Louisiana residents have few real earthquake stories to tell

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Louisiana isn't famous for its earthquakes. Although the state has experienced 17 minor quakes since 1843, most of the real shaking Louisianians have experienced has come from earthquakes in other states.

Shock waves travel through the earth over the course of a few minutes and are felt here.

Earthquakes like the one predicted for the New Madrid fault on Dec. 3 usually do little more in Louisiana than rattle a few windows or whip up inland waters.

For instance, the earthquake that devastated Anchorage, Alaska, in March 1964 was felt all over southern Louisiana and was blamed for snapping the mooring lines on 12 barges at the Cargill grain elevator. One of the barges drifted down the river and smashed into the Dow Chemical Co. wharf at Plaquemine.

Dow sued Cargill, which blamed the incident on the Alaska quake, citing in its defense an "act of God."

Newspaper accounts from 1964 indicate that a 5- to 6-foot tidal wave rolled along Gulf coast following the Alaska quake. Near Houston, three, 10,000-ton ships broke their moorings.

Even stranger were accounts of turbulent water on Louisiana's interior streams.

Louisiana felt the effects of the Alaska quake about 15 minutes after the actual event.

One account from a resident of Hoo-Shoo-Too Road described the Amite River as still. Then, "all of a sudden, water came in waves four feet high," according to the account.

Others said the waters of the Amite River "sucked out," or receded, and then came up in great waves four feet high.

Other reports at the time stated the wave action destroyed a pier and even damaged or sank boats on the bayou Terre aux Boeuf.

Another report described the swimming pool on the fourth floor of the Capitol House as "boiling" during the event. Elsewhere in East Baton Rouge Parish, a man reported that a half-submerged rowboat in a three-acre lake on his farm was thrown 30 yards from the water by the disturbance that followed the Alaskan quake.