who built a general merchandise store in 1899, is credited with getting the town started. He laid out town lots and sold the first ones. Three rice mills were built in Morse between 1900 and 1920. They were the White Ring, built in 1900, the Morse, in 1902; and the Liberty, in 1918.

There was a Catholic church in Morse in 1901, administered at first as a mission of St. Michael Parish in Crowley, and later as a mission of St. John’s, the Evangelist Church in Mermentau. There was also apparently a saloon and a school in Morse by 1901. The Morse correspondent for the Creole Signal reported on Jan. 19, 1901, “Sorry to learn that one of the newcomers here will open a saloon—a curse to any place. The building is being erected right in front of our school.”

A disastrous fire in the fall of 1902 destroyed two rice warehouses, two lumber yards, a store, and a boarding house. The school burned twice at Morse, once in 1905 and once in 1906.

Morse was incorporated as a village on March 27, 1906. J.B. Healy was the first mayor.

In the Istre Cemetery west of Morse and south of Mermentau, a number of graves have wooden shelters built over them. The structures have gabled roofs and resemble little houses with doors and windows. The doors, allow entry into the little houses, and once inside, a person of average height can stand erect under the ridge of the roof in one or two of them. Some of the windows are paneled with glass. Wooden crosses ornament most of the grave houses.

No one knows why or when the custom originated. One explanation is that a long time ago, when other materials were unavailable in the then remote region, the wooden houses were put up in imitation of the above-ground vaults in the old cemeteries of New Orleans. Another reason given is that the houses may be a more elaborate modification of the screening around individual graves used in many family cemeteries in rural areas.

The older graves are unpainted and unmarked. Some of the earlier inscriptions show dates of the late 19th century.

Midland was once considered for Southern Pacific roundhouse

Midland, about nine miles west of Crowley, was the point of intersection of the Louisiana Western Railroad and the Southern Pacific, which reached there in 1894. Frank Quebeceaux operated a ferry over the bayou Plaquemine at Midland in the 1870s. His horse-and-buggy ferry was built of cypress logs and was hauled across the bayou by ropes.

Some people say it was given its name because it was the halfway point on the old railroad running westward from New Orleans to Houston. Midland first appeared on an Acadia Parish map as Midland Junction.

The railroad line was extended from Midland north to Gueydan in 1896, then from Gueydan to Abbeville in 1902.

About that time, the Southern Pacific began plans to put a railroad roundhouse at Midland and, seizing upon that news, Charles H. Cowen, one of the area’s most successful rice farmers, began to develop the town.

Cowen, an Illinois native, bought 160 acres of land in the Midland area in 1892, and built another 600 acres shortly after that. In 1902, he formed the Midland Development Co. and the Midland Rice Milling Co. and on April 22 of that year, sold 356 town lots at auction.

Midland’s first post office was opened on June 13, 1902. The Callahan general store, with Eugene T. Callahan as postmaster, soon there were more stores, and a school, church, lumber company, and hotel and livery clustered around it. A year later Cowen opened the Midland Hotel.

Two sawmills operated near by by the Callahan brothers turned out some 25,000 feet of lumber each day. These brothers—Herbert, James, Abner, and Eugene—owned 874 acres of timber land eight miles from town on Bayou Queve de Tortue. They also operated a planing mill and tank factory at Midland.

It was in 1902 just as things seemed to be going well for the fledgling community that Cowen, then only 39 years old, lost a leg in a rice threshing accident, and died soon after from complications resulting from the accident. Also, about that time, the Southern Pacific decided against putting a roundhouse at Midland.

The first school at Midland was established in 1903. The first church, a Methodist church, had been built there about 1900.
German people were among the first permanent settlers to come to colonial Louisiana, most of them coming during the 1720s to establish themselves at Côte des Allemands, the German Coast, in what is today St. James and St. Charles parishes. The very first daughters of some of these early families would one day come to Acadiana, but these are not the families that make up the substantial Germannic community in Acadiana today. New waves of German immigration came to Louisiana in the 19th century, and these were quite different from the 18th century German settlers who had settled on the Mississippi River. The later immigrants were, for the most part, middle, lower class, and often left Germany because of repressive political conditions, or because they believed they would find better opportunities in Louisiana.

