OLDEST GRAVE HOUSE — Pictured above is probably the oldest grave house in the Iberville Cemetery. Unfortunately, the structure is gradually surrendering to the forces of wind and weather.

By MARY ALICE FONTENOT

MORSE — Once upon a time an aged Acadian, much beloved by his family, lay upon his deathbed. He called his grieving sons and weeping daughters to his side and made known his last wishes.

"My children," he said, "bury me in the corner of the pasture by the big oak trees. And don't let the rain fall in my face!"

With that he made the sign of the cross and breathed his last.

Houses Over Graves
Unique Burial Custom

BY MARY ALICE FONTENOT

BEST WAY.
The old man was laid out in a simple fashion of the times, and buried in a grave dug at the foot of his bed. He had instructed. This fulfilled only part of his final request. His dear children held a family council and decided that the best way to keep the rain from falling on papas face was to build a house over his grave.

This is one of the stories told about an unusual burial custom — that of building small houses over graves. Of late, the Iberville Parish cemetery board has discovered several old family cemeteries in the southeast part of the state.

No one knows why or when the custom originated. One explanation is that it was a way of preserving the body, allowing it to hearken the earth and be restored to its original state.

Another reason given is that the houses are an elaborate modification of the famous "Indian graves" found in many rural cemeteries, the purpose of which was to keep animals, both wild and domestic, from trampling the graves.

There are a dozen or more small houses built over graves in the Iberville Cemetery west of Morse. Some shelter only one grave, others are large enough to cover two side-by-side graves.

The houses all have doors and windows. The doors, about four feet in height, permit entry and, once inside a person may lie down and confront the norte.

SEVEN GRAVES.

Some of the graves within the house shelters are found in the traditional manner, marked by hand-hewn wood crosses. One area, obviously a family plot, tells its own poignant story; here are seven graves, two large and five small, each individual enclosed by fencing. Each individual is marked by a single hand-hewn wooden cross.

When the Iberville Parish Cemetery board surveyed the area, they found that the graves were well maintained and that the families were proud of their ancestors' final resting places.

The Iberville Cemetery, sometimes called the Lafayette Cemetery, is a peaceful and well-lit place. Ancient live oaks provide shade for the graves, while a hurricane shelter is nearby for emergency situations. The cemetery is identified with a metal sign over the entrance.

In the face of storms, the shelters provide protection for the graves and their markers.

DIVIDED HOUSE.

This particular grave house is much like a chateau for a family. A partial partition divides the two graves of a couple inside. In life, the story goes, the two did not get along well and the feud continues to this day beyond the grave.

ACADIANA NEWS

On Page 23