The leaders of the City of Kaplan include Chief of Police Steve Perry, Mayor Pro-Temp Presley Griffin, Councilman John (Kie) LeBlanc, Councilwoman Delores Meaux, Mayor Levi Schexnider, Councilman Warren Whaley and Councilman J.J. Landry.

City of Kaplan

KAPLAN CITY HALL
Bienvenue à la Mairie de Kaplan

Getting to haul the freight through in 1915 was just a little different from the way we get it done today. Sitting on top of the freight is Johnny Fletcher holding the reins to "Molly". The youngsters in the back are unidentified.

In 1938 an award ceremony was held for Dr. J.T. Abshire, mayor of Kaplan for 10 years, who had announced his retirement from political office. In the photo were Chief of Police John Fletcher, R.U. Abshire, son of honoree, Rev. Odilon Brise, Mayor elect G.A. Marrant (second row) Eddie Trahan, Joe Lormand, Rene Marceaux, Dick Herpin (third) Ulysses Vincent, Jules Motty, Lloyd Perrin, Edwar Guidry (back) Dr. Leo Saporito, Edouard Vincent and Charles Montgomery Sr.

Kaplan

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Eugene Eleazar, founder of Kaplan Bastille Days

A man whose wisdom and love of tradition helped develop the town of Kaplan was Eugene Eleazar, who emigrated from American to his native France in 1888.

Eventually, he settled in the town of Kaplan. In 1906, he was voted mayor.

Eleazar brought to Louisiana an idea born of loyalty and love for his mother—the republic of France.

His idea was to observe France's independence with a local festival—Bastille Day in Kaplan. The suggestion went over well with the festival-minded Acadian townsmen who spoke, basically, the same language, albeit somewhat more archaic patois. After all, they were thrice removed from Mother France.

Eleazar brought to Louisiana an idea that became the first displaced people in the New World.

This photo of the Eleazar family was taken in Rayne right before moving to Kaplan. The year was 1895. (front row) Leon Eleazar, Pauline Eleazar, Josephine Rencurel, Jules Eleazar, Leontant Me

In 1919 and another son, John Edward Fletcher had leased from the school board and was being worked by a tenant. That farm is now the site of Kaplan High School.

The Depression and hard times were being felt by all. As Chief of Police, he earned $50 a month and about $50 for the collection of taxes.

The three granddaughters of Eugene Eleazar and Fluence Eleazar (back) Jules Encurell and Eugene Eleazar.

Kaplan was incorporated as a village in 1903. Three years later, John F. Fletcher and his parents moved to Kaplan from Rayne. Another family, the Eugene Eleazar family, formerly of Rayne-immigrants from France in 1895, arrived in Kaplan in October 1906.

When John Edward arrived in Kaplan, he had $150 in his name, a new horse and buggy—a man of means in those days.

Two years later, John Edward married the Eleazar daughter, Pauline on Sept 10, 1908. The year after the marriage, he went into farming and planted 80 acres of rice making a profit of $300. On Sept 10, 1910, he bought out his father's livery stable and operated it profitably.

In 1912, he bought the house for $120 that became their home. The house, about five years old then, was the store located at 200 East First Street by wagon. The store building was first, torn down and cut to accommodate the wagon wheels. The house has a kitchen dining room, two bedrooms connected by a ten-foot wide hall that became a living room. All their children were born there: in 1913, their son George, their daughter, Yvonne in 1917, and another son, John. The house has withstood many storms and hurricanes, even snow and ice.

Many changes also took place in the past, minutes for the festival were grey, pole climbing, watermelon eating contest, bicycle race, tug of war and an old Acadian favorite, a fai-do-do.

Kaplan and its residents have never forgotten the Eleazar family, for many years, genealogy was offered to the Fletcher estate with a stipulation that the property in 1983. They wanted the house be moved off the lots within six months. The church people had the house moved to its present location on Fay Avenue was added to the house. As time went by, the house was being enlarged. A kitchen pantry, another bedroom, a bathroom and a room and a glass enclosed back porch now made the house more livable.