The advent of the Industrial Revolution, particularly in the northern and western German states, caused a lower middle class to seek a new area to continue their traditional ways of work and of life. By 1839 a German-language newspaper had been established in New Orleans, and it was followed by numerous others. The Deutsche Zeitung was founded in 1847, and continued publication until well into the 20th century. A German Protestant Church was built in 1830. To be followed in 1836 by a Lutheran Catholic Church, and in 1840 both Lutheran and Methodist congregations built churches in New Orleans. By 1860 over half the total population of New Orleans was made up of Germans. Many of them retained their language and culture into the 20th century.

The settlement of a German community at Robert's Cove developed indirectly out of the German community in New Orleans. Father Peter Leonhard Thevis, pastor of Holy Trinity German Catholic Church in New Orleans, convinced relatives and friends from his native land to emigrate to Louisiana. The advance guard of the immigrants consisted of Father Thevis' brother, Peter Joseph Thevis, his nephew John Gerhard Thevis (son of Jacob Thevis), and a friend, Hermann Joseph Grein. They met Father Thevis in New Orleans, who arranged for them to come to America and settle in Acadiana, near Bayne. On Jan. 13, 1880, Father Thevis, John Gerhard Thevis and Hermann Grein visited the Robert's Cove site. It wasn't easy to get to. The road wasn't finished and the roads were still mostly hilly. Many of them went from New Orleans by steamboat to Washington, then by cart to Opelousas and from there to Prudhomme City, then by foot from there to Robert's Cove.

After looking over the land, the two Thevis relatives returned with the priest to New Orleans and spent the rest of 1880 and early 1881 working in a brewery. In early 1881, Grein returned to Germany to bring over the first settlers: the fiancée of Peter Joseph Thevis and, he hoped, a bride for himself. He returned in March 1881 with nine immigrants: Joseph and Josephina Endenstain and their five children; Johannes Peper (his fiancée); August Leonards; but unfortunately no bride for himself. He would remain a bachelor until he died.

The first families emigrated to Robert's Cove in 1881 from the westermmost part of Germany, an area bounded by the Saar River, the Mosel, the Rhine, the Vosges mountains, and the Rhine. They purchased 600 acres of land, including a large portion of woodland. Chacahoe reports them as industrious and thrifty farmers with money enough to make themselves comfortable homes after paying for the land. They are setting up a sawmill and will saw all lumber needed for houses and barns. They are pious Catholics and have a German priest to visit the Bayne church every two weeks for their spiritual benefit. Several families purchased land, ranging from 50 to nearly 400 acres each. Some families came to this country with enough money to pay cash for their farms. Others made down payments and expected to earn the balance from the land. The names of these early families, and those who came in the succeeding years, were: Goen, Oliger, Habert, Olenfort, Zahnbrecher, Carmer, Thevis, Berkem, Heinen, Meyer, Reiners, Spaeutsens, Leondards, Theunissen, Schneider, Wurtz, Grein, Hengsens, Schlicher, Schefions, Gielen, Schoffhausen.

Many of their descendants live at Robert's Cove today. There was little more immigration from Germany to Louisiana after the first two years of settlement at Robert's Cove, but those who had come took care of growth. By 1900 more than 70 children had been born in Robert's Cove.

Naturii, the Germans wanted to establish their own church and school. Several efforts were made, but Father Aegidius Hennemann had been sent from Munich to the United States to locate a new home for a Benedictine monastery which feared that the German government might expel the entire order, as it had done to the Jesuit order earlier. In 1878 Father Thevis in New Orleans, wrote to Hennemann about Robert's Cove. Father Hennemann bought land there in 1883 and established both a church and a school. He intended to move the monastery to Robert's Cove, but the Bavarian government had successfully protected the order from eviction. Neither the church nor the school survived the war.

In 1885, however, a permanent church was legally incorporated as St. Leo's Parish, on land donated by Anton Frey. A German-language school was opened during the same year, and continued until the outbreak of World War I. When the state legislature passed several anti-German laws, one in particular forbade the teaching of German in public or private schools. German-language instruction resumed after the war, but ended finally in 1927.

