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For the person who is drawn towards the past, there is
no better source to draw from than the ethnic groups which
constitute however, only a social minority; there is still
conserved the traditions and the sayings of the Ancients.
It was therefore to such a group to the little people that
we went, asking them to share with us their riches.

Impregnated since childhood in French civilization, we
were for a long time interested in folklore, living in Texas
so close to French Louisiana, we were then very naturally
attracted towards the study of the traditions of the
descendants of the French who were settled in that part of
the country. Our choice was fixed on the parish of
Vermilion. Vermilion having remained one of the most French
of the parishes; in addition, no folklore study of it had
yet been conducted; and finally, our friends living in the
parish offered us their help, help that was not only
precious but indispensable to us, for without their generous
and constant assistance we could not have brought our
research to a successful end.

Folklore Year

The life of a society and its social folklore are
closely tied to the calendar. We follow then the liturgical
calendar to study the holidays and the periodical ceremonies
in the parish of Vermilion.

December

Advent is a period of preparation for Christmas, a
period of self-sacrifice and of penance. The faithful
frequent assiduously the church. December 8, day of the
Immaculate Conception, is a day of obligation when everyone
goes to mass. The weeks of Advent are devoted to great
preparations for "Chrismiss."

In Vermilion, in the country, Christmas still retains
its character of religious holiday. Even though the
merchant has influenced the imagination of the people with
his advertisements, especially that of the children, it must
be said that the Christmas holiday is still unpretentious
from the point of view of gifts.
The preparations for the great day includes the making of pastries and preserves, the great Christmas meal, and the buying of gifts. The housekeeper prepares a great variety of cakes. The fruitcake, which is the Christmas Cake par excellence is a must. It is necessary to prepare it well in advance in order to have time to steep it several times with whiskey or brandy so that it will become more tasty. The other traditional cakes which are most popular are the "layer" cakes with several layers, chocolate, white cream, lemon or pineapple; tarts are prepared of chocolate, pecan, lemon, fruits, thus tarts of all kinds, and confections pralines, "fudge", candy.

As soon as December begins everyone starts to send Christmas and New Year cards to friends and members of the family, even to those who live nearby. The custom of sending cards during the holidays is as widespread in the country as in the towns, although it is to be noticed that contrary to the townsmen who has become little by little a little indifferent, the country dweller ("habitant") chooses cards with religious subjects.

Then follows the time to buy gifts for all members of the family, especially the children. The children prefer Christmas to all other holidays and with good reason. They start to celebrate Christmas well in advance. At school there is a beautiful Christmas tree in each classroom. The children themselves prepare the garlands and the stars and decorate the tree. Often gifts are exchanged. Each school prepares a beautiful Christmas program in which the largest number of students possible participate. There is always a large chorus which sings Christmas songs. The atmosphere is meditative and solemn.

A quarter of a century ago, it was "Christine", wife of "Santa Claus" who brought New Year's gifts on New Year's Day and there were no Christmas trees. Since that time all is changed. The children believe now in Santa Claus, there are some even who write him letters to tell him what he should bring them. In the stores and shops of the little towns there are even Santa Clauses with long white beards who mingle with the patrons.

The parents buy gifts long in advance, wrap them in gold, silver or brightly colored paper, tie them with beautiful ribbons and place them under the tree with the name of the recipient. Each child receives a gift which sometimes costs very high, fruit, candy, nuts. Today, as in the past, the children hang their stockings on the chimney on Christmas Eve so that Santa Claus will fill them. In the towns one sees more exchange of gifts between friends and adults than one sees in the country.
"My father would go to town and bring back two dolls, one with blonde hair and one with black. I would cry all the time for the one with black hair. We each tied a stocking or a cotton sock to the chimney. We were three: me, my sister and my brother. And when my father arrived during the night he would place our dolls in the stockings and a metal cap-pistol and a sack of marbles in my brother's. The next morning we were glad to find this, we thought that is was Santa Claus who had brought it. There were no Christmass trees at home. We do not have Christmass trees either today."