In 1933, the house was being enlarged. A kitchen pantry, another bedroom, a bathroom and a room and a glass enclosed back porch now made the house more livable.

In January 1933, his youngest son, only 10, was killed in an accident riding a Sheltan pony in a race with his cousin on a farm that Mr. Fletcher had leased from the school board and was being worked by a tenant. That farm is now the site of Kaplan High School.

The Depression and hard times were being felt by all. As Chief of Police, he earned $50 a month and about $50 for the collection of taxes.

Yvonne married and moved to Houston. She married and moved to Houston. Her husband was a police officer and was asked what would he do with the Fletcher house. The six months were up so the estate gave the house back to Iberia Savings and Loan. The worker was told to contact the Savings and Loan people, who donated it to the Baptist Church, saving the house from being torn down.

The church people had the house moved to its present location on Guadet Street.

After undergoing more remodelings, the house became the Reverend Hollins Meaux Recreational and Educational Building under the guidance of Elzora White.

In its time of ownership by the Fletcher family (1912-1985) the house had withstood many storms and hurricanes, even snow and ice.

The lifetime of the house is not over yet. In its present capacity as an educational and recreational building, it has been extended in capable hands.
Whitney Mouton, the car dealer

Editor's note: This article was published in 1936. The title read "Kaplan, the second largest and fastest growing town in Vermilion Parish."

At Perry, down below Abbeville on the Vermilion River was a boy who was too young to be drafted when the World War broke out and found himself disposing of the goods in his father's business. Whitney Mouton, returned to his native village of Perry and started in Kaplan preparatory to entering into another business enterprise in the County Seat, Abbeville.

In 1927, he started into the automobile business in Abbeville, handling the Chrysler and Plymouth lines, another enterprise at which he was quite successful. Then in 1933, he resigned his position to enter into the mobile business in Abbeville, handling the Ford and Plymouth lines, another enterprise at which he was quite successful. Then in 1933, he resigned his position to enter into the automobile business in Perry preparatory to entering into business in the County Seat, Abbeville.

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Grave of executed Civil War deserters in Vermilion was first in Old Abshire Cemetery

This article was published in the Abbeville Meridional on Dec. 3, 1953.

The massive grave in what has been named "The Old Abshire Cemetery" in the fifth ward of Vermilion is kept clean and orderly today by residents of that area as a reminder of the Civil War of 1863.

The grave serves as a reminder of the Civil War because all area residents know that the 11 persons buried in it were deserters during the conflict, men who were sought out of their hiding places by Confederate soldiers and executed as punishment for their desertion.

Residents today do not feel proud of the fact that the men, some of them are direct descendants, were direct deserters. But they do feel a certain respect for the dead. For that reason, they clean and maintain that grave along with the others that have spotted the cemetery throughout the years. Actually, the cemetery grew around the massive single grave where the deserters are buried. In later years, as members of their families died, they were laid to rest in the plot of ground which eventually grew to be a recognized cemetery.

It was in the month of April in 1863 that a dozen men of the area refused to join the Confederate army, according to some of the area residents who have had the story told to them over and over again. The men hid out, stayed behind when the other men left with the Confederacy, pillaged for existence and took advantage of the setbacks of the war for personal gain and momentary pleasures.

As some of the area soldiers returned and learned about the deserters, they set out to find them, determined to give them their due punishment. The deserters were found and dragged into a nearby woods and shot.

Oscar Thibodeaux, was the custodian of the old cemetery, related the story in French with almost motion picture effectiveness. He told how the deserters' families were notified by the Confederate soldiers who had killed them, that their men lay dead in the woods. He described how the wives and children hitched oxen to carts and went to the woods to bring back their dead.

Because of the war, burial facilities were almost unavailable. Eleven of the executed deserters were taken to the burial plot in the oxen drawn carts and were laid into grave without coffins, placed one on top of the other, alternating head and feet in two rows. Only one of the deserters was taken home by his widow and buried at a conventional funeral.

