UL Librarians delve into history of Evangeline Parish

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Louisiana has a rich heritage and unique culture that is expanding every day with every attempt to dig deeper. Evangeline Parish by University of Louisiana at Lafayette librarians Jane Kiesel and Jean Vidrine, delivers the history of the 114-year-old town through photographs that offer a jump through time.

The book is part of the Images of America History Books, which focus on the history of towns across America through more than 200 images in each addition.

Published by Arcadia Publishing on May 26, the books hope to reveal aspects of the town that may have been forgotten with the passing of time.

Both Vidrine and Kiesel have worked in the Dupré Library for 25 years in the Special Collections Department. Evangeline Parish is Kiesel’s second entry into the Images of America Series, having previously done a history book on Lafayette for the same series.

“IT’s a great series. We have several copies of the other books here in the library, and they’re all just wonderful,” said Vidrine.

The book is Vidrine’s first entry in the series; however, it holds a special meaning for her as an Evangeline Parish native. The process of compiling information for the book was eye opening to Vidrine, just as much as it was to Kiesel.

“We heard stories from some of the other folks out there,” Vidrine said. “Some of them didn’t have photographs, but they did tell us a lot of stories of events that happened in the past.

“There’s a lot of history in the parish; there’s a lot of history in any parish, though. I think you don’t know until you start digging, and then you realize there’s a lot.”

According to the Kiesel, field work was much more extensive for the relatively young parish than it was for Lafayette.

“When I did the book on Lafayette, we had so many pictures here in the [Dupré Library] archives and we could just go through the collections,” said Kiesel.

Nevertheless, the duo accumulated more than 300 photos for the book, surpassing the 200-picture format the Images of America series normally follows, according to the Opelousas Daily World. From gathering pictures to garnering information for the captions beneath the photographs, the two had their work cut out for them. One of the things that helped, however, was the expanse of resources at the library.

“When we started, there were no computers here at all. I think we might have had two computers in the whole library, one of them being the reference office,” Kiesel said.

“We had card catalogs; nothing was online. Now, we have computers and scanners, and we had to scan all of the photographs. We were able to email everything to the publishing company, so it was really easy to put it together,” said Vidrine.

According to the UL Lafayette website, the authors of the newest addition to the series will hold book signings at the Creole Families’ Bastille Day Mass and Heritage Festival on July 12 in Ville Platte and the Mamou Cajun Music Festival on Sept. 6-7. Kiesel and Vidrine also expressed intent to schedule book signings at branches of the Evangeline Parish Public Library.

“We just haven’t gotten that far yet,” said Vidrine, “Our schedule is pretty full right now.”

With the release of the book, the authors say they have little time between the book signings and selling a few copies of the books themselves.

“Arcadia keeps [the books] in print as long as there is a market for them,” said Kiesel.

The books are currently being catalogued and will soon be available for checkout at the Dupré Library. They are currently available for checkout in public libraries and for purchase both on the official Arcadia Publishing website and in local bookstores. The authors encourage sharing the book with friends and family alike.

“This is a great book to be passed down to family members for generations to come because there’s a lot of history in there that you don’t know about, and with the pictures in there, generations to come will be interested to see how Evangeline Parish was in the beginning. It’s a book that everyone should have,” Vidrine said.