The Abbeville Meridional
Vermilion's First Newspaper

"Meridional," meaning a native of southern France, was the name given Vermilion's oldest newspaper by Judge Eugene Gueugnon, who emigrated to this country from southern France. Judge Gueugnon after purchasing the "Independant," published entirely in French for twenty years, in 1852, changed its name and issued its first edition in December, 1856.

The newspaper, which is entering its 89th year, was first published in St. Martinville, in English and French, then Lafayette, and finally in Abbeville, in a small building south of the State Highway on Valerie Street.

In those days, an editor who expressed himself freely in his newspaper, was often challenged to a duel. Judge Gueugnon was no exception, just as James Gordon Bennett and Horace Greeley fought duels to defend their editorials. Judge Gueugnon did. Although wounded in two of the duels, he continued to print what he thought.

On the death of the "Meridional" until his death in 1862, his son, Eugene, then became owner and editor, and made Eugene Isadore Addisain, publisher. When Eugene Gueugnon passed from this world in 1877, his widow sold the newspaper to E. I. Addison, who with the help of his son continued to print the "Meridional" in English and French on a site east of the First National Bank, until 1886.

In 1886, C. J. Edwards bought a half interest in the "Meridional," and at the same time became editor. After Mr. Addison's death in 1901, Dr. Edwards purchased his half interest, thus becoming sole owner. Under his management, the "Meridional" became known for its editorials, due to the excellent ones produced by Dr. Edwards.

Coming to Abbeville in 1876 from New Orleans, with his parents, Judge and Mrs. Edwards, he educated his father publish the Abbeville "Banner," a short-lived newspaper. After graduating from the Kentucky School of Medicine, at Louisville, with honors, in 1883, he returned to Abbeville to practice his profession. He married Miss Kate Young, granddaughter of E. I. Gueugnon.

While in New Orleans, Dr. Edwards had learned the printing trade when he worked on a small newspaper which he occasionally contributed articles. A staunch champion of the French and Acadian interests in Louisiana, he attended every press conference that his profession would allow him to. Only once did he give up his editorial duties and that was in 1886 when he served as State Senator for a year. His brother, W. P. Edwards, a young lawyer, took his place while D. H. Labé was reporter.

Dr. Edwards fought against the Louisiana Lottery, aided with prohibition, and was noted for picking the winning candidates in gubernatorial elections. Democratic in political policy, the "Meridional" was also the official journal for the parish official bodies.

His sons, Harold, Mark, Floyd, and his daughter, Joanne assisted in the publication of the paper, when it was located on a hill back of his home, for three years. Hand presses were used at first. Then the office was moved over the Bank of Abbeville. From there it was located at the corner of Washington and Port Streets. Another move was made, this time, to the second floor of the LaPorte Building on Concord Street.

Again the site of publication was moved, this time to a building across from the present shop, and in 1905, Henry Laffier and E. J. Hoffpaur joined the growing staff of the "Meridional," which became known as the "Abbeville Meridional." The office was moved to its present location and a new machine purchased by Dr. D. Edwards who for several years supervised publication.

After thirty years of editorship, Dr. Edwards walked away in 1920. Acting for his mother, as manager, F. D. Edwards made E. J. Hoffpaur editor, which position he maintained until 1934 when ill health forced him to resign. He was succeeded by Ralph R. Bienvenu, a native of St. Martinville, and a graduate of Southwestern Louisiana Institute.

On December 19, 1936, a special edition commemorating the "Meridional" 80th anniversary was published.

In 1926 at his mother's death, F. D. Edwards became sole owner of the paper.

The growth of the paper increased, more room was needed, and in 1929, the present two-story building was erected. One of the best equipped and modern printing establishments in Southwest Louisiana is housed in the building.

Right after Pearl Harbor, a band of five columnists, Jahob W. Col. White, as they called themselves, began to stir up racial differences in Abbeville and the Meridional played its part in waging war against them which resulted in their sudden departure from Vermilion Parish.