For years, the burial place was nothing more than a hill with weeds growing over it. However, descendants of the dead men felt it their duty to beautify the place, so they raised funds among themselves to have the grave squared off, a concrete cross constructed across the center and fencing around its borders. The names of the 11 men appear on the cross today, but are withheld in difference to living relatives.

The names of the 11 men can be seen on the base of the cross.

Rene Richard built the cross on the deserters graves and printed their names on it on June 22, 1945.

The eleven men were killed on April 30, 1863. They included Easton Abshire, Elear Abshire, Jack Abshire, Joseph Abshire, Martin Abshire, Alean Hanks, Pierre Istre, Theodule Simon, Will Abshire, Theodule Monceaux and Euclide Richard.
Two La. ports vying to build ‘mini-refineries’

By DAVE MILNER
Advocate correspondent

ABBEVILLE — The Port of Vermilion and the Port of Iberia are among three finalists for a $150 million Arco construction module project.

The project, which Atlantic Richfield Companies designed for use at its Northern Alaska Oil and Gas Drilling and Production Operation at Prudhomme Bay, will involve $150 million in labor and construction over 30 months.

The third finalist is Freeport, Texas, which also is situated on the Gulf Coast.

Arco called the administrators of the three finalist ports on Wednesday, officials said.

Thirty site proposals were submitted to the California-based company, from which the three finalists were chosen. Officials predict that the project could employ as many as 800 to 900 full-time workers, and as many as 1,100 at peak construction times.

"It’s a great honor and reflects well on the port’s structure in Louisiana that two could be selected from this state," said Jay Campbell, director of the Port of Vermilion.

"It’s our version of the Super Bowl, World Series and NBA finals," said John Oubre, director of the Port of Iberia.

Campbell said his proposal took five months to prepare.

Oubre said that the construction modules built at the chosen port site will be "mini-refineries" to be used in the discovery, development and processing of oil and gas at Prudhomme Bay in Alaska.

Contractors handling the project for Arco will tour the finalist sites, and will make a final decision sometime this fall. Actual construction could begin as early as Spring 1992.

Oubre said his port already has participated in a major construction project.

“We have already completed a similar construction project back in 1986, involving the Sohio Co.,” Oubre said. “This project, undertaken in 1984 and completed in 1986, should demonstrate to Arco the Port of Iberia’s experience in handling such major projects.”

The only disadvantage he sees is that the Sohio infrastructure is occupied by five companies that are leasing space at the port. Freeport already has an infrastructure, and with access to deep water channels in the gulf, could give the two Louisiana ports some stiff competition, Oubre said.

Campbell and Oubre said they have asked Gov. Buddy Roemer for assistance in the way of emergency funds and financial incentives to entice Arco to choose one of the state’s ports for the project.
Historic cemetery restored

The earliest date on a tombstone here is 1868.

Bernard Chaillot
Vermilion Bureau Editor

ABBEVILLE — The voices of the dead whisper in the trees at the Old Masonic Cemetery, where for years old tombs of red brick crumbled and weeds grew thick among the headstones.

But a concerted community effort over the past two years has restored the historic burial ground to its former place of honor and reverence, a sacred and well-kept final resting place.

A dedication ceremony will be at 10 a.m. Saturday to recognize the contributions of many who gave their time and effort to rescue the hallowed ground from decades of decay.

Community historian Ken Dupuy, who donated more than 1,000 hours researching the site and compiling obituaries, said the South Main Street site next to the railroad tracks was the first of three Masonic cemeteries in the city.

Virtually unused since 1905, the earliest date on a tombstone here is 1868. Veterans from the Texas War for Independence from Mexico, the Civil War and the Spanish-American War are buried here, Dupuy said.

“Sawyer White was the chairman of the committee that restored the cemetery and was the literal workhorse, spending many hundreds of hours actually restoring tombs and coordinating the restoration,” Dupuy said.

White said his goal was to “demonstrate individuals can make a difference and encourage and motivate property owners in town to maintain our historic sites and structures. We have so much, but there is so much to be done.”