Mineral springs made Pointe-aux-Loups early health spa

Pointe-aux-Loups, "Wolf Point," is one of the oldest place names in the Acadian Parish area. It was a well-known summer resort because of the medicinal springs there.

The first mention of the place in government papers is in records of 1811, when William Mckay purchased 640 acres of land there.

Like other early settlements, the name Pointe-aux-Loups stems from the name of a waterway, Couler Pointe-aux-Loups, a tributary of Bayou Canne. The name is said to have originated because of the presence of large numbers of wolves in the wooded area adjacent to the stream.

First known settlers of the area were the Doucet's, the Hieberts, and the Semans.

Pointe-aux-Loups was a well known summer resort prior to the Civil War. The Opelousas Courrier of June 5, 1858, carried this advertisement:

"The unsigned takes this mode of notifying the public he is now in readiness to receive all those whose pleasure it be to seek the above well known health resort and pleasure and recreation. Those who are bidded by misfortune to have recourse to them for the remedial agency of the water. These Springs are situated on the Bayou de Canne distant about 4 miles from the south west of the town of Opelousa. The numerous springs there to be found may be as such as are recommended by physicians with sulphate and preparations of iron. The springs are very abundant and in one instance three of the streams form a large basin which affords a magnificent bathing place, the waters of the said basin can be entirely renewed every hour the circumstance which is certainly calculated to add much to its purity. At the distance of some Streamwards from the principal bathing place on the springs another is furnished with an abundant stream of water of the coldness of which can almost be compared to that of ice."

"In announcing the opening of this establishment, the undersigned does not pretend to offer to the public as in a fashionable watering place where fine dressing may be exhibited with the other general accomplishments. His object on the contrary is to offer to the affected a means through which a sick constitution may be restored and health. The establishment consists of comfortable dwellings with all the necessary furniture which may be required of such a place, and the table will always be simply furnished with ample edibles may seem best to suit the taste of visitors. An excellent pasturage in which horses may be kept with safety will be at the disposition of such as may desire it."

"Antoine Cart was said to have been in poor health and was told by a doctor to move to Texas. He was on the way to Texas when he stopped at Pointe-aux-Loups, liked the place, and decided to stay. His health began to improve because, he said, of the curing waters."

Cart's advertising evidently paid off, as advertisements continued to appear in the Opelousas newspaper until the Civil War years, when publication was suspended. The advertising appeared again after the war, and, by 1873, the spa was attracting visitors from across the area. Advertisements began to include testimonials to the curative powers of the water.

"Antonio Lahlid said his daughter had been cured of dyspepsia. Charles A. Perrold said his daughter, 12, had fever and chills and a deformed stomach that kept her from eating for 18 months. She was just fine now. Another Perrold child, who had des dafet (ringsworm) over almost all of his head, had been cured. There were testi monies from others who had been cured of "maladies of the skin."

Special rates were offered for those who wanted to bring their own provisions to the springs. Agency was to be had by the day, week, or month," at a modest price."

Cort sold the property in 1877, according to the Opelousas Courrier of June 2 of that year: "The popular Pointe-aux-Loups springs, recently purchased by Mr. Miller and thoroughly repaired and much improved by him, will be open to the public as in former years."

The new proprietor continued the newspaper advertising begun by Cart. Items in the news column told of Saturday night balls being given at the springs. The Christmas 1878 newspaper carried an advertisement for a Grand Bal to be held on New Years Eve.

Notices advertising Pointe-aux-Loups Springs continued to appear in newspapers until the turn of the century. By 1883 the list of promised cures had grown to include such maladies as rheumatism, kidney and liver disease, paralysis, and diseases of the blood. A resident physician was always in attendance in case of need, and hucks could be had at Mermento (sic) Station for those coming by railroad.

Another medicinal springs in the vicinity was advertised in 1880. This was Nespique Spring, operated by Francois A. Dapravy. The place was described as "set on Dr. Austin's old place, some three miles from the mouth of Nespique."

The mineral springs at both Pointe-aux-Loups and Nespique gave out sometime after 1900, probably due to a general lowering of the water level, and the establishment of rice irrigation canals in the 1890s."
Some memorable dates in Acadia history

1738
December: Joseph LeKintrec and Joseph Blanpain form a partnership to trade with the Attakapas and Opelousas tribes in St. Landry Parish, including what would become Acadia Parish.

