Mrs. Roy Krewitz and
Dean T. J. Arceneaux.
The Significance of La Maison Acadienne-Française

La Maison Acadienne-Française, the French House on The University of Southwestern Louisiana campus, is more than a center for the preservation of the French language ... more than a meeting place for special functions and for visiting dignitaries ... more than a means of focusing attention on the French and Acadian heritage of the area ... and more than a rallying point for the preservation of the Acadian folklore of the area.

It is a symbol of the strength not only of the French language and culture of the area but also of the people of French and Acadian heritage who have emerged as leaders in this area in the fight to keep their language, heritage and customs, which are their roots, alive and growing. With them it has been a labor of love of such magnitude as to engulf also those of non-French ancestry.

Like the magnificent, native live oak trees that send their roots deep into the good earth and spread their branches in intricate designs upward and outward, the French and Acadian culture continues to spread and to be a vital and viable part of Louisiana.

The University of Southwestern Louisiana is proud of its role in the French renaissance movement in Louisiana and in its preparation of teachers to serve as instructors of French in the educational institutions in this state and elsewhere.

Because of its early recognition of the importance of preserving the heritage of the area, The University of Southwestern Louisiana, through its faculty and administration, assumed the leadership in Louisiana in the French movement from an academic standpoint as well as from other points of departure.
Acquisition of La Maison Acadienne-Française

A major step was taken by the University in its role as a leader in the French renaissance movement in Louisiana in the move to purchase the property now known as La Maison Acadienne-Française. A prime proponent of this project and a most effective emissary was Mrs. C. E. Hamilton, who at the time was president of France Amérique de la Louisiane Acadienne. France Amérique de la Louisiane Acadienne is the society devoted to the fostering of the French and Acadian language and culture of Louisiana.

Through this society, under the chairmanship of Dr. T. J. Arceneaux, dean of the USL College of Agriculture at the time and an active member of France-Amerique, funds to purchase the property were requested of the 1954 Legislature. Assisting in this effort in addition to Dr. Arceneaux and Mrs. Hamilton, who had strong social and political connections, were Dr. Hosea Phillip, Mrs. Laurence Montegut Ziegler and Dr. Paul Delaup, all USL professors; Mrs. Harry Griffin; Mrs. Roy Krewitz (Anna Belle Dupuis-Hoffman) and other Acadian leaders.

Adding to the success of the effort was the strong support of USL’s president at that time, Dr. Joel L. Fletcher, who was deeply interested in preserving the French and Acadian culture of the area.

The bill to authorize the purchase of the property for Southwestern was introduced into the House of Representatives by Representatives J. Alfred Begnaud and Arthur Webb of Lafayette. A member of the House Appropriations Committee that year, Rep. Begnaud helped to clear the bill through the committee and to steer it in the House.

Senators M. Eloi Girard of Lafayette and Elmore Bonin of St. Martinville guided the bill on the Senate floor.

Act 471, which authorized the purchase of the property to be used as a French house for USL, was signed by Gov. Robert F. Kennon on July 7, 1954. The legal papers completing the transaction for
USL (which was then named Southwestern Louisiana Institute) were signed by President Fletcher on Dec. 9, 1954.

The house and the one acre of land located at the corner of Johnston Street and St. Mary Boulevard, were purchased at a cost of $50,500 from the estate of Isaac Bendel, who had inherited the property from his sister, Mrs. Myrtile Meyer.

The colonial type house had been built in the 1920's as the home of Mr. and Mrs. Myrtile Meyer. The land on which the house stands was the site of Lafayette's first horticultural nursery . . . the Lacey Nursery.

