A Newcomer's Guide to ACADIA PARISH

Supplement to:
The Rayne Acadian-Tribune
CHURCH POINT NEWS
January 26 & 29, 1984

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* Due to limited time & personal, there were many merchants we didn't get to include in this edition. CALL 334-3186 and reserve your space for the next one!
Acadia Has Long, Colorful History

Acadia Parish was once a prairie roamed by Indians, short summers, hot summers, and tall grass made it a good hunting country for the Indians who were made evidence by the discovery of arrowheads of the Choctaw and Cherokees. Some of the weaving and many of the first rice-clearing methods were developed among these tribes. Not only the Indians, but pirates and brigands found refuge in this solitary part of Louisiana, because the natural vegetation offered innumerable natural hiding places for their body. In the decade 1760 to 1770, land grants from the Spanish Government were made to exiled Acadians, who were forced to abandon their homes in Canada and who subsequently settled in the Louisiana Territory. It is believed that these first settlers chose the banks of the Mississippi River and that their homes were made of a material compounded from moss from the oaks which grew on the river banks. Some of these shelters still stand as testimony to their sound construction. A German colony also settled in the area through the agencies of Joseph Pahacker of New Orleans.

In 1803, the United States purchased from France for $15,000,000 the land which Louisiana claimed for France, which lands drained into the Mississippi River, being that portion from Canada to Louisiana and including New Orleans.

Southwest Louisiana from the Atchafalaya River, to the Sabine River, not draining into the Mississippi River, was not included in the Louisiana Purchase but belonged to Spain. In 1804, the territory of Orleans in which Acadia Parish is located was divided into twelve counties or districts. In 1819 the conflict with Spain was settled by a treaty by which Spain sold for $5,000,000 both East and West Florida to the United States, and granted America claim to Southwestern Louisiana to the Sabine boundary. By this act, Louisiana received her present western boundary. Stock raising became the principal industry. The owners of the land did not have to worry about providing food for the stock for they roamed the prairie. Corn and cotton were introduced slowly to the farmers. There were millions of crawfish with their chimneys presenting a picture of loneliness. The few homes scattered in the vicinity of the trails and streams were crudely erected, the dishes plain and the food simple. The early Acadians needed little in the way of trade as they did not care for money. Their only wish was to be left alone and live as their ancestors lived.

As time passed more people came and the need for the creation of a new parish was evident.

Acadia Parish is the center of civic and religious life for the scattered people and this resulted in increased trade. This was one of the richest sections in the state and leaders knew that the growth and development of the fertile soil was to be realized only through better service given to the people. Naturally the voters wanted more political power. They felt the need of a new and nearer center where they could become acquainted with each other, and in turn become well-known themselves.

In 1838, a bill was introduced to create the

(Continued on Page 6)

Want to Know More About Parish? Try the Local Media!

One of the best ways for a newcomer to find out what is going on in a community is through the local media.

In Acadian Parish, a healthy variety of both broadcast and print media serve our community.

Parish residents can help themselves to a daily newspaper, two semi-weeklies, a weekly newspaper and two radio stations, or tune in to five nearby television stations.

The Rayne Acadian-Tribune, published Thursday and Sunday, is the oldest continuous newspaper in the parish over 80 years of publication. Its sister paper, the Church Point News, is published every Tuesday and has been in existence for 40 years.

At the helm of both papers is our fine editor and now publisher Myrt Fair Craig. Editing the Church Point News and Acadian-Tribune is Danie Dalgety while Steve Randy hands the editing chores in Rayne.

Frances Rilma is advertising manager for the two papers, with assistance from Nancy Young in Church Point and Harolyn Freeman in Rayne.

Charles Prejean is serving as the two newspapers' general manager.

In Rayne, Marilyn Cormier handles the society and school news, while Brent Foreman takes care of sports and circulation.

In addition to regular news coverage, the Acadian-Tribune and Church Point News also publish several special editions a year, as well as The Tribute Hopper, a weekly shopping guide appearing on Thursdays.

Also a member of the same "newspaper family" is the Crowley Post-Signal, published every Tuesday through Friday and Sunday.

In addition, several daily newspapers published outside Acadian Parish were available through subscription or newsstands.