1777
The population of the widespread Opelousas district is counted at 756.

1784
April 16: Antoine Blanc buys 2,000 acres on Bayou Plaquemine Brûlée from Nemeton, chief of the Attakapas.

1796
The Prudhomme home is built at Bayou Mallet.

1798
William Wixom received a Spanish land grant on the bayou now bearing his name.

1799
Attakapas Indians sell a village on the west side of the Mermentau River to André Martin for $100.

1801
John Lyon buys land on Bayou Queene de Tortue from some Attakapas Indians.

1820
A Methodist church is established at the Plaquemine Brûlée settlement near what is today Church Point.

1832
Dec. 6: A post office is established at Cole's Settlement, about five miles northeast of Crowley.

1838
May 11: A post office is set up at Plaquemine Brûlée.

1848
Jesuits from Grand Coteau establish a chapel at what would become Church Point.

1856
A Catholic chapel for free mulattoes is established at Bois Mallet.

1857
A post office is set up at Coulée Blanc, a few miles southwest of what is today Crowley.

1858
Aug. 5: A post office is established at Pouspoeville, as Rayne was first known.

1873
The first Lutheran congregation in southwest Louisiana is established at Evangeline.

1874
April: Crowley's first railroad station burns.

1877
February: Fire destroys a large portion of the Rayne business district.

1891
Sept. 11: Charles W. Faulk is named first postmaster at Ebenezer.

Inset: Raymond Herpin was one of the early bakers at the Crowley Bakery. This photo was taken in 1916. (Photos courtesy of Randy Herpin.)

1893
The Pickett Mill, the first rice mill in Crowley, opens its doors.

1894
April: Crowley's first railroad station opens.

1895
February: Fire destroys a large part of the Rayne business district.

1896
Aug. 16: A post office is established at the settlement of Santo. It would later be changed to Gasser, then to Frey.

Feb. 14: Twenty-four inches of snow fall in Rayne, still a state record for snowfall in one town.

1898
April 30: A post office opens at Lorna, later named Morse.

July: A volunteer fire company is formed at Crowley.

1899
May 10: A post office is opened at Star, later renamed Maxie.

Nov. 11: Mermentau is incorporated as a village.

1900
Dec. 2: The first car appears on the streets of Crowley. It was a "Foster Wagon" owned by C.C. Duson. It cost $350.

1906
The railroad puts a line through Morewater, which becomes shortened to Mowata.

1914
Crowley High School's football team goes undefeated to win the state championship. Among its victims during the season was SLU, the Southwestern Louisiana Industrial Institute (now SLU), which Crowley High beat 51-0.

1921
Babe Ruth and the New York Yankees came to Crowley to play an exhibition game against the Indianapolis Indians, who held their 1921 spring training camp in Crowley.

1927
Sept. 21: The First Rice Festival opens in Crowley with S.L. (Soll) Wright as King Rice and his daughter, Edith, as queen.

1940
August: Torrential rains leave 8 feet of water in some parts of Crowley. Flood waters also covered parts of Branch, Robert's Cove, Rayne, Esterwood, Midland, Mermentau, Morse, Guayan, and Lake Arthur.

1974
Oct. 29: Just after 1 a.m. a massive tornado slices through Crowley, destroying everything in its five-block-wide path.
Acadia communities have colorful histories.

The Depression of 1929 caused many people to leave for the United States. This exodus continued until the 1950s, when the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College (LSU) in Baton Rouge began offering courses in French. The result was a resurgence of interest in the Acadian culture, particularly among young people. Today, Acadian communities are once again thriving, with a resurgence of language, music, and traditions. This has led to an increased interest in Acadian history and culture, and has made it easier for younger generations to connect with their roots. The Acadian community is proud of its heritage and continues to pass it on to future generations.
HISTORY OF ACADIANA

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Acadia

Jackson Brewing Co., which made Jax Beer.

The war interrupted Fabacher’s distillery business, and it was then that he persuaded his friend, Huber, also a native of Germany, to help him found a German colony in southwest Louisiana.