Following the deaths of Mr. and Mrs. Meyer, the property was inherited by Mr. Isaac Bendel who had made his home there with Mrs. Meyer for many years. She died in 1949. Mr. Isaac Bendel died in 1952. It was then that Mrs. Hamilton, who felt that the property, because of its proximity to the campus, should be owned by Southwestern, began her efforts to have USL acquire the property as a cultural center for the "edification of the French language and Acadian culture" as well as for other suitable purposes.
Miss Jeanne Castille, left, and Mrs. Malcolm Burleigh.
President Fletcher’s strong advocacy of the movement to preserve the French language and French-Acadian culture led him to make funds available to furnish the house in a manner that would reflect that culture. Mrs. C. E. Hamilton, Mrs. H. L. Griffin, Mrs. Roy Krewitz and Mr. John Manuel searched antique shops in New Orleans and the homes in this area to find and to purchase suitable furnishings. Their search resulted in the purchase of authentic Louisiana and French antiques and period furniture. Aside from the educational value to the USL students in being able to view these pieces, their intrinsic value today far surpasses their original purchase price.

Among these furnishings are a settee and chairs of the Louis XV and XVI period with their original Aubusson tapestry; a Louis XV console table with an apricot colored marble top veined in black; a Louis XV Bombe marquetry veneered china cabinet with Ormolu mounts and a top of veined brown and white marble; a Boulle table of the Louis XIV period which features Ormolu mounts with intricate inlays and a center panel of petit point; two small empire cabinets with white marble tops and black and gold ornamentation; and a gilded Louis XV table with a white marble top with green veining.

There is a Louis XV style marquetry piano and nearby is a rippled base floor lamp originally designed to use kerosene. Included also in the furnishings are John Belter chairs created in the French style. A special attraction is the screen of fine French styling decorated with floral designs on canvas.

A special point of interest (in the reception room) is the mantel with white marble interior and apron in the reception room. The fire screen and other appointments are of Louis XV styling and feature cupid designs. On the mantel are Sevres porcelain vases with pastoral scenes and floral designs. There is also a blue Sevres clock on the mantel.

The chandeliers and wall sconces in the reception room once lent their beauty to a cathedral in
Prudent Mallard Bed.
France. In the reception area also near the fireplace is a five-piece set (including a love seat and two side chairs with the original Aubusson tapestry). Another interesting piece is the Louis XVI period circular table decorated with carved flowers and with caning on the bottom. Atop this table is a bronze based lamp with raised classical figures. Other Victorian period pieces are the medaillon back sofa and side tables near it of the Eastlake School.

In the sun room opening off the reception room the furnishings are of the French Empire and Victorian periods and feature intricate curlicued motifs. An interesting light fixture in this room is a sphere of beaded crystals on a wired base.

In the renovation of the house, a raised dais built at one end of the reception room is used as a small stage for the programs held at the French house. In the butler's pantry and kitchen the only original features are the china cabinets, the sinks and the tile floor.

In the upstairs foyer the bookcase is of the American empire period. The secretary is of the French empire period and features the original hand made glass. The chandelier is made of crystal pendants.

The bedroom contains a Prudent Mallard bed with a canopy or half tester and armoire; a Victorian dresser with small shelves on either side of the mirror and a wash stand complete with a matching set of bowl, pitcher and water urn as well as other accessories. The room also contains two Victorian rockers. The light fixture, which burned kerosene originally, is a brass lamp with cranberry shade.
Madame Chantal LeClere-Lendais.
Historical Documents and Photographs