Under the able leadership, and management of the present editor and publisher, Mr. Edwards, the "Meridional" has grown forward and followed closely its policy, "Fair and Impartial coverage of the news."

Today the men in the armed forces from Vermilion Parish, in all parts of the world, are receiving the Meridional.

Again some changes have been made in the staff. Mr. Bienvenu resigned in April, 1941. Mary Geffs, a graduate of the Tulane University School of Journalism, became News Editor. Dr. Edwards is the Society Editor. Joe Primeaux, Jr., printer and pressman, has been with the Meridional for thirteen years, and Howard Briley, printer and linotypist, has been on the staff since June, of this year. Mrs. Josephine Dubois, formerly a associate with the "Abbeville Progress" which the "Meridional," bought and consolidated in January, 1944, has been added to the back office staff.

Mr. and Mrs. Joe C. Primeaux make up the other members of the mechanical department.

Lt. Weston P. Miller, Jr., now in the United States Army, was in the European theater of war, was also a linotypist. He was employed by the "Meridional" in 1930 and continued as a member of the staff until his induction into the army in April of 1942.

In the spring of 1944 it was decided to publish a special edition of the "Meridional," in commemoration of Vermilion's 100th anniversary. To do this, three Louisiana journalism students, Joyce Trichel, Marian Bordelon and Ellyn Hunt, worked for several weeks with the regular staff gathering "Meridional" clipping ads for this milestone in the paper's career.

The "Meridional" has had an unusual history in that it was handed down from father to son, and left the family once, only to return when Dr. C. J. Edwards married the granddaughter of the original owner and publisher.

"The Meridional" is one of the oldest newspapers in Louisiana. Vermilion has had its share of other newspapers in its 100 years but most of them were rather short lived. The "Checker," one of the few that ran as a newspaper the "Meridional Flag," published by John E. Fleet in 1876. This was followed by the "Vermillion Banner," with W. W. Edwards as publisher in 1876. It lasted only a year.

On February 14, 1877, the "Whangdoodle," appeared. Its policy was to "tend to everyone's business."

S. P. Watts, in 1892, launched his "Star," whose purpose was to defend the Louisiana lottery. Immediately, the "Star" came into being. It was written by A. J. Golden, Olivier Broussard, and W. P. Edwards, and did its best to defeat the lottery.

The "Star" continued as a Republican paper for a few years and was later purchased by a Mr. Scanlan, who changed the name to the "Vermillion Advocate."

Came 1905, and another paper appeared, the "Weekly Herald," published by O. H. O'Bryan. In that year also, "The Independent High School News" was printed by Harold and Mark Edwards, Milton Crisman, and Robert Green. At this date, the "Vermillion Banner," "Kaplan News," and the "Guessed News," published by Mat Ramsey, came into being.

"The Abbeville Progress" published by the late J. W. O'Bryan, was founded in 1845 and consolidated with the "Meridional," in January, 1944, when Mr. O'Bryan died, thus making the "Meridional" the only newspaper in Abbeville and still holding its undisputed place as the leading paper of Vermilion Parish.
In order to stimulate interest in Vermilion's past and also to learn something of the way people lived way back yonder, an essay contest was conducted throughout the parish schools along about last March, by the Woman's Club of Abbeville.

At the spring graduation, the winners of the contest were announced and presented with their prizes. Each week since, the Meridional has been publishing the first prize essays.

For the Anniversary edition we thought we would present some of the runners-up for your reading pleasure. We could not print them all, but hope you will like the following we have selected, as typical of life in Vermilion, Long Ago:

Theresa Meyers Dronet
By JOYCE LANDRY
Erath High School

On a bright, sunny morning in the year 1886, a daughter was born to the wife of Desire Meyers. She was named Theresa.

The family lived in a two room house with a dirt floor and chimney. These two rooms served as a bedroom, kitchen and warehouse. All of the furniture was made of logs.

Although the family owned a few tin plates, most of the food was served in gourds. Cooking was done at the fireplace, where three pots were usually standing. One contained red grits, another meat, and the third potatoes. Rice was so scarce it was served only on occasional occasions.

