Morse Named For Rail Official

South of Midland the railroad was extended into Vermilion Parish. Four miles South of Midland, in Acadia Parish, a railroad station was established to serve settlers who had bought land from W.W. Duson. This became the town of Morse, so named for a Southern Pacific railroad official.

An early settler in the Morse area was involved in a strange incident reported in the press in 1880. The newspaper story related that a New Orleans resident, an Italian physician named Francois Toro, had a son born in 1862. The child's mother died. A relative by the name of Alexandre Borne abducted the child, allegedly to get Dr. Toro's money. The boy was brought to the home of Evariste Navarre “at Queue Tortue.” Navarre was told the boy was an orphan and was asked to keep him for a couple of months. Years went by; although a poor man, Navarre was said to have treated the boy well. In October of 1879, when the youth was 17, a Mr. Lebesque of New Orleans came to southwest Louisiana on a business trip and heard the story. This led to a reunion of father and son, which was effected December 24, 1879. The newspaper article, widely reprinted in south Louisiana, was titled “A Bizarre Christmas Story.” Evariste Navarre owned land about four miles west of the present community of Morse, near the Western end of Bayou Queue de Tortue.

The Mauboules brothers, A.J. and J.S., settled at Morse in 1982. They homesteaded lands secured through the W.W. Duson Real Estate Company of Crowley. An unusual burial custom exists in the Morse-Mermentau-Midland area of Acadia Parish. In the Istre Cemetery, located west of Morse and south of Mermentau, a number of the graves have wooden shelters built over them. The structures have gabled roofs and resemble small houses, with doors and windows. The doors, about four feet in height, permit entry, and once inside a person of average height can stand erect under the ridge of the roof. Most 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 long ago, when other materials were unavailable in the then remote

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region, the wooden houses were put up in imitation of the above-ground vaults in old cemeteries of New Orleans. Another reason given is that the houses may be a more elaborate modification of the fencing around individual graves used in many family cemeteries in rural areas, the purpose of which was to prevent animals, both wild and domestic, from treading on the graves.

The older grave houses are unpainted and unmarked. Many of the newer ones are freshly painted and well kept. Some of the earlier inscriptions show dates of the late 19th century.