Center for Louisiana Studies, students work to preserve French Louisiana culture

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Tucked away in a room on the third floor of the Edith Garland Dupré library, researchers play tapes more than 70-years-old to piece together oral histories and folk songs originating in the Acadiana area.

The Center for Louisiana Studies, an archival effort on the part of the College of Liberal Arts to preserve and record materials from past Louisiana generations, is the home for those records.

“Our initiative is to perpetuate the scholarship and study of Louisiana culture and history predominantly... (We have) the world’s largest collection of material related to the oral traditions of French Louisiana,” Director of the Center for Louisiana Studies, Joshua Caffery, Ph.D., said.

In the center, everything from reel-to-reel tapes from the 1940s to moving image films to “wire recordings” dating back to the turn of the 20th century are collected, played and converted to digital format, according to John “Pudd” Sharp, the Assistant Director for Research at the center.

“This stack here is labeled to be cleaned outside of the archive because it’s so nasty,” Sharp said. “You can see that has mold and dust all over it and given that folklore is most typically thought of as an oral tradition... (cleaning and digitizing the material) is a way to memorialize these things and keep them so people can come to study them or access them.”

Juliane Mahoney, a graduate student getting her Master’s in English with a concentration in folklore and who works at the center, said students should come to the center if they are interested in local history.

“Personally I know I had a lack of knowledge about local history before I came here,” Mahoney said. “I grew up around here but I didn’t even think about any of this kind of stuff. I sort of got into the music and that made me want to learn the language.”

Renée Reed, a sophomore majoring in traditional music with a concentration in Cajun and Creole music, said she identifies as Cajun and plays Cajun music with her family. Reed said her father, Mitchell

How ‘one-of-a-kind’ culture made Mardi Gras their own

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Every year, forty days before the Easter holiday, Louisiana rolls out extravagant floats, colorful beads and endless alcohol for the annual Mardi Gras Celebration. Though the laughter is the same, Cajun Mardi Gras and their festive relatives in New Orleans hold many different traditions when it comes to Fat Tuesday.

The Cajun Mardi Gras, also known as “Courir de Mardi Gras,” is a time for Cajuns, New Orleanians and people from across the world visit the south in order to experience the community that forms in the streets before the Lenten season begins.

Mardi Gras is closely tied to Cajun culture, and many see the two as going hand in hand.

McKenzie Melancon, a junior at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette majoring in speech pathology, who identifies as a Cajun, said Cajuns are a one-of-a-kind people in the way they celebrate their heritage, especially through Mardi Gras traditions.

“It’s a time where we eat until we can’t eat anymore, drink until we can’t drink anymore and have the biggest party ever because it’s our way of preparing for the Lenten season,” said Melancon of the festival holiday.

The most infamous and traditional Cajun Courir de Mardi Gras celebrations take place in small towns such as Mamou, Eunice and Church Point.

According to Barry Ancelet, Ph.D., a former Cajun folklorist and modern languages professor at UL Lafayette, Courir de Mardi Gras originated in rural medieval parts of France.

Ancelet became interested in Cajun culture during the late 60s during the counterculture movement and said he was interested in rediscovering his roots.

“Our counterculture movement was the start of a reevaluation of the past, of the language, of the music, the stories, the culture and the traditions,” said Ancelet.

According to Ancelet, the Cajun-French language was rapidly eroding as he was growing up and he wanted to preserve the language he treasured.

Cajun Mardi Gras processions are often lead down the streets by men on horses and small homemade floats.

According to one of Ancelet’s publications, “A Brief Overview of the Louisiana Cajun Country Mardi Gras,” riders race to the host house from the road when the Capitaine — the leader of the Mardi Gras procession — waves his white flag to signal that permission to visit has been granted. During the visits, riders often dance while standing on their horses.

Crowds are also inflated by non-participating spectators who come from

MARDI GRAS
continued on page 9

More than food, Crawfish is a staple piece of Cajun culture

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PRESERVATION
continued on page 9