Birthday for Abbeville

Abbeville, Louisiana’s Treasure Chest, reaches the centenary mark tomorrow.

With one of Louisiana’s most colorful backgrounds, this home of the friendly French, has lately grown to be one of the state’s most progressive cities. Abbeville’s story has been almost buried by time and fires that wiped out most of its written records.

But the story of the little Vermilion settlement—built by a priest who wouldn’t give up—that has become the center of the southwest Louisiana dairy industry, wouldn’t stay buried. From personal papers, the files of the Abbeville Meridional, and the memories of the city’s older residents, the ADVERTISER has compiled the history of the town in a nutshell—along with pictures of the community’s past and present.

Centennial celebrations won’t be held until after Lent, but for the story of Abbeville on its hundredth birthday, turn to pages 12 and 13.
Abbeville Airs Street Names To Give Them More Distinction

By Joe Choate

ABBEVILLE — It makes no difference to 19 home and business owners on 9 blocks of Charity St. in Abbeville, surveyed and ready for four-lane improvement, whether the state route continues to bear that name or another.

Seventeen of the 45 home and business owners contacted would rather that it stays Charity St., mostly from the business standpoint. The majority of those against renaming of the street contends that the change would cause confusion in correspondence where businesses are concerned.

Eight residents of the street are totally willing to change the name to “something more distinguished than just Charity.” One would like to see it get its name of French origin, “La Rue Petites Soeurs de Charite.”

In translation, the original French name of the street reads “Little Sisters of Charity Street.”

It was the name given the road by Pere Megret, founder of the city, in honor of an order of nuns who once maintained a convent on the street. The convent was located where the residence numbered 706 on Charity St. now stands.

One of the residents who would like to have the name changed said it is his desire to see the state route from its current east limit to the west city limit bear the name Pere Megret St. in honor of the city founder. Such an action would cause a change of names on three streets along the state route in the city by the name Concord and West Port. The section of the state route in front of St. Mary Magdalen Church already has been changed to Pere Megret St.

The possible change of the street’s name was suggested when several persons felt that a four-lane highway should have a more dignified name than Charity. Others suggested that Charity St. has become almost as synonymous with Abbeville as Canal St. to New Orleans and that changing its name would cause confusion.

Others yet suggested that the state route within the city limits continue to be called Charity with “drive” or “lane” instead of plain “street” to give it some requested distinction. Mayor Roy R. Theriot already has indicated that he likes Charity Drive.

Most of the interviewed residents who want the name changed say friends and visitors are usually amused when they tell them that “we live on Charity.” Others jokingly said their out-of-town friends usually called it when they chose a home site on Charity St. because they needed charity or were charitable people. Several of the residents in the “no difference” bracket stated that it did not make them feel “demoralized” to tell anyone that they live on Charity (street, that is). Yet another stated that it is “needed charity from the state to get it four-laned.”

The one person who would like to see the original French name come back to the street said it would be an instant move in perpetuating a French heritage which is quickly dying in our state. He also suggested giving back the original French name of Rue de la Paix to Peace St. in the city, along with several other changes that would aid in symbolizing a certain degree of culture.

Some of the older residents of the street remembered that the original road mapped by Abbe Megret as “La Rue Petites Soeurs de Charite” once was not part of the present state route and was blocked in a dead end where the state highway curved along today’s Prairie Ave. in Abbeville. In other words, residents of the primary road could not enter the highway on the east end, but had to travel westward to the business district and detour on small avenues to reach the state route. For that reason the city street once was nicknamed “La Rue de Misere,” or “Misery St.”

Officials are fairly confident that records will show that the street in question still actually is “La Rue Petites Soeurs de Charite” and has not been changed by legal ordinance. They believe that a progressive and fast moving people in the city eventually chopped the “Little Sisters” portion when referring to the street which made it become known commonly as “Charity.”

No one had any definite suggestions as to what name the street would bear should it be changed. Presumably, they are leaving that to the city fathers who must take final action on any such proposals.

La.-Cities — Abbeville

Daily Advertiser
July 26, 1956
Picturcsque Abbeville Hits Century Mark Monday

State's "Treasure Chest" Almost Played Second Fiddle to Perry

Coffee, Friendliness, "Broussards" Maintain Abbeville's French Air

La Plus Vieille

Abbeville's Acadian Architecture

State's "Treasure Chest" Almost Played Second Fiddle to Perry

By George Arceneaux  
Staff Writer  
Abbeville - Perry's Bridge today-quiet, tiny, but with memories that stretch back more than a century. This is Perry's Bridge today-quiet, tiny, but with memories that stretch back more than a century.

