Opelousas hosts Juneteenth fête

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(Opelousas) Daily World

OPELOUSAS — Wilfred LaFontaine sat Saturday at a picnic table on the grounds of Le Vieux Village in Opelousas, watching as a trickle of people arrived for the start of the 2006 Juneteenth Folklife Celebration.

“I just stumbled upon it,” he said of the annual gathering. “I’m retired from the city of Opelousas, and I’ve never been out here.”

LaFontaine said he and his wife were waiting on their grandchildren, who were returning from a church outing in Baton Rouge. Emma LaFontaine said she planned to “check out” the food and crafts offered under the shelter of the farmers market area before returning home.

What is Juneteenth?

Juneteenth, also known as Freedom Day or Emancipation Day, is an annual holiday, celebrated June 19 in the United States, commemorating the end of slavery. The holiday originated in Galveston, Texas.

For more than a century, the state of Texas was the primary home of Juneteenth celebrations. More recently, however, its observance has spread across the nation.

Juneteenth commemorates June 19, 1865, the day Union Gen. Gordon Granger and 2,000 federal troops arrived on Galveston Island to take possession of the state and enforce slaves' new freedoms.

Since 1980, Juneteenth has been an official state holiday in Texas.

SOURCE: Wikipedia online encyclopedia

Sandra Joseph gives her rendition of “Who Am I” at the Juneteenth Folklife Festival on Saturday in Opelousas.
Fête

Juneteenth is the name given to the June 19, 1863, anniversary when slaves living in Texas first learned of the presidential order to free all slaves in Confederate territory. For the 23rd consecutive year, the city of Opelousas put on a celebration of its own for the holiday, adding a little history and Creole culture to the mix.

On display at the celebration was a table containing various inventions by African-Americans. Shown were the sewing machine, an 1853 invention of Isaac M. Singer; the mop, a design created by Thomas Steward in 1893 and still in use today; and the electric traffic light, invented by Garrett Morgan.

DeAndre Ozene, 12, sat with some friends near the table. He said his grandmother put the objects together for display.

"Last year, it was nice, and it's nice this year," he said.

Eunice resident Preston Watley said this was the fifth year he brought his woodwork to the celebration.

"It's just a hopeful thing," he said of the Juneteenth celebration. "For the older people, it reminds them of how things were different back then."