Tour Alexandria Pineville and vicinity
TOUR ONE
Alexandria-Pineville

The known history of Alexandria-Pineville dates back to the early 1700's when the first outpost was established on the banks of the Red River at a site now occupied by the Rapides Cemetery.

The French called their settlement "Les Rapide", named for the rapids or falls which were on the river at this point. Later the Spanish came in and renamed the area "El Rapido". When the state was admitted to the Union and divided into parishes, this section was called "Rapides."

A limestone ledge, three miles wide across the river, caused the falls. In low water stages, parts of a unique dam, constructed during the Civil War to raise the water level for Federal gunboats to pass over the falls, may be seen. Known as "Bailey's Dam", it had a large influence on the Red River Campaign in 1863 and 1864 during which much of the area was burned to the ground. Alexandria-Pineville were occupied for two months and many small battles were fought nearby.

Following the movement of the Union forces out of Alexandria-Pineville, two forts were hastily constructed to repel an anticipated third invasion which never came. They are located on the bluffs of the river near the site of Bailey's Dam. Fort Randolph, named for the commander of the fort, is on the grounds of Central Louisiana Hospital and not accessible to the public. Fort Buhlow, which was under the command of a Lt. Buhlow, is now a favorite picnic spot, although only a few stones and the earthworks remain. The site is marked on Highway 165-167 near the O.K. Allen Bridge. Bailey's Dam has been placed on the National Register of Historical Sites. In low water stages, the remains of the dam can be seen. Lake Buhlow is the scene each autumn of the world's championship boat races. Fort Randolph and Fort Buhlow are on the National Register.

The site of the Louisiana Seminary of Learning, also on the National Register of Historic Sites, is approximately three miles up Highway 165 North. The seminary opened under William Tecumseh Sherman in 1860. It was moved to Baton Rouge in 1869, later becoming La. State University. Now on the grounds belonging to the U.S. Forest Service, there is a mini-picnic area and a marker. Directly across the highway is the United States Veterans Administration Hospital.

Almost directly across from Fort Buhlow is the entrance to Central Louisiana Hospital, a community dedicated to the treatment and education of the mentally ill.

The road through Central runs into Shamrock Street on which the Alexandria National Cemetery, begun 1867, is located.

Mount Olivet Church, established in 1854.

Louisiana College, off Main Street in Pineville, traces its history back to the old Mt. Lebanon University, founded in 1852. It was established in Pineville in 1906 under the auspices of the Southern Baptist Foundation.

Also on Main Street is Mount Olivet Chapel, built in the 1850's and dedicated by Bishop Leonidas Polk, known as "The Fighting Bishop of the Confederacy". During the war the church was used by the Union forces and is believed to have been spared burning because of this. The building is kept locked, but directions for obtaining the key are on the door. The chapel is listed on the National Register of Historical Places. Follow Main Street across the bridge into Alexandria.

Very little remains to show the first plan of Frederick Walther, hired by Alexander Fulton in 1805 to plat the city. Walther's records state:

"I have surveyed and laid off the town . . . comprised of 80 squares, each of which contains four lots of 1,000 French feet each. The streets, eight in number each way, are 50 feet wide. The street in front, Water Street, is 160 feet more or less. The commons above and below the town are 100 feet more or less and the commons back of town are 200 in depth. The square marked Center Square and the public square are declared by Mr. Fulton to be public use."

Water Street has long since fallen to the levees, but the other streets remain as he indicated, beginning with Second (called Main), Third, and so on to Tenth, the end of the original plan.

The "commons" marking the end of the original plan on each side are now Casson Street and Jackson Street.

The first public square once contained the court house and is now the Town Talk parking lot. The other square still remains in public use, with the fire station and police station and genealogical library on that block.

The Rapides Bank on Main and Murray Streets was built there in 1898 by Col. George W. Bolton. In 1977, it was designated as Alexandria's new visual arts center. It was on this site.
that Alexander Fulton established his trading post in the late 1700's. The building is on the National Register of Historical Places.

On the “Commons”, now Casson Street, was the terminal of the Ralph Smith Smith Railroad, the first railroad built west of the Mississippi River. Begun in 1827, it went to the South Louisiana agriculture lands in the Bayou Beouf region. Officially named the Red River Railway, the rails were strips of iron slightly less than three inches wide and about half an inch thick, spiked onto wooden stringers. The railroad engine and most of the tracks became a part of Bailey's Dam in 1864.

Third Street also contains many turn-of-the-century landmarks. Probably the most famous of these is the Bentley Hotel, which takes the entire block of Second, DeSoto, Third and Jackson Streets. It was built in 1908 by a lumberman named J.A. Bentley. The Rapides Club and Opera House was built on Third Street in the early 1900's. Movies became popular during the 1920's and the club building was sold in 1927, becoming the Paramount Theatre. The inside has been remodeled, but has retained the original balconies and design. Both the Bentley Hotel and Paramount Theatre are now on the National Register of Historic places.