The town of Abbeville was incorporated in 1850 and in 1884 the city was chartered. Abbeville was the permanent seat of Vermilion Parish.

But the old is passing fast now, and the new is in the making. Abbeville is changing, expanding, growing, becoming more modern, more progressive, more up-to-date.

Abbeville is a city of two cultures - the old and the new. The old is the French-Canadian culture, brought here by the early settlers, who built the town and gave it its name. The new is the American culture, brought by the later settlers, who built finer, more modern homes, and gave Abbeville its modern look.

The city is still a French-speaking town, with a good many of its citizens still speaking French as their native tongue. But the town is not only French-speaking, it is also English-speaking. The town has a good many English-speaking citizens, who have come here from other parts of the country, and who have made Abbeville their home.

Abbeville is a city of two cultures, but it is not divided into two parts. The old and the new are mixed together, and the town is thriving.

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LETS GO VISITING:

ABBEVILLE:
Sauce Piquante Plus

WHEN A COLORFUL TOWN like Abbeville grows, does it have to change its personality, lose any of its charm?
Since 1950, Abbeville has gradually edged its way into the 10,000-population class. With growth has come, of course, all the typical problems: how to expand utilities and school space, how to keep on growing. But some citizens also ask a question that is distinctly Abbeville: "Will the city lose its old-time French flavor?"
"New people move in, times and interests change and this is good," says Abbeville's Mayor Roy R. Theriot. "But it would be a little sad if the next generation of Broussards, Héberts and LeBlancs grew up not knowing how to speak the French language and sing the French songs."
Abbeville is retaining the "French front" valiantly and cheerfully, however. The past that it is trying to preserve is far from the old decadent plantation tradition. It is rather a happy one of singing, dancing, hospitality and good food.
The spirit of Abbeville is kept alive by men like old-time folklore expert Fernand LaBauve Sr. He and Mayor Theriot have a weekly Saturday morning radio program featuring French songs and stories and plugs for keeping them popular. LaBauve will break into a belated in any public place on request—and supply an English translation as lagniappe.
The spirit of Abbeville is in the voices of Miss Lelia LaBauve's first-graders singing Acadian folk songs at the elementary school. Miss LaBauve is president of Le Cerclier Acadie, organized in 1954 to keep the old traditions alive.
The spirit of Abbeville is alive in Savy Hebert as he bends over his pot of sauce piquante. (This is a hot sauce of rice, flour, onions, tomato paste, celery, chili powder, parsley, peppers, etc. It goes with a variety of main dishes like chicken and fish.) Savy is acknowledged to be one of the best cooks in Abbeville. He selects all the ingredients himself and chases his wife out of the kitchen when he works. "Sauce piquante at Savy's" is a mouth-drooling phrase in Abbeville.

As much as they care for the sauce piquante of life, the people of Abbeville are interested as well in the solid meat and potatoes side. No longer are they citizens of a small French community. The 1950 census showed the city grew 46 per cent in 10 years, from 6072 to 9356. Present population estimates vary between 11,000 and 12,000.
Increased prosperity is illustrated by the rise both in bank deposits and loan activity in Abbeville's two banks. Total deposits on Dec. 31, 1950, were $10,623.054.16. On Dec. 31, 1955, the deposits were $13,416.252.77—an increase of nearly $3 million in five years! Loans outstanding for both banks combined are about $200,000 ahead of five years ago.
Reason for the extra change jingling in Abbeville's pockets and cash registers can partly be explained by the big oil boom that hit Southwest Louisiana in recent years. So far Abbeville has had a moderate, appetizing taste of oil money.
Oil production for Vermilion parish is about six million barrels a year. "Our big future in this parish is offshore oil," Mayor Theriot says. "We are working for a deep-water channel to the Gulf. Then we could service offshore operators. The boom would be such that the town wouldn't know what hit it!"
For the present, however, Abbeville relies on staples like the dairy industry. The Vermilion creamery, to which 65 dairies sell, processes 1,861,500 gallons of milk a year.
Big tourist attraction in Abbeville is the annual Dairy Festival, held in the fall. Begun in 1949 as a simple parade, the festival now has dozens of floats, thousands of visitors and big-name entertainment. (Last year's attraction: Tex Ritter.)
Abbeville, the parish seat, fortunately sits in the middle of a farm-rich parish, for which it is the center of trade. Most important crop last year was rice; latest figures show annual production for the parish to be 1,484,182 barrels or 240,437,484 pounds.
Young people relax beside Bayou Vermilion which flows through Abbeville. From left in foreground: Wayne Summers, Kathy Cade, Jimmy Gooch, Audrey Veasey.