Hanging in the upper and lower hallways and in the library are framed documents of the Acadian Bicentennial year, letters from French and Canadian officials, the Holy See, President Ike Eisenhower and photographs of Acadian leaders. Among these are photographs of Louisiana’s first Democratic governor, Gov. Alexandre Mouton; Gen. Alfred Mouton; Dean of American Diplomats, Jefferson Caffery, also a native of Lafayette and a USL alumnus; Robert Martin, USL’s legislative founder; Bishop Jules Jeanmard; Mrs. Hamilton, the “marraine” of the French House, and other noted Acadian leaders, including a photograph of Dean Arceneaux and the mayor of Paris, when the dean represented the City of Lafayette in France for the bicentennial of the birth of General Lafayette.
With the renovations completed and the furnishings in place, La Maison Acadienne-Française was ready for use. A French House Committee to direct its use was appointed in 1955. Members of the committee were: Dr. T. J. Arceneaux, president; Mrs. C. E. Hamilton, vice president; Dean Joseph A. Riehl, Dr. Graves B. Roberts, Dr. Elmer Johnson, Dr. Hosea Phillips, Mrs. Laurence Montegut Ziegler, Miss Marie Del Norte Theriot (Mrs. J. G. Hains), Dean Harry L. Griffin, Dr. Paul Delaup, Miss Flo Landry, Miss Anna Belle Hoffman (Mrs. Roy Krewitz), president that year of France Amérique, and Mrs. Nita Fourgeaud.

In October, 1955 Miss Alice Broussard was appointed to serve as chatelaine. She held the post until her retirement in 1961. Succeeding her was Mrs. Clara Fusilier Cooper, who also served until her retirement in 1974. The third chatelaine is Madame Chantal Le Clère-Lendais, a native of France.

An impressive ceremony on Oct. 29, 1955 marked the official dedication of La Maison Acadienne-Française and the inauguration of its use. The event was planned as part of the climax of the celebration of the Acadian Bicentennial. On hand for the special ceremony, among others, were: Msgr. Jules B. Jeanmard, Bishop of Lafayette; Jacques Vimont, Ministre Plénipotentiaire de France; Guy de Schompré, Consul Général de France à la Nouvelle Orléans; the Hon. Bona Arsenault, M.P., representing Canada; Senators Eloi M. Girard and Elmore Bonin and Representatives Alfred Begnaud and Arthur Webb, all representing the State of Louisiana, and J. Ashton Mouton, Lafayette mayor.

The USL Orchestra, under the direction of Professor George Barth, played the "Star Spangled Banner," "La Marseillaise", "O Canada" and "Le Réveil de la Louisiane." The program ended with the presentation by M. de Schompré of the Palmes Académiques to Dean T. J. Arceneaux; Mlle Anna Bell Dupuis-Hoffman (now Mrs. Roy Krewitz); Mme. N. G. Thibodeaux and Mlle Jeanne Castille.
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Use of La Maison Acadienne-Française

In the years since this memorable occasion, La Maison Acadienne-Française has fulfilled the purpose for which it was intended in many, many ways. Dignitaries from many foreign countries as well as from many parts of the United States have enjoyed the beauty and the hospitality offered at the French House. It has been the focal point for supplementary study of French on the part of USL students. It has prompted the French government on several occasions to make a gift of a collection of books in French to the University of Southwestern Louisiana and it has become one of Lafayette’s interesting tourist attractions further emphasizing the French-Acadian background of this area.

Among some of the uses to which the French house has been put are: meetings of France-Amérique de la Louisiane Acadienne, meetings of the USL French Club and other foreign language clubs; special programs such as the observance in 1957 of the 150th anniversary of the birth of Longfellow; the special program in 1957 in honor of the bicentennial of the birth of General Lafayette and receptions in honor of such dignitaries as: French Ambassador Herve Alphand, 1958; Governor Gagnon of Quebec, 1961; Premier Ministre, Jean Lesage, Quebec, 1961; the Hon. Bona Arsenault, Canadian statesman and historian on the occasion of the publication of his book, “Histoire et Généalogie des Acadiens” in 1965; all French consuls at New Orleans since 1955 and many other distinguished American, French and Canadian visitors. It has also served as the center for the folklore of this area.
France Amérique de la Louisiane-Acadienne

Since the society of France-Amérique de la Louisiane-Acadienne, under the able guidance of its first president, Mrs. C. E. Hamilton, is credited with making it possible for The University of Southwestern Louisiana to acquire the property now designated as La Maison Acadienne-Française, it is appropriate that the goals of the society be recorded here.

