La. Town of Oberlin Observes Mardi Gras by Unique Custom

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OBERLIN, La. — In their own unique way, 40 Oberlin men will set the pace for Mardi Gras here when they saddle their mounts and ride out at 5 a.m.

These costumed men will travel the Calcasieu River road from Oberlin to the community of Guy where they will continue south on U.S. Hwy. 165 to the Bernice Spears rd., turn left and go into a French settlement, thence back to Oberlin at 2 p.m. When they reach Oberlin after their 30-mile ride, they will parade down the main street.

A spokesman for the group said he did not know where the practice comes from but believes that Oberlin and Pine Prairie are the only two places in Louisiana which hold this annual ride.

He said after the riders leave here, they ride to farm houses.

"The 'Chef,' Simon Sonnier, leads the group and when they reach a house he holds up a flag and proceeds to the house alone. The rest of the riders stay approximately two hundred yards away.

"After the Chef is accepted by the occupants of the house, he lowers the flag and the rest of the riders come forward. The occupants are asked for a chicken, flour, onions or other edibles. Upon receiving these, the horsemen leap from their horses and dance wildly about the yard to the accompaniment of an accordion played by one of the riders."

"That night," he continued, "The gathered victuals are cooked into a large gumbo and everybody eats until his heart is content; then . . . they dance. They dance, laugh and sing until the stroke of midnight and then the fun is over. Lent begins."