The Randolph House, built in 1895 on the corner of Third and St. James Streets, houses a gift shop featuring Louisiana items.

Probably the oldest residence in this section of town is the Charnley House, now a law office, located at 1128 Fifth Street. It is believed to be of 1870 construction.

At Washington and Fifth Streets is the first library constructed after the others were burned by Federal troops in 1864. It was financed by donations from the S.S. Bryan and Andrew Carnegie Foundations. Built in 1907, it now houses the Alexandria Historical and Geneological Library. It is open daily and contains many interesting papers, books and photographs relating to early days of Central Louisiana.

The year 1882 brought two railroads to Alexandria, and the first depot was built on Tenth and Madison Streets. Still standing and in need of repair, it predates the Texas and Pacific Railroad Station on Tenth Street by more than 30 years. Many of the hotels and restaurants which sprang up around the stations are still standing, including two at the corners of Tenth and Jackson, and the Europe Hotel at Beauregard and Tenth. Tenth Street marks the end of the original Fulton grant.

Fast disappearing are the quaint brick streets of Alexandria. Built before the turn of the century, they have been virtually indestructible, but modern cleaning methods and heavy traffic are taking their toll and many are now being covered by asphalt. Still left are Jackson from Bolton Avenue to 24th; Foisy from Monroe to Casson; Lee from Hill to 27th; Marye from Bolton to 27th; Monroe from Fourth to Eighth and again from 12th to Bolton. On some of these, particularly on Monroe Street, can be seen the remains of the tracks of the first street railway system operated from 1890 to 1899.

St. Francis Xavier Cathedral and St. Francis Xavier Academy, on Fourth and Beauregard Streets, were constructed in the 1890's. The Cathedral is on the National Register. This land was occupied by General George Armstrong Custer and his Federal troops in 1865 when he was stationed in Alexandria during reconstruction.

St. Francis Xavier Cathedral

New Hope Missionary Baptist Church
TOUR TWO
Bayou Rapides

Among the first areas to be settled by families who wanted to use the lands for crops was Bayou Rapides, Cotile and Jean de Jean. Many acquired their property by Spanish grants when that country was in control in the late 1700's.

The homes built by these planters were not the showplaces of Natchez, St. Francisville, or River Road area, but were grand in this area for their day. Most of these were destroyed during the Civil War.

Tour Two begins at the intersection of MacArthur Drive and Bayou Rapides. The first stop is Kent House. Even if it were not unique in having survived the combined devastation of time and the Civil War, Kent House would be remarkable for its architectural worth. The house is regarded as the oldest standing structure in Central Louisiana and is a fine example of eighteenth-century rural Louisiana plantation architecture. Built between 1796 and 1800 by Pierre Baillio, the house was a more simple structure than we see today. Subsequently nineteenth-century owners added rooms and refinements for style and accommodation.

Both in plan and construction, Kent House is a fine example of French and Spanish colonial architecture. The house is constructed as a raised cottage with the living quarters well above the ground on brick piers. Heavy cypress timbers form the framework which is held together with wooden pegs, many of which are seen on the exterior. The walls of the house are completed by filling the spaces between the timbers with a mixture of mud, moss, or deer hair, called 'bousillage'. Where protected from the rain by the galleries, the exterior walls are finished only with a thin coating of plaster or layers of lime-wash, either white or colored. Exterior walls are covered with wide feather-edged boards to preserve the bousillage.

Materials used in building the house were taken directly from the land itself. One of the main attractions of bousillage was its ready availability since mud was always at hand, moss taken from the trees felled for building purposes, and hair obtainable from the many deer hunted in the forest. Native clay was baked in the sun to provide the rose-colored bricks, and timbers for beams, pillars, and floors were cut from trees felled on the site.

There were always outbuildings on a plantation to support necessary work and to house plantation workers. Kent House features a group of such structures typical of the times: a Milk House (c. 1820) of timber frame construction fastened with pegs; a carriage house; a plantation kitchen; and a worker's cabin of the pre-Civil War period of "briquette entre poteux" (brick between post) construction. Kent House is listed on the National Register.

The house and outbuildings are open daily from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. with exception of Sunday when hours are 1 p.m. to 5 p.m.

England Air Force Base occupies the site of Oak Isle, one of the largest plantations in pre-Civil War days. It was the Alexandria Municipal Airport prior to World War II, when it became Alexandria Air Base. Renamed England Air Force Base for one of the pilots who trained there, the base is now the home of the 23rd Fighter Squadron, the "grandchild" of the old Flying Tigers, organized by a Louisiana native, General Claire Chenault. The air base covers approximately 3,500 acres, and is of tremendous economic importance to Central Louisiana.