Area fans can tune into KSGG-AM and KAJN-AM, both in Crowley for news and music, while television viewers can receive broadcasts from ABC on KACT Channel 5, CBS on KLFY Channel 10, NBC on KPLC Channel 7, and independent television on KADN Channel 13 or Louisiana Public Broadcasting System on Channel 24.

In addition, cable television is available for a nominal cost in most of Acadian Parish.

A RICE FIELD IN ACADIA—Rice has long been the most important cash crop in the parish.
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HISTORY

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Parish of Nicholls," but the settlers pressed the legislature and the bill was amended to "create the Parish of Acadia and provide for the organization thereof."

With the passage of the bill on June 30, 1868, the Parish of Acadia was created. The establishment of Crowley as the seat of the Acadia Parish government came about when the settlers of the Mermentau, who had to what is now Opelousas, the parish seat of St. Landry, felt the need of a closer center for their legal, religious, and civic affairs.

On February 18, 1867, an auction of land was held, attracting buyers from throughout the state. C.C. Duson had advertised that Acadia was a new parish with a population of 10,000 and that it was the desire of the Southwest Land Company to make Crowley the parish seat.

The land company deposited $5,000 which would be paid to the Police Jury if this came about. If not, the money would be used to develop Crowley as a commercial center. Although the communities of Prairie Haynes and Hayne were strong contenders for the parish seat, an election held on March 1, 1867, Crowley was victorious.

The first court house was to have been a frame building, costing $600; however, after the $5,000 offer of the company, it was decided to build a brick building "costing" approximately $10,000. This court house, completed in June, 1868, was followed by the construction of the first parish jail.

The aboriginals of what is now Acadia Parish were the Atakapas, Caddoan, and Choctaw Indian tribes. They were settled for any length of time, but made their homes along the bayous and rivers. As the more civilized white man settled the area, the Indians who were not absorbed into the culture, moved on to other regions of the state.

Because of the climate and soils, many of these settlers came from what producing sections of the north and west, and brought with them extensive knowledge of planting, cultivating, and harvesting grain crops. The majority of the Inhabitants, however, were descendents of the Acadians exiled from Nova Scotia in 1755. These people were also oriented towards agriculture as a means of living.

Since the parish's vast lowlands were ideally suited for grazing and many inhabitants drove cattle from Texas across the Sabine and Mermentau Rivers, cattle raising has always had a place in the economy.

The earlier settlers had been using crude Indian methods to plant and harvest rice which were abandoned in favor of the sowing methods of the "Yankee" wheat farmers. The Abbott brothers, developers in this area, invented a system of irrigation and flooding which gave major impetus to successful rice growing in the parish.

Crowley, the "Rice City of America," was given almost overnight. In 1900, the census figures showed a populaion of 23,400. In 1911, oil was discovered at Crowley, and the Evangeline Oil Field in the western part of Acadia became the first major producer in the state. Many families from Acadia become wealthy due to the oil boom of 1920.

At about this same time the yellow fever epidemic was taking its toll in New Orleans. Due to the efforts of the newly organized Board of Health under Dr. E.H. Ellis, not one case of the dread fever developed in the parish as well.

The name Crowley was chosen, according to legend, because an Indian railroad man named Pat Crowley convinced his bosses to run the railroad line through the newly purchased tract after he had promised that the new town would be named for him.

Settlers were attracted to the area by W.W. Duson's ability to convince them that fortunes awaited the taking and that the climate was ideal. He placed advertisements in the major newspapers throughout all the states. Among the pioneers attracted to this area were the Fontenot, Lykes, Egan, family, J. Frankel, Chapotin, Pugh, the Freeman brothers, Judge Barry, Professor Cherry, Alex Kaplan, Sabatier, Sheeplace, Clark, Ellis, Dr. January, Dan Smith, Pickett, J.A. Williams, the Abbott brothers, the Wright brothers, the Hays, and many others.

The needs of the parish reflected by the police jury which voted for the passed the Newcomer's Guide to Acadia Parish...
HISTORY

(Continued from Page 6) in the City of Crowley.

October of 1967 was the birth date of the first parish-wide celebration commemorating the one thing which did the most to perpetuate the parish’s growth—rice, in the National Rice Festival. Except for the war years, this “fete” has been an annual affair. The date chosen as festival day, October 5, is the birthday of Crowley’s founder, W.W. Duason. A monument in his memory was unveiled at the first festival and stands in one of the four parks Duason gave to the city at the time it was laid out.