Fabacher and Huber came to Prairie Faquetique in 1870, and the first group of colonists from Germany had arrived by January 1871. A few months later, there were 60 persons in the colony.

The Fabacher post office was established June 11, 1873, with Joseph Fabacher as postmaster. It was closed about the turn of the century. The place also became known as German Settlement, and later became known as Ritchie.

FAQUETIQUE

There are several references to the “prairie Faquetique” in descriptions of land claims in the Acadia Parish area. The land area lies between Bayou Malet and Bayou des Cannes in the northern section of Acadia Parish and extends across the boundary into St. Landry. The word Faquetique is a derivative from the Choctaw fakit tek, turkey hen.

Zeno Huber owned a store at Prairie Faquetique Prairie southwest of Eunice in 1878. At that time, the entire land area between Bayou Malet and Bayou des Cannes was called Prairie Faquetique. Martin Carron ran a store there in 1881. The Opelousas Courier of April 2, 1881, reported that on March 26 there had been “a fatal affair at Faquetique, at the store of Martin Carron; Portella Sonnier was fatally stabbed by Octave Fusselier. The killing was said to have been the result of ‘drinking too much whiskey,’ and Carron ‘demanded an intention not to sell whiskey in the future.’”

The settlement of Faquetique had a post office for six months in 1876.

FREY

John Frey was postmaster of the Santo post office when it was established Aug. 16, 1895. The name of the post office was later changed to Cassier, then to Frey.

GOTT’S COVE

Gott’s Cove is a residential community off LA 97 in south Acadia Parish, between Evangeline and Millerville.

GRAND MARAIS

Grand Marais is between Prudhomme and Prudhomme and many families à gens de couleur libres farmed there.

GUM POINT

Gum Point was in use as a place name in the Branch area as early as 1900. In 1900, the Thibodeaux school in Ward 2 was moved about a mile north and was thereafter known as the Gum Point school.

LONG BRIDGE

On Sept. 11, 1886, a bridge was opened across Bayou Plaquemine Bréllle, west of Rayne. The bridge, identified in the Rayne Signal, the “Duoun Bridge,” the newspaper said, “would greatly facilitate travel between Rayne and a large section of country on the other side of the bayou.” The bridge later became known as Long Bridge.

LONG POINT

The Long Point settlement was about six miles north of Crowley on Long Point Gully. The Opelousas Courier and Rayne Signal reported on Oct. 23, 1886, that both a bear and a bear which had been killed near the Willie Higginbotham farm. The animal was found in the Allen Laughlin cornfield, eating corn. Laughlin and his brother, Tom, chased the bear with a pack of dogs and killed it with buckshot. The bear measured 5 feet 3 inches from nose to tail, and weighed 230 pounds.

LYON’S POINT

Lyon’s Point, about seven miles directly south of Crowley, was named for John Lyon, the colonial settler who bought land here from the Attakapas. According to family tradition, Lyon had settled first in the Bayou Queve de Tortue area, but was badly treated by pirates there in 1819 and moved to the Robert’s Cove area. His original land holdings on Bayou Queve de Tortue were said to have been divided among his children when he moved to Robert’s Cove.

A Catholic chapel was established there in 1908. There was a school at Lyon’s Point in 1902, but it didn’t last more than a year or so.

MAXIE

The Star post office was established on May 10, 1899, with Lyman L. Clark as postmaster. The name was changed to Maxie on March 4, 1908.

MILLERVILLE

Located on Bayou Nezpiq, about six miles west of Iota, Millerville was named for Dennis Miller, who owned a store and sawmill there. In 1888, there were two general stores, a saloon, a hotel, a blacksmith shop, and “a good schoolhouse” at Millerville.

There was a post office at Millerville for about eight years. Dennis Miller was appointed first postmaster on May 18, 1887. Millerville was a major shipping point in the 1880s. Rice, lumber, eggs, and chickens were shipped down Bayou Nezpiq to the railroad at Mermentau.

MIRE

This settlement was first called Castille. In 1909, the voting place at Castille was the Deshotel & Dejean Store. Ernest Higginbotham also ran a store there. There may have been a post office named Dejean here for a short while.