Homemade candles and the fireplace were the only means of illumination.

Theresa grew up hearing stories about the exile of her forefathers from Nova Scotia in 1790, who finally ended their wanderings in Louisiana at Bayou Teche.

At the age of eight years, the young Theresa learned to weave. During the day she worked in the fields picking potatoes, and when she returned to the house in the evenings, her grandmother taught her how to card, spin, and weave.

When she was almost fourteen, she sold her first bedspread. With the money received, Theresa bought herself a "ready-made" dress. Having never had one before, she treasured this one, and wore it only on Sundays.

Because of poor roads and the distance to a school house, the little Acadian had no chance to attend school until she reached sixteen. One Saturday, her father bought her some books to commence school with the following Monday. The very next day, to the surprise of her family, she asked for permission to be married.

She was married to J. B. Dronet in due time. Her trousseau cost her parents nothing, as she made it all herself. She reared eight children, three daughters and five sons. All of the girls were taught to spin, card, and weave.

In 1929, Mrs. Dronet made a bedspread which was presented to Herbert Hoover, then president of the United States, by the Acadians of Louisiana.

In April, 1934, Mrs. Dronet represented Evangeline in a show at New Orleans. As she walked into the stage, the band played, "There's An Old Spinning Wheel in the Corner," after which she demonstrated her craft.

In 1935 entering a handicraft contest in New Orleans, she won the first prize of $45.00 for one of her handmade bedspreads.

Each time Mrs. Dronet weaves, spins, or cards, she is dressed as Evangeline. When she greets a person, they are "Chere Madame."

The Autobiography of An Old House
By LAURENCE COUSSON
Perry Junior High

I am just an old house on F. J. Noel's place along the Perry-Intercoastal highway, approximately one mile out of Perry. I have had many occupants. Even slaves have lived in me. Many children have played in my attic, and are still playing in it. Inside of me is a chimney made of hard mud, which heats two large rooms. My floor is constructed of brick, with a layer of lumber over them. This lumber came from swamps and was knotted by hand from red cypress which is called eternal wood. The planks are held together by wooden pegs.

My walls are made of weatherboard lined with a mixture of moss and clay, which was polished and then whitewashed. The weatherboards are nailed together with old fashioned square nails.

My roof is made of handmade shingles, which required much time and patience.

Having been repaired for more people to live in me, I don't look much like myself any more. I used to have shutters, but now I have only windows. This change was made so it wouldn't be so dark inside of me.

A few of the families that have lived in me are the Duroeuns, Volmers, and the Fletchers. The Sherman's lived in me after I had been repaired.

Surrounding me are large oak trees which were there long before I was built. Near me is an old underground cistern which is made of bricks and cement. It was built not long after I was and seems an old friend, we have gone through so much together.

My Grandmothers Wedding
By MARY ANN LANDRY
LeRoy School

My grandmother was married in the year 1847. The wedding was a bit different from those of today. When my grandmother married, she was about thirteen years old, and the boy who married her was about fifteen.

Her wedding dress was made of cotton, and she wore thick cotton stockings, high heeled shoes, a veil which covered her face, and reached far below her waist in the back.

The groom wore a black suit, a black queer shaped hat, and black pointed shoes. His trousers were very narrow.

Going to visit his bride, the evening before their wedding day, he was accompanied by many people. There was much dancing and gayety far into the night. All took part in the dancing.

The next day, the bride and her parents rode to the church in a barouche, while the groom rode in a hack. Arriving at the church, the husband to be, went immediately to the sacristic. The bride, on her father's arm walked slowly up the aisle toward the altar. A short distance from her destination she was met by the groom. After kissing her father, she took her intended's arm and they proceeded to the altar together, where they were duly married.

After the customary showering of rice and congratulations, they were driven to the bride's home for a large dinner.

That night another dance, this time in honor of the newly married couple was given. Between dances, the crowd paraded around the dance hall, led by the bride and groom. Lasting until dawn, these wedding dances were always gay affairs.

Information obtained from Mrs. Adolf Landry of Maurice.

Rev. Antoine Desire Megret