Recently the citizens voted a $2,900,000 bond issue, which was passed by a 7-to-1 margin. The money will be used:
(1) To expand sewerage facilities and build a new disposal plant, large enough to service one and a half times the present population.
(2) To improve the water distribution system.
(3) To build a 125-foot water tower with one-half-million-gallon capacity and also a one-half-million-gallon underground reservoir.
(4) To repair sidewalks, streets and swimming pools.
(5) To expand electrical facilities and to add power substations.
Tentative plans also include a new city hall. The present one is a former bank building. Only a short distance from the gleaming courthouse erected in 1953, the City Hall, most residents agree, looks insignificant by comparison. It is in this old building the mayor holds municipal court.
"This additional duty," Mayor Theriot admits, "is an old-timer from the period when Abbeville was a small town. On occasion I come down here at night just to accommodate people. Once I was coming home from a late dinner at about 1 a.m. and I happened to meet a policeman who asked me if I would mind coming down to City Hall and hearing the case of an SFR student who had been caught speeding.
"The kid had an 8 a.m. class, so I came down and held court at 1:30 in the morning."
While some public buildings like the City Hall need to be either renovated or replaced and utilities need expanding, Abbeville's citizens feel the school and recreation setups are quite adequate at least for the present.
Large combined grammar and high schools are the fashion in Abbeville. Three out of five of the city's schools are this type. Newest school in town is James A. Herod High school with 29 classrooms for 725 pupils.

This Negro elementary and high school combined was opened last September. Nearby is a Negro swimming pool and park, opened last summer.
Water ballet from outer space is worked up by Royettes and coach. From left: Barbara McMurray, Shirley Rose, Jo Ann Owens, Sharon Stone, Carol Kennedy (behind Sharon), Lynn Kohler, Mrs. Roy Brener, Jane Dunn, Karen Wegner. Girls made aluminum paddles.

As a "pink elephant" Alice "Tippy" Stone, 11, dances the tango before jumping into pool to finish her act.

**Fun By The Pool**

By **JOY JACKSON**

These "barefoot ballerinas" have added dry land performing to their swimming routines. Results are some nifty numbers.

**Ballet Skirts** have been added to swimsuits by a synchronized swimming group, "The Royettes" of New Orleans.

These 20 aqua maids don't confine their performances to the pool; they also offer a little dry land lagniappe.

Coached by Mrs. Roy Brener (for whom they are named), the group practices in the Percy Stern pool at the Jewish Community Center, 5342 St. Charles. Enthusiastic "ballet-swimmers" from ages seven to twenty-seven, they can be found practicing any day of the week. Some by land—striking a fetching pose in a ballet skirt over a bathing suit. Some by actual contact with the H2O—working out their latest synchronized routine in the pool.

This effort adds up to a varied and eye-catching water show which the Royettes put on for any Louisiana group that offers an available pool. Sponsors for the youngsters belong to the New Orleans Swim Sponsors Association, a non-profit organization which includes many parents of the Royettes.

In one number the girls have worked they enter wearing white swimsuits, ballet skirts and flower hair wreaths. After a pool-side ballet, the girls remove the skirts and dive into the water to continue their "dance."

Several do solo numbers. Perky little Alice "Tippy" Stone, 11, impersonates a pink elephant to the "Elephant's Tango." Housewife and young mother Mrs. Yvonne Hildebrand dazzles aqua show audiences with her solo ballet of a fencer in action.

Small fry in the group have their own show stopper—"The Little White Duck." It involves a lily pad, a red snake, two black bugs and two green frogs, plus the little white duck, of course.

The group performs with split-second timing to recorded music. "When the record stops, so do we," explains coach Brener. "No number ever runs over 6 minutes; most averaging around 3 or 4 minutes."

The Royettes are faced with plenty of "technical" problems. In an aqua show, the motto isn't "the show must go on" but rather "the show must stay up."

"We can't have any cumbersome costumes that tend to sink," says Mrs. Brener. For a clever black cat number last year the girls sewed long black tails to their bathing suits. But, stuffed with cotton the tails wouldn't float. The girls tried several types of stuffing, but none would float. Finally Mrs. Brener tried the artificial grass used in Easter baskets. This floated!