Kent Plantation House, built in the 1790's.

Tyrone Plantation House was built around 1840 by George Mason Graham, chairman of the board of supervisors for Louisiana Seminary of Learning. Many meetings with Sherman, Governor Moore, and others on the board were held here. This home is believed saved due to friendship with Sherman. Graham lived there until his death in 1891 and is buried in Rapides Cemetery. Private.

Joseph Walker, who became Governor of Louisiana from 1850-1853, lived on the next plantation and is buried there. While in office, Gov. Walker led in the funding of public education for all children in Louisiana.

Many homes were built by the family of Garcia de Texada who were recipients of several large land grants from the Spanish government. Three of their homes remain, including China Grove, built in 1856. Bayouside, across the bayou, built in 1852 is on the National Register. Further up the bayou is Juliett, which has been incorporated into a larger home. All are private.

Hunter's store at McNutt, across Bayou Rapides, built by P.J. Sleet in the 1880's, was named Blue Star Grocery. Uphill is McNutt Cemetery, containing graves of early settlers.

Eden Plantation Home, built by Pleasant Hunter in 1840, is now occupied by the eighth generation of the Hunter family. Private.

Hot Wells Health Resort had its beginnings in 1913 when an oil worker noticed hot water gushing from a drilling hole and casually washed his hands in it. Because it felt good, he continued doing this for several days
and then noticed that a persistent rash on his hands was no longer there. From that beginning word got around and thousands have taken the "cure" in its healing waters during the past half century.

The resort has modern motel rooms, restaurant, and a swimming pool, in addition to the bath house, with its steam rooms. Campsites are also available.

The waters, containing two pounds of minerals to a gallon of water, bubble out of the ground from 2,800 feet below the surface at 116 degrees and is piped up the hill to the bath house.

Cotile Recreation Area adjoins Hot Wells. It has a surface area of 1735 acres with maximum depth of 25 feet, 400 acres cleared for sailing, boating, and water skiing, 55 spaces for camping, 100 picnic sites, and a boat dock and launching area.

Further up the bayou, a turn-off to the left, across the levee, leads to Henderson Hill, named for the first settlers. The Old Texas Trail, laid out in 1700's went over Henderson Hill, across western Rapides and Vernon Parishes. Another part of the trail branched off in another direction, going to Many through the Neutral Ground and crossing at Burr's Ferry.

During the Civil War, the Henderson Hill overlook, which commanded the entire valley, was the scene of battle.

The Henderson-James cemetery, containing graves of the early settlers, is also located on the hill, near the crest.

The Neal-Dark cemetery, nearer the entrance to the Hill, contains many interesting tombs, among them that of Annie Coashit Dark, a woman who had amassed a fortune in land on Bayou Rapides. She built her tomb and left elaborate instructions for her remains. However, she died while on a visit to New Orleans and her body is buried there. Her tomb still stands, marked by wheels of countless carriages which bumped into it as they moved up the trail which led past the cemetery.

At the entrance to the cemetery stands a one-room building which was used for almost two centuries as a meeting house. Both school and church services have been held there. Cordelia, the home of Newton Crain Blanchard, governor of Louisiana from 1905-1909, was located near the entrance to Henderson Hill but moved when the levee was built. It is now on the right of the Bayou Rapides Road and is listed on the National Register of Historical Places. Private.

Bayou Rapides runs into Highway One just past Cordelia. The tourist may either turn left and return to Alexandria through Boyce or continue to Cane River Country on Highway One north.
TOUR THREE
Lecompte, Cheneyville

This tour begins at Willow Glen overpass, Highway 165-71 south toward Baton Rouge. Take the second left turn past the overpass to the old highway, now La. 1208-1.

Hard Times Plantation House, adjacent to the Inglewood Commissary, directly across from the dairy, was built in 1869 by William Harris.

Inglewood Plantation House was built around 1820 and is an excellent example of early Louisiana farm architecture. Inglewood Plantation is owned by the Right Reverend Christopher Keller, Jr., the Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Arkansas. Private.

Only a marker denotes Mooreland, where much planning was done to set up Louisiana as an independent state in the early 1860’s. Mooreland, the home of Thomas Overton Moore, was briefly the capital of Louisiana when Moore, then Governor of the State of Louisiana, was moving the capital north to escape Federal capture in 1863. Mooreland was totally destroyed during the war, the mills and engines torn to pieces and used in Bailey’s Dam. The contents of the plantation home were divided among the slaves prior to its destruction. Toward the end of hostilities, he moved his family to Texas, later to Mexico and thence to Cuba. Upon his return, Moore and his family lived in a slave cabin, their only remaining property.

Rosalie Plantation is located on a part of an original Spanish land grant made to Daniel Clark. Clark, an early New Orleans businessman and statesman, was the father of Myra Clark Gaines, whose lawsuits tied up property settlements in New Orleans for decades through the 19th century.