One week or several days before Christmas a Christmas tree is brought to the house which was cut in the woods or bought "in town." Recently the trees are flocked to imitate snow. The tree is decorated with colored glass ornaments and garlands of tiny multicolored light bulbs purchased in the dime stores are hung on it.

It is not only in "the houses that preparations are made. In the towns all the stores are the principal streets are decorated. The light poles are encircled with moss and pine and cypress branches and they are decorated with electric light bulbs of all colors. From one side of the street to the other are extended electric wires on which are attached smiling Santa Claus's and stars of all colors and sizes. All is brilliantly lighted.

The houses in the towns and along the roads are equally adorned on the exterior. On the doors are placed wreaths of holly still bearing its red berries and decorated with bows of red ribbon as well. At the windows stars or electric candles in a number of houses the illuminated Christmas tree is placed in the window recess, on the street side. All its lights and colors give an almost fairy-like look to the little towns of Vermilion.

Christmas Eve is awaited with impatience. If the roosters crow and the chickens cackle at 10 o'clock in the morning and at 4 o'clock in the afternoon it is said that they are singing the coming advent of Christmas.

"Christmass" Eve finally arrives. In all the churches there is a midnight mass to which everyone goes except the little ones. The bells ring twice before midnight to call the faithful. The church is decorated with greenery and red flowers. The preferred plant is the poinsettia because of its beautiful deep red flower which resembles a star. If the camellias bloom early we sometimes see them in the churches of the parish. Red and green are the colors which characterize the holidays. The candles are lit. The cradle all decorated with festoons of moss and illuminated reproduces with a naive faith the Nativity. The mass begins at midnight and lasts about an hour. The choir sings
Christmas hymns: *O come [all] ye faithful, Adeste fideles, Holy Night*, and others. In order to render the mass more solemn, the celebrants take care to organize each time something out of the ordinary. In 1952, in Gueydan, it was a procession of little girls dressed in white carrying red roses.

After the midnight mass one returns home. Certain families do not eat at all when they return from church, others have a reveillon (a supper after the midnight mass) which almost always consists of gumbo. There are persons who drink punch before or after the midnight mass. The mother of the family who awaits many guests for Christmas dinner sometimes puts the turkey in the oven as soon as the family returns from the midnight mass.

A custom which is spreading more and more is that of receptions on Christmas Eve. The guests begin to arrive starting at 10 o'clock at night. At midnight they leave for mass to return right after mass to continue the social visit. At these soirees (night visits) punch is ordinarily served and other alcoholic beverages. An altogether recent innovation is the Christmas Eve dance in the night clubs of the parish. Even though a number of people find this shocking the custom seems to persist.

On Christmas Day the children, impatient to see their gifts rise at daybreak. They pass the morning in playing with the new toys which they have just found under the tree. In certain families it is the custom to pay each other visits on "Chrsimiss" morning. Usually punch (egg-nog) is served or anisette. The punch is a beverage made of milk, eggs and sugar well stirred, to which is added whiskey or brandy. The anisette is a traditional beverage of the parish but it is served less and less, whereas in the olden days there was no ceremony without anisette; it was served on all the holidays, as well at wedding ceremonies as at solemn communion.

Even during the visits, the mother, very occupied, continues to prepare the large dinner. All the family is invited to one's house or it is brought to the home of the parents where all the family reunites. In all cases the Christmas meal is always eaten with the family.

The menu is naturally very varied. Usually several meat dishes are served: a baked turkey with rice or oyster dressing, a suckling pig, a duck or a goose, some chickens. There is always cranberry jelly, raw and cooked vegetables as well as pickles. The indispensable rice, in jambalaya or in all other forms is always on the menu. The salad which accompanies this dinner is the Waldorf salad, a combination of apples and celery cut in cubes, mixed with dry raisins and the whole thing garnished with mayonaise. For dessert