The greatest natural disaster suffered by the area since its first settlement was the flood of 1840. Most of the parish was covered with water from one to eight feet, making boats the only means of transportation. After almost a week, the waters receded, allowing the people to begin cleaning up the million dollar plus property damage, not including the loss of livestock and crops.

Since its very beginning as a settled parish, Acadia has always owed its economic existence to agriculture. The second world war and the Korean War further emphasized this with its demand for more foodstuffs. It is not expected that agriculture, rice in particular, will ever be replaced as an important source of income, however, it no longer dominates the parish economic activity as it once did.

The discovery of oil in the parish was the first real glimpse at diversification of its economy the parish had ever seen. Within agriculture itself, there is diversification as more products are grown with success; the livestock industry shows great promise, especially since the parish population is becoming more urban and thus more market oriented. Soybeans are enjoying success and supplementing rice as another cash crop. Trade is on the move in the parish as well. The greatest deficit, however, is the general lack of manufacturing establishments which are sorely needed to retain the farmers and farm laborers as more and more of the people are released into the growing unemployed labor forces.

Crowley, the parish seat of Acadia Parish, is the “hubbed” of government with a number of government and federal in addition to the parish and municipal, help swell the economy, creating jobs and payroll money.

School Board

The Acadia Parish School Board offices are located on North Parkway Avenue in Crowley, just south of Interstate 10. These offices serve as the administrative center for the parish school system and base office for the workings of the School Board.

The Board is composed of 16 members, elected from throughout the parish on a district system. Board members then, among themselves, elect a president and vice president. Currently serving as Board President is John D. Sattin of Iota, while Vice President is Grant Link of the Richland Community.

Other members of the School Board include Mary Faulkner, Donna Williams, Eimo Ogeron, Wado Helen Bias, Jasper Fontenot, Eunice Dugas, Irvin “Chopy” Smith, Louis Giroard, Willie Segall, Johnson Yeager, Walter Bruner, Alfred Daigle, M.W. “Micky” Sonie, Jr., and Carlton McFarlin.

The Board appoints a parish school Superintendent to oversee the day-to-day operations for the school system, and to serve as secretary-treasurer of the School Board.

Dr. John A. Bertrand, Ph.D., is presently filling this office, but has announced his resignation from the post effective June 30. Dr. James Griffin will succeed Dr. Bertrand in this capacity.

Police Jury

The Acadia Parish Police Jury is also headquartered in Crowley, with official offices in the courthouse on the Court Circle.

Recently-elected Police Jury President is Joe Bentz of Crowley with Curtis Pellerin of Rayne as First Vice President and Emerson P. Abshire of Morse as Second Vice President. These officers were elected in January, 1944, and will serve one term.

Terry LaCombe is the Jury’s secretary with Joe Arabie as the treasurer. These two were appointed by the Jury for two-year terms.


Parish Officers

All parish officials maintain office space on the Court Circle in Crowley, most in the Courthouse. Sheriff Elton A. Arceneaux’s office is located adjacent to the Courthouse on the Court Circle in Crowley. Sheriff Arceneaux will retire this month.

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GOVERNMENT

(Continued from Page 7)
year after 24 years as the chief law enforcement officer in Acadia Parish. His successor will be Ken Goss, who served under Accreaux for a number of years.

Other parish officers are Clerk of Court J. Andrus "Andy" Barouque; Assessor Arthur LeBlanc; Coroner Dr. Mark Down; and Registrar of Voters Martin Venable. Acadia Parish falls into two state Representative’s District. Donald Thibodeaux of Crowley represents most of the parish with District 42, while C. Dale Sitig of Eunice represents voters in the 41st District in the extreme northern portion of the parish.

The entire parish is located in Senate District 25, represented by Cecil J. Picard of Maurice, in neighboring Vermilion Parish. Acadia is included in the federal Seventh Congressional District, represented by John Breaux of Crowley.

District Court

Acadia Parish is located in the 18th Judicial District, which also includes the parishes of Lafayette and Vermilion. J. Nathan Stansbury of Lafayette serves as District Attorney, while judges are Bradford Ware of Crowley, Douglas J. Nebraska of Lafayette, Byron Hebert of Lafayette, Lucien C. Bertrand Jr. of Lafayette, Allen M. Babineaux of Lafayette, Hugh Ellis Bransou of Crowley, Suettia "Sue" Fontenot of Abbeville, Ronald D. Cox of Lafayette, John Rixie Monson Sr. of Lafayette, Don Aaron Jr. of Crowley and Bennett J. Guidry of Lafayette.

