The Acadian Village

by Ann Wakefield

Not far from the hustle and bustle of modern-day Lafayette, Louisiana, stands an oasis from the past: the Acadian Village. An authentic replica of a typical rural community, the village is a tribute to the courage and tenacity of the Acadians who helped establish the dominant culture of the area.

Exiled from their colony in Acadia in the latter half of the 18th century, the Acadians turned south to French-speaking Louisiana. These industrious and resourceful farmers settled the area known as Acadia (a combination of Acadia and Louisiana).

Lafayette’s Acadian Village, which opened on July 4, 1976, is an authentic replica of the typical rural community of the Acadian settlers. It is situated along a man-made bayou on ground that was once a corn and soybean farm.

The property was donated by Mr. and Mrs. Elias J. Alleman to the Lafayette Association for Retarded Citizens, which operates the Acadian Village as “The Tourist Attraction With A Heart.” Here retarded and handicapped citizens maintain the grounds, thereby becoming tax payers instead of tax burdens.

The cluster of nine buildings along the banks of the lovely bayou include three authentic
Christmas at the Acadian Village.

The Chapel of New Hope, located along the banks of a man-made bayou, is the central structure in the Acadian Village.

that is somewhat of a mystery. During the building of the chapel, community help was solicited for the donation of an altar. One morning outside the chapel door, a carving of The Last Supper was found, left by a donor who remains anonymous to this day. It forms the central portion of the chapel’s altar.

The General Store, located at the entrance of the village, is also a replica of an earlier Acadian architectural form. It is built with aged lumber in the traditional method of “briquette en bois.” A brick is used between posts. Electrical wiring is left exposed, as a typical precaution against fires.

Many souvenirs are on sale in the store, including native crafts and Cajun (adaptation of “Acadian”) music records.

Across the entrance from the store is the oldest house in the village, the Bernard House, which dates from the 18th century. It was built by a doctor, as indicated by the relatively fancy trim on the porch roof.

Next door is the Thibodeaux House, built around 1860 by Narcisse Thibodeaux in Breaux Bridge. Lafourche’s neighbor to the north. It is an excellent example of classic Acadian architecture, with its “briquette en bois” (stucco and wood between posts) structure.

The Acadian Village is surrounded by 10 acres of gardens and woodlands, intersected by the meandering bayous. Children enjoy crossing the bayous’ bridge and hand-pumping water from the bayous by means of a pump usually seen only in the movies.

Every once in a while during the course of the year, the Acadian Village comes alive with activity. To greet the spring season, a sheep-to-shed weekend is usually held. During this time, shepherds and spinners gather to shear sheep, wash and naturally dye the wool, spin into yarn and weave it into a shed. Spinning and weaving with native cotton is also demonstrated.

During the summer, an Acadian Day is celebrated at the Acadian Village to honor present-day Acadians for their contributions to contemporary Louisiana. Cajun crafts and music are the primary attractions of the weekend, which is scheduled this year for June 6-7.

The fall celebration of the Acadian Village takes place this year on Sept. 19-20, during the popular city-wide Festival Acadiens.-acadian activities. There will be music, Cajun French plays, a puppet show and a festive old-fashioned fair where homemade goods and crafts are exhibited and judged.

Christmas is a very special time at the Acadian Village when, during the second week in December, the old homes are decorated with bright green and red ribbons and Sants and his helpers welcome children to a village truly transformed into a Christmas wonderland.

Any time at the Acadian Village is a good time. A visit is a valuable introduction to the heritage of Acadians. The village is open every day, except major holidays, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

For more information, contact the Lafayette Convention and Visitors Commission, P.O. Box 9266, Lafayette, La. 70505. Telephone: (337) 232-8737.