Recently the group has been practicing a new ballet "from outer space." The swimmers wear antennae on their heads and "flying saucers" on their hands. Their "saucers" are aluminum paddles which the girls cut out themselves. They serve as a decorative touch and enable the girls to whiz through the water when used as hand paddles.

Synchronized swimmers have their own field of competition. Mrs. Brener explains that her group has to work on a synchronized number for a year before it can enter an AAU competition. This is because New Orleans has no indoor pool open to women in the winter where a group like the Royettes could practice and be ready for early summer competition, she comments.

This year the Royettes plan to enter the Junior National AAU synchronized competition for solos at Andover park pool on August 3-4, and will travel to Houston, Tex., that same month for the Junior Olympic synchronized competition for teams and duets.

Throughout the summer the members will keep practicing and putting on shows wherever and whenever asked. Showing off their hardearned tricks is like a commencement day at this "school for mermaids."

A solo aqua number as a fencer is performed by Mrs. Yvonne Hildebrand. She is also part of a duet number with Shirley Rose as Haitian dancer.
Largest recreation area for white children is the Cormeaux Park, which has a baseball diamond, barbecue shelters, wading pool and playground facilities. There are also Godchaux Park, with its swimming pool, and the Abbeville High playground, which has a baseball diamond and stadium.

For those who want to learn how to skin a nutria, be a farmer or auto mechanic, study business administration, radio-television or electric appliance repair, or how to handle natural gases in the field, Abbeville has the Vermilion Parish Trade school. Opened in 1953, it started with an enrollment of 342. Both full and part-time students now number 1500.

Although today it is the center of trade education, a growing city with expansion problems, a potential offshore oil boom town, Abbeville had a rather uncertain start in life. It was born because, in 1843, Father Antoine Desire Migret had a disagreement with the board of directors of his parish church in Vermilion (now Lafayette).

He left his church and purchased the land that is now Abbeville to start his own community. He called his town La Chapelle.

When Vermilion parish was created in 1844, another settlement, nearby Perry's Ridge, was named temporary parish seat. By that time "Abbe" Migret's community had a much larger population than Perry's Ridge. An election was held and La Chapelle was the winner but, due to a technicality, the victory was set aside. Meanwhile, the founder-priest died, and the town's name was changed to Abbeville (probably in his honor).

A year after his death, in 1845, Abbeville finally was named parish seat.

Abbeville grew steadily in spite of yellow fever epidemics and a near bankruptcy.

Today, still predominantly French and Roman Catholic, it still has much of the spirit of its founder's first small village. But it also has the joys and headaches of a growing community.

Abbeville is still sauce piquante. It is also meat and potatoes.
Good deeds mean stripes in this boys' outfit where corporals are the kings

THE BOYS TAKE ORDERS from their corporals even when the non-coms are smaller than they are and can't fight as well.

Stripes not strength make the big difference when you're a member of the New Orleans recreation department's Rangers. Organized a year and a half ago at John P. Lyons Memorial Center, 621 Louisiana, the Rangers are a military-type outfit open to boys 9 through 12. The Rangers drill, do good deeds, go on hikes and try mightily to act like Marines. The organization now has four squads of eight "men," each headed by the much-envied corporals, who are privileged to bark orders, dress their men down and, best of all, have the respect of the much-envied corporals, who are priviledged to bark orders, dress their men down and, best of all, drill them.

The man who outranks them all and is in charge of the Rangers is NORD supervisor James T. Garner, who works at Lyons center and is a former United States Marine sergeant. Watching his Rangers march proudly around the center yard in pith helmets too big for them, looking like lines of brown turtles, Garner smiles.

"Even kids who used to be problems take this thing seriously," he says. "It's the military part that gets them. Boys who wouldn't obey ordinarily will snap to attention when you call it Marine discipline.

"The boys come to weekly Tuesday night meetings on time, serve refreshments at Golden Age club functions, pick up trash around the center. They know that each Ranger gets points for every hour he puts in or things like this. These points add up to extra stripes.

Right now I have five corporals, one for each squad, and a company clerk. But we're forming another platoon soon. That means more corporals, and I'll be needing a sergeant soon, too. The boys all know this and you should see them hop to it."

What being a non-com means is described by the serious-faced, 12-year-old corporal of the second squad, Robert Logrie.

"My men were chosen honor squad four times in a row," Logrie says. "You notice even when the others are talking or chewing gum and things, my squad is quiet. That's because I have discipline and give a boy a black mark when he talks or anything. Three black marks and you have to march in the back row. The best thing about the Rangers is that even the bigger boys listen to me."

