WINTER IN THE BAYOU STATE

A festive season in the festive Bayou State

By Paul F. Stahls, Jr.

Down in Louisiana, possibly due to the semi-tropical climate and the Gallic influence of a large segment of its population, life is leisurely and carefree. Folks take their fun seriously, just as they often take the more serious aspects of life in a spirit of fun.

For whatever the reason, Louisiana is the land of joie de vivre, and the evidence lies in the state's many colorful festivals, at least one of which is scheduled for almost every weekend of the year.

The unusual thing about Louisiana festivals is that they lack the glossy, prefabricated look of events manufactured to serve solely as bait for visitors. These celebrations, almost without exception, have begun as homespun community get-togethers. Though they have grown to accommodate their very welcome guests, they have retained their ori-
ginal charm and rural flavor.

The winter festivals are listed with details below. Exact dates of
most are set only a few weeks in advance.

PECAN FESTIVAL, November 1-2, Colfax. This Grant Parish (Coun-
ty) town is a center for Louisiana's pecan industry, the state's seventh ranking money crop. Pecan cooking
contests, parades, country store, queen's contest and ball, country-
Western music, flower show, fireworks and other goings-on will pro-
vide a weekend of genuine family fun.

SWINE FESTIVAL, November, Basile. Off U.S. 190, west of Ope-
ulousas, Basile goes all out in honoring the lowly animal that brings us
bacon, ham, sausage, hogshound cheese and chitterlings. The festival
offers bands, dances, barbecues, talent show, boudin (Acadian sausage)
eating contest, greased pig catching, pork cooking contest, swine show,
arts and crafts show, queen's pageant and an Acadian culture exhibit.

HUNGARIAN FOLK FESTI-
VAL, November, Albany. This little
town on U.S. 190, just off Interstate 12 east of Baton Rouge, was
settled by a group of Hungarians in the late 1800s. For years they have
held autumn folk dances celebrating their harvests. Natives wear
traditional costumes, and kolbasi (Hungarian sausage) and homemade
breads and other treats are sold. Authentic Hungarian dances and
contests will be performed and opened to participation by guests.

CAMELIA PAGEANT, Dec-
ember, Lafayette. Held at the Univer-
sity of Southwestern Louisiana,
this event consists of the exhibition
and judging of Louisiana's many
camellia varieties.

ORANGE FESTIVAL, December 7-8, Fort Jackson. This Plaquemines Parish festival will be held in
historic Fort Jackson, six miles be-
low Buras on the Mississippi's west
bank. The fort, built during the years of Spanish ownership of the terri-
tory, endured five days of shelling by Union gunboats before surren-
dering to Admiral Farragut, who was on his way from the Gulf to capture
New Orleans in 1862.

Orange juice and orange wine will be available for mass consumption,
and fried and raw oysters, gumbo,
oyster loaves and other local favor-
ites will be available. Music, races,
dances, fish skinning contests, duck
and goose calling, shrimp peeling
and oyster shucking contests, carni-
val rides, games and walking tours of
the fort make this a highly enjoyable
occasion.

NATCHITOCHES CHRISTMAS
FESTIVAL, December 7, Natchi-
toches. The oldest town in the Louisi-
ana Purchase stages a Christmas
show each year that you will remem-
ber always. After the parade passes
along the old brick Front Street, you
will grab a sack full of hot meat pies,
the town's unique specialty, and find
a seat on the west bank of Cane
River-Lake (an abandoned loop of
Red River) for one of the nation's most elaborate fireworks displays.

At the close of the fireworks, look
at the bridge, whose lights will be-
gin flashing from red to green, count-
ing the seconds to Christmas as they
have for so many years. Seconds
later, the remainder of Front Street
and the town will come to life in the
colors of Christmas. Have more
meat pies and then drive or walk
along the east bank of the lake,
while the Christmas lights of the
260-year-old town shine in the black
December night and reflect in the
still waters of the lake.

TALLULAH CHRISTMAS FES-
TIVAL, early December. Visitors
to this northeast Louisiana town
will find a fireworks display and impres-
sive Christmas lighting along
Roundway Bayou.

HODGES GARDENS FESTIVAL
OF LIGHTS, December 8-31. The famous "Garden in the Forest" near
Many is the scene of this nightly
lighting. The Centenary College
Choir of Shreveport begins the open-
ing-night pageant with "The Chris-
tmas Story in Song," followed by
a lighting display on the Gardens' 225-
acre lake.

PATIO PLANTERS CHRIST-
MAS CAROLING, late December,
New Orleans. This 28-year-old event
features a candlelight procession at
historic Jackson Square in the French
Quarter. Caroling is accompanied
by the bells of St. Louis Cathedral.

BONFIRES ON THE LEVEE,
Christmas Eve, the River Road
(both banks), from Baton Rouge
to New Orleans. If you spend Christ-
mas in Louisiana, don't neglect to
take a river drive to view the miles
and miles of towering bonfires
which burn all night in a tradition
set by the earliest settlers of Father
Mississippi.

SUGAR BOWL FOOTBALL
CLASSIC and Midwinter Sports
Carnival, late December to Janu-
ary 1, New Orleans. Sailing regattas
and tennis and basketball tourn-
aments are climaxed by the Sugar
Bowl Classic (December 31) and
the Sugar Bowl Parade.

FUR AND WILDLIFE FESTI-
VAL, January 10-11, Cameron.
This town, close to the Gulf of Mex-
ican in southwest Louisiana, hosts
the event at the height of the trap-
ing season. Trap shooting, retriever
dog trials, archery, nutria and musk-
rat skinning, fur judging, duck and
goose calling, parades and a fair
are on the agenda.

SQUARE DANCE FESTIVAL,
mid-January, Baton Rouge. Hosted
by the Louisiana Square Dance As-
sociation, the event features style
shows, dancing workshops and ex-
hibition square dancing.

FRONTIER DAYS, mid-Feb-
uary, Logansport. Turkey shoots,
Western costumes, parades, skits,
square dances, horseshoe pitching,
fast-draw contests and the annual
trek of the Trail Riders to Houston
are features of this Toledo Bend
town's festival.

MARDI GRAS, February 11,
New Orleans. Scores of parades line
the streets during the week preceding
Mardi Gras. Fat Tuesday is reserved
for such historic and colorful pa-
rades as Rex, Comus, the Zulus and
Pete Fountain's Half-Past Walking
Club. You'll soon be yelling "Throw
me something, Mister!" and you'll
catch some of the bushels of beads,
trinkets and the parades' distinctive
"doubloons," many of which become
valuable collectors' items, tossing
from the floats.

COUVRIR DU MARDI GRAS,
February 11. Miles from the gay bed-
lam of New Orleans, there will be
quieter but no less colorful celebra-
tions in Bayou Country towns such as
Ville Platte, Eunice, Basile, Mamou
and (the Sunday prior to Mardi
Gras) Church Point. Pirogue pro-
cessions and horseback jaunts by
costumed riders through the coun-
tryside in search of ingredients for
evening community gumbo suppers
are featured attractions of these
celebrations, where fun is the pass-
word and strangers are welcome.

For exact dates and complete in-
formation on the festivals, land-
marks, fishing rodesos, horse shows
and other attractions of the Bayou
State, contact the Louisiana Tourist
Development Commission, P. O.
Box 44291, Baton Rouge, Louisiana
70804.