MOWATA

At the turn of the century, the land which is now Mowata was a big rice plantation known as the Jones Plantation. In 1906, the railroad built a station at the plantation. Deep wells had been drilled to irrigate the crops on the plantation, and the station was named to advertise the abundance of water. The station was called Morewater, but later was shortened to Mowata — according to one story, because there wasn’t enough room on the station signboard to print the longer name.

PITREVILLE

This settlement is in the extreme northeast corner of the parish. A post office opened at Pitreville in the early 1900s and was named for the first postmaster, Edgar Piter.

POINTE NOIRE

A portion of Prairie Hayes, a few miles west of Church Point, was once called Pointe Noire, Black Point, for reasons unknown.

PRAIRIE HAYES

Prairie Hayes was named for Bosman Hayes, the colonial landowner and settler. The area extended west, north and south for some miles from the Hayes land grant on Bayou Plaquemine Bréllle. The prairie remained virtually unpopulated until after the Civil War.

It was described as “bounded by Bayou Plaquemine Bréllle on the south, Bayou des Cannes on the west, and Bayou Malet on the south. A post office was opened here in 1885.

One of the Prairie Hayes folkways was the annual Courir de Mardi Gras. Correspondents for the Crowley newspaper reported on Feb. 15, 1903, “in accordance with an old custom here, the Creoles dressed in masquerade …. and at night gave a grand (masked) ball” and on Feb. 27, 1904, “the Mardi Gras rode as usual, and from the racket they made, had a good time.”

PRAIRIE MAMOU

This area is between Bayou des Cannes and Bayou Nezpiq, and extends across the parish line, through the neck of St. Landry Parish in which Eunice is situated, and on into Evangeline Parish. The lower part of the prairie is called Tee Mamou; the upper part is Grand Mamou. On old maps, the place name appears as Prairie Mammouth, French for Mammoth Prairie.

Mammouth could have been the remains of an early mammoth found there. More likely the mam- mouths of this prairie were bison, called mammoths by the first Acadian settlers, who used the word to mean “big animal.”

PRUDHOMME CITY

Prudhomme City is about six miles east of Eunice in northern Acadia Parish. There was a sawmill there in 1881. The St. Landry Democrat of Dec. 31, 1881, reported: “Mr. Louis Savoy had his foot saved off at Mr. R.G. Smith’s sawmill near Prudhomme City a few days ago.” There was a resident physician at Prudhomme City as early as 1871. This was Dr. W.T. Jenkins, who was also a planter and rice grower. His son, Dr. Walter A. Jenkins, began his practice at Prudhomme City, but later moved to Church Point.

The Prudhomme City post office was established April 15, 1873. It was discontinued on July 6, 1894.

RICHARD

This area was once known as “Light and Tie.” An old resident recalled in a 1975 interview that “there were few trees and no hitching racks on the prairie in the old days. ‘Light and tie’ meant to dismount and hobble your horse by tying the bridle around the horse’s front leg so that the animal would not wander away.” It was also known as Thralkill and as Coe, for families living there. The present name comes from the Richard School, built on land donated by Thigéne Richard.

TASSO

Tasso supposedly got its name from the persistent aroma of smoked meat that hung over Bovet Malet. Supposedly the rustlers and jayhawkers of the area had numerous bouchaniere in the thick woods of the prairie. These rustlers rustled the hogs, hence the odor. The name is sometimes seen as Tasseux, but the Louisiana-French word is properly spelled Tasso, because it is derived from the Spanish tasso, which means “jerked beef.”

WHITEHOUSE

This was the name of a post office established Jan. 11, 1893, with Anna B. Jarvis as postmistress. The post office was closed in 1904. Whitehouse was located on the Mamou Prairie, on Bayou des Cannes near the Acadia-St. Landry parish boundary.
Some thought Jayhawker Carriere was really a hero

His outlaw band reigned in area around Bois Mallet in 1860s

Ozemie Carriere, who lived in Bois Mallet, was born May 6, 1831, four months after his father’s death. His parents, Ursin Carriere and Emilie LaCasse, had seven other children.