France-Amérique de la Louisiane-Acadienne was founded in Acadiana on Oct. 16, 1951 as the first regional society organized for the express purpose of preserving the French-Acadian language and culture.

The goals set forth in the charter of the society stated: to strengthen the bonds of friendship, cultural and historical, between France and other French-speaking countries and the United States and most particularly Acadiana; to encourage the study and the preservation of French as a living language; to give moral support to a dynamic French department at USL so that students of a high academic quality interested in acquiring a thorough command of the French language and culture would be attracted to USL and to preserve the Acadian folklore.

France-Amérique de la Louisiane Acadienne is also the organization responsible for the creation of the Louisiana Acadian flag. During the observance of the two hundredth anniversary of the arrival of the exiled Acadians in Louisiana, the Acadian Committee of France-Amérique de la Louisiane Acadienne, as one of its official acts, made a strong recommendation for the approval of an Acadian flag. The flag was designed by Dr. T. J. Arceneaux.
Louisiana Acadian Flag

The official description of the flag, as provided by Dean Arceneaux, is as follows: to symbolize the French origin of the Acadians, a portion of the arms of the mother country... three fleurs de lis, silver on a blue field... is used as parts of the flag.

To symbolize Spain, the nation which controlled Louisiana at the time of the Acadian migration to Louisiana and under whom they prospered after years of exile, the old arms of Castile... a gold tower on a red field... appears in one section of the flag.

The gold star on a white field represents "Our Lady of the Assumption" (Maris Stella), Patroness of the Acadians. The star also symbolizes the active participation of the Acadians in the American Revolution, as soldiers under Galvez.
Le Réveil Louisiane

France-Amérique de la Louisiane Acadienne adopted as its theme song "Le Réveil de la Louisiane" during the presidency in 1953 of Mrs. Roy Krewitz. The words and music were written by L.P. (Placide) Canonge in 1877, on the occasion of the inauguration of Governor Francis T. Nicholls.

Le Réveil De La Louisiane

Ecoutez, ce n'est plus un rêve,
Ecoutez ces puissantes voix.
Un immense hosanna s'élève,
Du sud et du nord à la fois.
Louisiane, fière reine,
Redresse ton front indompté.
C'est ta fête, ô ma souveraine,
La fête de ta liberté.

Refrain

Debout fais flotter ta bannière,
Renais à la force et à la foi,
Et dans des torrents de lumière,
O mon pays, réveille-toi!
Louisiane, réveille-toi!

Reveille In Louisiana

It's "Reveille" for our Louisiana
"Reveille" mighty voices shout . . .
An immense hosanna together the North and
the South proclaim . . .
Louisiana, stately queen, lift up your
unconquered brow!
Awaken, majestic sovereign, Awaken to
your liberty . . .

Refrain

Arise and wave high your banner, Reborn with
new strength and new faith . . .
And in a flash of enlightenment . . . Oh my
state my native state, Louisiana, Awaken!
Presidents of France Amérique de la Louisiane

Mrs. C. E. Hamilton .................................................. 1951-53
Mrs. Roy Dupuis-Hoffman Krewitz ...................... 1953-57
Mrs. John McCaslin ........................................ 1957-60
Miss Jeanne Castille ........................................... 1960-62
Mr. Joseph Monterrat ............................................ 1962-64
Dr. Hosea Phillips .............................................. 1964-66
Mr. Harris Periou .................................................. 1966-68
Dr. Paul Delaup .................................................... 1968-70
Dr. Philip Dur ....................................................... 1970-72
Mrs. Lyle Givens Williams .................................. 1972-73
Dr. Davey L. Bernard ............................................ 1973-74
Miss Zoe Lyons ..................................................... 1974-75
Mr. Robert Badon .................................................. 1975-76
Mrs. Malcolm Burleigh ........................................ 1976-78
Mrs. Georgie S. Mouton ...................................... 1978-