Municipalities

Rayne’s municipal government is run on the Mayor-Council form. Ralph J. Stutes is currently serving as Mayor.

One councilman, Vincent Chappuis, is elected at large by voters from throughout the city, and he was appointed Mayor Pro Tempor by Mayor Stutes. The other four council seats are elected by district representation. The remaining councilmen include Calely Bollanno, Russel Bensell, Alex LaCroix and David "Pete" Babineaux Sr.

Serving as Chief of Police, an elected position, is Peter Haure, Jr., while Morris Touchet is the City Marshal. City Prosecutor is James Cunningham and City Judge is Derald Belin. Robert "Bobby" Hebert serves as Rayne’s City

(Continued on Page 8)
Fairs, Festivals Abound

The International Rice Festival, held in October each year, is one of the oldest festivals in Southwestern Louisiana. First held in 1937, the festival includes rice eating contests, grand parades, Queen’s Ball and livestock shows.

Rayne is the site of the Frog Festival. September 1964 will be the twelfth festival to honor the frog processing field. Events include a frog jumping contest, Queen’s contest and Ball, selection of junior royalty, and a grand parade.

In Church Point on the Sunday before Mardi Gras, the “Cuirrur de Mardi Gras” is held. Costumed and masked, horseback riders collect contributions of food to make a large gumbo which is enjoyed by the large crowd that gathers.

More recently, Church Point stages its first annual Buggy Festival, an event organized by the people of the area as a benefit for the local hospital. The Buggy Festival is held in December.

GOVERNMENT

(Continued from Page 8)

Clerk with Charles "Moon" Chappuis as the City Attorney. The Town of Church Point also operates on a 1959 council system of government, with Harold Beauford serving as the Mayor. Reivers Paul, alderman-at-large, is the Mayor Pro Tem and other council members include Thomas "Randy" Batiste, James Duplanchine, Ida Ruth Lavergne and Robert Thedoeaux. Heading up the local police department in Church Point is Floyd Lyons.

Other officials include Michael Calvino, judge; Lawrence Guillory, prosecutor; Lee Wimbler, city attorney; and Shirley D. Kidd, city clerk.

In Crowley, Robert Straub is the head of the city government as mayor, with aldermen-at-large Jerry Page Harmon as the mayor pro tem. Other council members include Clarence Helo, Billy Cleveland Fulkerun, George Lee Meaux, Isabella Delahoussaye, Doris Randy, Jr., Sherman A. Wilson, Clifford Broussard and Elith Hobbie.

T. Barrett Harrington is the City Judge with Ellis Credence as Marshal and Glen Everett as the City Prosecutor. Chief Al Gibson directs the City Police Department.

Mayors of other municipalities in Acadia Parish include Ernest "Sheeny" Gauthreaux in Mermentou, Ernie P. Broussard in Estherwood, Shirley Abshire in Morne and Eunice Raspberry in Iota.

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Opportunity

Newcomer's Guide to Acadia Parish Page 9
**Public, Parochial Schools**

**Co-exist Successfully Here**

Public and parochial schools exist successfully side by side in Acadia Parish. Officers of the Acadia Parish School Board are located in Crowley on North Parkway Avenue, and new residents can call that office to obtain information about school registration and district lines.

In Rayne, the public school system operates Central Rayne Elementary School for kindergarten students; Martin Petitjean Elementary School for first through third graders; South Rayne Elementary School for fourth through sixth graders; Armstrong School for seventh and eighth graders; and Rayne High School, grades nine through 12.

In addition, the state operates a post high school trade school, the Southwest Louisiana Vocational-Technical School in Crowley. That school offers courses in secretarial and other office programs, welding, auto mechanics, drafting, nurses aid courses and other technical programs for parish students, at no cost to the student, other than books and supplies. Courses are also offered by the University of Louisiana at Lafayette for daytime classes.

Acadia also has a Catholic School System for pre-school through high school students. The Catholic School system supports elementary schools including Rayne Catholic Elementary, Our Mother of Peace in Church Point, Redemptorist in Iota and St. Michael's in Crowley. "Graduates" from these elementary schools may either enter the public school system in

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