As a teen-ager, Ozemie became involved with a group of local toughs who made their living by helping themselves to their neighbors’ livestock, gold, and whatever else they could lay hands on. They ranged across Acadia in pursuit of booty, but they were most often found on the prairies of Acadia and western St. Landry parishes. Carriere learned his trade well, and was firmly established as the leader of this outlaw band by the late 1850s.

With his leadership came reports of crimes more vicious than simple robbery. Some people were killed when they resisted the outlaws. That was something that could not be overlooked, and lawmen across the area began tracking the Carriere gang. When the lawmen didn’t get there fast enough, local vigilante groups did. The bandit leader’s older brother, Hilarie, and several other members of the gang were strung up by vigilantes. But Ozemie Carriere remained untouched, and his gang kept acquiring new members — including some women.

When the Civil War reached Acadia, Ozemie added another dimension to his reputation. He became a “Jayhawker,” a term coined during the Civil War for guerrilla fighters in the South who fought against the Confederacy. The war was not popular in every camp in Acadia, and a number of men decided that they would rather join Carriere’s gang than be conscripted into the Confederate army.

In 1864, the Confederate government attempted to conscript Creoles of color from the Opelousas area for duty as forced laborers in north Louisiana. The Creoles did not like the idea, and were welcomed alongside white draft dodgers in Carriere’s Bois Mallet band.

Before the Civil War, Carriere had entered into an extra-marital liaison with a sister of General Guillaumet, a prominent man of color. Who in 1864 became Carriere’s chief lieutenant. Carriere also accepted Union deserters as quickly as men skipping Confederate duty.

As his gang grew in size, he had to raid more regularly to keep everyone fed and happy. Luckily for him, the war also brought new opportunities for his raiders — the Confederate encampments where he could find food, tents, horses, and weapons.

The Confederates put out orders to shoot him on sight. But Carriere became a hard man to see, because he was also a hero to the families of those he was hiding from the Confederate draft.

At one point, Union General Nathaniel Banks, who commanded the Federal troops that marched through southern Louisiana, sent his Chief of Staff to offer Carriere a commission in the Union army. Carriere would have none of it. He didn’t want any general looking over his operations, no matter which side they were on.

As historian Carl Brauseaux and his fellow writers point out in “Creoles of Color in the Bayou Country,” “Under the leadership of Carriere and Guillaumet, the southwest Louisiana Jayhawkers were a formidable fighting force capable of resisting repeated Confederate efforts to annihilate them — Operating out of camps in the Bois Mallet area, the Jayhawkers controlled most of the southwestern Louisiana prairie country for much of 1863, 1864, and 1865.

While publicly espousing the Confederate cause, St. Landry’s wealthiest Creoles of color appear to have privately supported the insurgents. It is hardly coincidental that such leading free men of color as Auguste Donato, fils, capitalized on the Jayhawker presence to move as many of their increasingly valuable cotton bales as possible to relatives’ farms in the Bois Mallet area, where they would be safe from Confederate and Union foragers. Indeed, contemporary civil suits indicate the free men of color were even transporting to Jayhawker territory fencing materials that they acquired from Union forces.

It is equally significant that, Brauseaux et al continue, “though the Jayhawkers lived off the land by pillaging local farms, particularly those between Opelousas and Church Point, they appear to have scrupulously avoided the caches of agricultural stores hidden by free persons of color at Bois Mallet. Indeed, at a time when Jayhawkers were conducting daring daylight raids against Cajun yeomen, Auguste Donato’s cotton bales sat abandoned but untouched on Evarte Guillory’s Bois Mallet farm.”

But Confederate soldiers who had gone to fight were angry now over how Carriere was hiding those who would not go. The military joined with the law in hunting him down. The vigilantes found Ozemie’s brother, Ursin, and his sister, Celestine Carriere Saunder, early in 1865. They had each been part of the gang, and were given vigilante justice.

In May 1865, Confederate Lt. Louis Amende Brininger met Carriere and one of his men, Martin Guillory, in the woods near present-day Mallet. When the confrontation was over, Carriere was dead and Guillory was badly wounded. Carriere was 34 years old, Guillory would recover from his wounds and accept a Union commission as a captain, organizing hisJayhawkers into a unit called the Mallet Free Scouts. But he too would soon be shot down by vigilantes. He was 25 years old when he died.