White’s grandfather was John Calhoun White, a member of the extended family that descended from Dr. W.D. White, first master of the Masonic Lodge 192 F&AM, who was buried here along with several of his children.

Dr. White’s remains and those of his wife were moved to Graceland Cemetery long ago, but as one walks through the small Masonic graveyard here, the headstones of the children of W.D and L.R. White tell a tale of woe brought on by death too soon.

First there was Willie, born Oct. 22, 1864. He died Aug. 21, 1868, just before he turned 4. The epitaph reads “Too good for earth, God called him home.” Joseph was born Nov. 10, 1866, and died Nov. 28, 1870, just after his fourth birthday: “Our darling one hath gone before to greet us on that blissful shore.”

Maggie was born Nov. 23, 1868, and died Nov. 22, 1870, the day before her second birthday and six days before her brother Joseph passed away: “It was an angel that visited the green earth and took the flower away.”

Next came Nannie, born Dec. 1, 1879, died Sept. 9, 1884, age 4: “Sleep on dear child and take thy rest. In Jesus’ arms forever blest.”

The last White child in a marked grave is Walter, born Aug. 28, 1886 — 22 years after Willie — and died less than three months later, on Nov. 8, 1886: “Budded on earth to bloom in heaven.”

Many buried here, including John Calhoun White, are in unmarked graves. A plaque has been placed to acknowledge them. White said Otha Morgan, George Eldredge and Donald Hudson worked with him month to month to restore the cemetery.

Many others helped from time to time, he said. Albert Steen, Menard Marble, the city, the Greater Abbeville-Vermilion Chamber of Commerce, the Main Street program, Masons and many other groups and individuals also did their parts, “and now it is a site to be proud of, a place for meditation and reflection,” White said.
Brush-buried Grotto has Arisen

Three years ago anyone driving along Parish Road 2-2, eight miles south of Abbeville could easily miss seeing Bancker’s monument to a miracle. Instead a passerby would have seen nothing but overgrown brush.

Two years ago Teddy and Barbara LeMaire, of Abbeville, assumed the chore of restoring a brush-buried grotto that was first constructed in 1867 by the Rev. Gerard De Vos to complement the Our Lady of Prompt Succor Parish grounds. However, the church was torn down in 1940 and the parish moved several miles down the road to follow the influx of people moving into nearby Henry.

Bishop Jules B. Jeanmard and De Vos then thought it prudent to dismantle the church and reconstruct another one within the larger population area, according to the Rev. Joseph Stemmann, pastor of Henry’s St. John’s Catholic Church and St. James Chapel in Esther.

Meanwhile, the Bancker grotto site was abandoned, and eventually over-run by grass, weeds and decay. The LeMaire’s say they accepted Stemmann’s call to restore Bancker’s Our Lady of Lourdes tribute as part of a volunteer project, and from the spiritual fuel they felt for the mother of Jesus Christ following a 1987 pilgrimage to Medjugorje, Yugoslavia.

Many believe the Blessed Mary began appearing to four children in the Yugoslavian village in June 1981 to encourage prayer for world salvation and repentance of sins.

For the past two years, the LeMaire’s have spent most weekends at the 3-acre site renovating, reconstructing and recreating the miracle of Our Lady of Lourdes—the thematic symbol of the old grotto standing near the east bank of the Vermilion River.

In the small community of Lourdes, France in 1858, the Virgin Mary is said to have appeared to 13-year-old Bernadette Soubirous in a nearby cave (grotto).

“When Our Lady appeared in Lourdes her message was for the conversion of sinners,” Stemmann says.

“And to give sinners a visible sign, there was a little stream of water where if one bathed in the stream it supposedly yielded physical and spiritual healing powers,” the pastor says.

After several visitations in France, grottos replicating the miracle began appearing throughout the U.S., Stemmann says.

“About in 1935, priests began building grottos in each of their parishes and this is how this one came about,” the pastor says.