Although the Rangers are too young an outfit to rate a sergeant yet, the idea for their organization is about eight years old. Lyons center director Murtagh Rupp explains how Rangers were born. "Johnny Brechel and I talked over the idea for a NORD marching organization just a few years after the recreation department was organized but nothing came of it." (John Brechel, now deceased, was former executive assistant with NORD.)

About two years ago, Lyons center tried to organize the forerunner of the Rangers, a nature study group called "the Bird Watchers," which didn't go over.

"The name must have scared the boys away," Rupp laughs.

In November, 1954, Rupp brought up his old marching society idea. "I thought this would tie in well with Mr. Garner who was to head the group," Rupp says.

"The kids were always asking him about his experiences with the Marines."

Although they have no official tie-in with the US Marine Corps, the Rangers pattern themselves after the Leathernecks. The Marine Corps Reserve and the Marine recruiting station in this area co-operate by sending representatives to speak with the Rangers and to help drill them.

Gradually the Rangers have become a good enough drill team to march in parades.

However, with boys the age range of the Rangers, Garner realizes that you have to have some play mixed in with the military.

One of the Rangers' favorite games is "dead Indian." A boy is blindfolded and given a dummy rifle. In front of him is a basket filled with bottle caps. Another boy is chosen to sneak up to try to steal the basket without the blindfolded boy hearing him and "shooting" him. If the second boy steals the basket successfully, he is given a turn with the rifle. If, on the other hand, he is caught, he must lie down on the floor where he was shot; another boy is chosen to do the sneaking.

To some of the boys this is more than a game. One little Ranger who had piled up quite a lot of dead Indians with his rifle, explained: "This will come in handy if I ever have to do any night fighting."

Ranger captain Garner, a former Marine Corps sergeant, shows his boys how to hold their drill rifles. Lined up on Lyons Center field are, from left, Hunter Harris, Raymond Millet and A. J. LeBlanc.
ENFORCING THE LAW

Vermilion To Penalize Absent Board Members

Members of the Vermilion Parish School Board got a treat last week. Their monthly stipend was increased from $350 to $600. But if they want to collect the full $600, they have to attend every meeting.

That’s because the board decided to levy a $100 penalty for members who fail to attend a board meeting. Absenteeism on local public bodies as school boards, police juries, councils, and such, slows down governmental operation. If a would-be officeholder offers his candidacy to serve the public, the least the public can expect is attending meetings where decisions are made that will affect the entire municipality.

The Vermilion board will accept a valid excuse for absence. The member can present his reason to the executive committee, which will decide if it’s valid. If not, that’s 100 bucks less from the paycheck that month. Looking at politics in a realistic manner, however, it does not seem likely that the executive committee of almost any public body will be quick to dock one of its own. Who knows? A member of that same committee may want to take a day off himself from the next meeting.

The same principle applies to any parish. The Lafayette Parish School Board and Police Jury by and large have good attendance, although there are the regulars who are known to miss a goodly quota of meetings, both regular and committee. It got so bad a couple of weeks ago that when a Police Jury committee met, the few present had to go out and corral a couple of jurors who weren’t on that committee so that they could have a quorum.

The Louisiana Legislature passed a law some time ago permitting a police jury or a school board to assess a $200 penalty on any member missing a meeting. The law was changed, favoring the jurors. Any juror missing a meeting could be fined $25. School boards could still hit a missing member for $200.

That law is on the books but we’ve heard of no instance on the local level where a $200 fine — or $25, for that matter — has been collected from a missing member.

The law does not apply to non-elective bodies. If it did, and it were enforced, the Charter Commission could really hit it big. Attendance at its meetings has been dismal. The solution in this case is for citizens to turn down an appointment if they don’t intend to sit and serve. In the case of elected bodies — police juries and school boards — the law is on the books and it should be put into action.
GROUND BREAKING SERVICE—Ground breaking services for the new Faith Hope Missionary Baptist Church were recently held across from Herod Elementary. This new church will be located on the corner of Cuba St. in Abbeville. Rev. Mack Crayton Jr. will be the pastor of this new church. He is an ordained Minister, Past High Priest, has a B.S. degree, and is a veteran.

Services for this church are now being held at First Holy Ghost Church at 8:00 a.m. on Sundays until their new church is built. Breaking the ground together are (front row) Herbert Myles, Mack Crayton, Mayor Larry Campisi, Israel Parker, and Rep. Sam Theriot. Back row persons are some of the members of this new church. (photo by Angie Mayard)