In 1831, it was purchased by Gervais Baillio, a son of Pierre Baillio who built Kent House. He was a sugar planter, judge and a member of the first board of supervisors of the Louisiana State Seminary. It was through the intervention of General Sherman, who was a close friend of Baillio when Sherman lived here, that the home was saved. A copy of the orders to “protect the life and property of Judge Baillio” is framed and displayed in the foyer of the house, built in 1832. Owned by Dr. and Mrs. Tom Norman. Private.

The Normans also own the old Rosalie Sugar Mill, located on Bayou Robert, a short distance behind the plantation home. Records now available show the sugar production of the mill as far back as 1845. The equipment has long since been disposed of with the exception of two sugar kettles, inside the structure. The building is constructed of brick, hand-made on the plantation, and interior beams of handhewn cypress span a width of 42 feet. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places as an example of early agricultural architecture. Open.

Across the road from Quantico in a curve of the highway is Aliceton, also once a part of Quantico. Aliceton was a wedding gift for Alice Robinson, whose parents owned Quantico. She married Samuel Levi Wells, son of Governor and Mrs. James Madison Wells, in 1868.

The highway loops back onto U.S. 71-165 at a point just beyond Rosalie. Louisiana State University at Alexandria is on land which was formerly Chambers plantation.

On La. 470, turn right past Bayou Robert Co-op, formerly Oakland Plantation. Oakland Baptist Church is now rebricked and the grounds contain an old cemetery.

One half mile on the left is Delmar Plantation House, once a part of Quantico Plantation. Originally three houses in one, parts of it were removed during remodeling in the early 1900’s.

The original plantation home at Quantico has long since disappeared and a more modern home built on the site. Behind the house still stands a tall chimney, the remains of a sugar mill. The long line of oak trees leading to the house were blown down in the tornado of 1976.

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Louisiana immediately following the Civil War. The home was burned during the Red River Invasion, even though he was a Federal sympathizer. Only an old cistern remains at the spot marking Sunnyside.

It was through this land that the Red River Railroad, the first railroad west of the Mississippi was built. The line was the result of the genius of Ralph Smith Smith, a railroad engineer born in 1806 in Connecticut.

The old Smith Landing was behind what is now Dougherty's Garage in Lecompte and nothing is left of it. Warehouse Row, along the bayou, indicates the volume of business once produced there. The old terminal building and what was once either a warehouse or hotel still stands across the road from Dougherty's at the intersection of Hardy and Water Streets.

Meeker Sugar Refinery has the distinction of being the northernmost sugar refinery in the United States. This part of Rapides is the beginning of the Louisiana sugar cane country.

The next paved road to the left of Highway 165 leads to Loyd Hall, a two-and-a-half story brick mansion rich in history and legend. There is the possibility that the original portion was built around 1810 by members of the Wells' family and the Loyd family updated it around 1830. During the Civil War the house escaped damages although its owner, James D. Loyd, was hanged by the Federals in 1864 as a Confederate spy. Owned by Dr. and Mrs. Frank Fitzgerald. Open by appointment. Loyd Hall is on the National Register of Historical Places.

Bus tours will turn around at this point and go back to U.S. 165 as the railroad underpass leading to Highway 71 is too small for large vehicles. Automobiles may either return to Alexandria at this point or take U.S. Highway 71 east toward Cheneyville.

Cheneyville is one of the oldest towns in the parish, named for William Cheney, the leader of a group of settlers who migrated from South Carolina in 1811. Among these settlers was the Tanner family which built Witchwood, located to the left of Highway 71 just past the road leading from Loyd Hall. This plantation home of hand-hewn cypress timbers held together with wooden pegs has been in possession of the Tanner family since it was built in the early 1800's.

The old Ezra Bennett's Store, long since vacated, recorded history of Rapides and Avoyelles Parish for years, prior to and after the Civil War. His statements of goods bought and the families who used the store have been invaluable in researching parish history. The store and the old Bennett house across the highway are listed on the National Register.

"Live Oak", the home of Mr. and Mrs. Harvey Bubenzer, Jr., is in the curve of Highway 71 near Bunkie. During the Civil War, this home was used as Union headquarters and General Banks could look out over the lands from the "widow's walk" atop the large home. Private.

Near Live Oak is Ashland, built in 1857. Both are said to have belonged to relatives of President Jefferson Davis. Owned by Mrs. Bessie Allums and Mr. and Mrs. Harvey Allums. Private.

The boundary line of Rapides Parish is just beyond this point.
For additional information, contact the Alexandria-Pineville-Rapides Convention Commission at 110 Bolton Avenue, or P.O. Box 992, Alexandria, LA 71301. (Phone 318/442-6671) or the Rapides Parish Police Jury, P.O. Box 1150, Court House, Alexandria, LA 71301.