Stemmann said he plans to conduct a Mass every August at the Bancker grotto, and hopes to spur more awareness of the shrine when Our Lady of Prompt Succor parish celebrates its centennial in 1997.

Today, the Bancker grotto containing the image of Mary sits on a landscaped grounds flanked by 14 crucifixes representing the various “Stations of the Cross” throughout the 3-acre site.

“We hope to have it all complete in about another year,” Barbara says.

“We still have sidewalks and landscaping left to do and clear brush up to the bayou,” Barbara says.

The couple eventually hopes to construct a wharf on the Vermilion River to combine the river’s ambience with the serenity of the grotto site.

Teddy LeMaire says two or three Rosary groups are already making regular appearances at the grotto.

“And I think more will come once more people know what has been done and we get it all finished,” Teddy says.

“It’s really been rewarding to see what the grotto site looked like before, to what it is now,” Barbara adds.

The couple say they have bulldozed, cleared brush, reconstructed the grotto with donated money only.

“We do a little more each time we get donations,” Barbara says.

Currently, a bricked sidewalk is being laid from the grotto to the street.

Reconstruction work on the grotto is complete. The couple used wood, wire and concrete to refurbish the old shrine.

During the three-year project, the LeMaire’s say they will have spent about $2,000-$3,000, and battled a couple of severe cases of poison ivy by the time they finish the grotto around this time next year.
Battle goes on for Abbeville mayor's office

By BRUCE SCHULTZ
Acadiana bureau

ABBEVILLE — Each of two men is claiming to be the legitimate mayor of Abbeville, and it's going to take a judge to decide who's right.

A court hearing has been scheduled for Monday to determine if newly elected Mayor Brady Broussard should be enjoined from assuming the duties of mayor now held by Larry Campisi.

Broussard defeated Campisi in a hard-fought primary election last month, 2,844-2,189.

Campisi claims Broussard should take over on July 1. But Broussard insists that he was able to assume the mayor's position Monday when he obtained his commission from the secretary of state's office. Broussard was sworn in Monday at 2 p.m. by his brother, Judge Marcus Broussard.

"I was mayor at 2 o'clock as far as I was concerned," Broussard insisted.

Campisi said that at 1 p.m. Monday he called Broussard, who ordered him "to have all my personal effects removed from City Hall" by 9 a.m. Tuesday.

But later Monday afternoon, Campisi obtained a temporary restraining order from Judge Bennett Gautreaux, prohibiting Broussard from assuming the duties of mayor until a judge decides the dispute.

Broussard said he had several reasons for taking the sudden action Monday.

He complains that Campisi has not contacted him about taking over the office.

"I was disappointed he didn't call me," Broussard said. "I just assumed Larry would call me, that he would invite me to City Hall and one thing would lead to another."

But Campisi said he believes it was up to Broussard to take the first step.

"He never spoke to me once in person or over the phone about making the transition," Campisi said.

Broussard said that Campisi should have consulted him about the $3.5 million worth of contracts that the City Council approved since the election.

"I was upset because as mayor I'm going to have to deal with this," Broussard said.

Broussard also complained that Campisi failed to congratulate him for winning the election.

"I thought the victor was supposed to call the defeated," Campisi said.

Broussard said Campisi failed to acknowledge his presence at the last two council meetings since the election.

"He didn't recognize me or anything," Broussard said.

But Campisi said he didn't call on Broussard at the council meeting because he didn't know if Broussard had anything to say.

"His whole thing is he just says he just hasn't been able to get any recognition as mayor, which I think is ludicrous," Campisi said.

Campisi said he needs to stay on the city payroll until July 1 to allow time for his family to obtain medical insurance, in addition to accruing enough time to become vested in the state retirement system.

Broussard's attorney, Irby Hebert of Abbeville, said he plans to ask for a hearing by Thursday or Friday to dissolve the restraining order. If a judge agrees to throw out the order, Broussard automatically will assume the duties of mayor, Hebert said.

The city charter provides that a new mayor will take over the office when the successor is "duly qualified," and no date is mentioned for the succession, Hebert said.