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"We Know Who We Are"

An Ethnographic Overview of the Creole Traditions & Community of Isle Brevelle & Cane River, Louisiana

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"We Know Who We Are":
An Ethnographic Overview of the Creole Community and Traditions of Isle Brevelle and Cane River, Louisiana

By
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Respectfully Submitted to:
Jean Lafitte National Historic Park and Preserve
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Errata

Page i -

"Jean Lafitte National Historic Park and Preserve" should read, "Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve. . . ."

Please define "emic" as the point of view from the culture as opposed to the anthropological, descriptive view of the culture - the outsider's point of view(etic).

Page vi -

"Dr. Allison Peña" should read, "Ms. Allison Peña. . . ."

Page 13 -

"The first was literary-folkloristic which resulted in local color novels and romantic history - all but 'outside' authors and artists . . . " should read, "The first was literary-folkloristic which resulted in local color and romantic history - all by 'outside' authors and artists. . . ."

Page 14 -

"Whenever Creoles tried to explain who they were, who they felt they were, it ultimately was, and is, interpreted as an attempt to *passer pour blanc*" should read, "Whenever Creoles tried to explain who they were, who they felt they were, it ultimately was, and is, interpreted as an attempt to *passer pour blanc*, or to pass for white. . . ."

Page 47 -

"Until the populations were so widely dispensed" should read, "Until the populations were so widely dispersed. . . ."

Page 59 -

"*Mardi Gras Couri* . . ." should read, "*Courir de Mardi Gras*. . . ."

Page 73 -

"Cape Jasmine . . ." should read, "Cape Jessamine. . . ."

"*Merlitons*" should read, "*Mirlitons*. . . ."

Page 101 -

"Powhattan, Louisiana . . ." should read, "Powhatan, Louisiana. . . ."

Page 107 -

"It circles a plowed field and is identifiable only be the gates . . ." should read, "It circles a plowed field and is identifiable only by the gates. . . ."

Page 117 -

"These have been called 'slave bracelets' by local oldtimers. . . ." should read, "These have been called 'slave bracelets' by local oldtimers, referring to ornamental bracelets, not shackles."

Page 152 -

"People can rent it and use it, but it is no long used weekly . . ." should read, "People can rent it and use it, but it is no longer used weekly. . . ."

Page 163 -

"Several Isle Brevelle people give Father Nicky Hussein . . . ." should read, "Several Isle Brevelle people credit Father Nicky Hussein. . . ."

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Executive Summary

There have been novels, historical accounts, and popular articles written about the Cane River Creoles. Romantic images of a "forgotten" people, of people "lost between" cultures, of people who lost their identity, of people without real genealogical perspectives have been strewn across sixty years of "outsider" research.

With funding from the National Park Service, Jean Lafitte National Historic Park and Preserve, it was decided to pursue an old-fashioned ethnography of Isle Brevelle and adjacent areas of Cane River. Methodologically, the study was to be field oriented with oral interviews, providing a tape archive, and would attempt community involvement at all levels. The St. Augustine Historical Society had developed on Cane River to protect and preserve Creole patrimony and culture. Virtually an all-Creole organization, that group was asked to help, to keep the "study" within their social boundaries, to keep the study as unobtrusive and emic as possible. A local Creole artist, well known for his ethnological photography, Joseph Moran was asked to join Hiram F. Gregory, anthropologist, in the study. The society agreed to help them and has. Some fifty to sixty people have been involved with this study.

Fieldwork, with an on-going review of the literature, has yielded a different picture of Creole culture. It has a national dimension; families who participated in the exodus from rural Louisiana to urban areas not only developed a brokerage system in which relatives found work and provided newcomers with resources until they were established, but also developed homecomings and traditions of children's visiting their rural relatives. As highways and airlines became better, back-and-forth visitation became national as well as local. The apparent loss of Cane River population was in no way to be taken as cultural loss.

By the 1980s, a nationwide network - California, Illinois, New York, and Texas having the largest colonies - had developed. The Creole Heritage Day at Isle Brevelle, held on Augustin Metoyer's birthday, attracts people home from across the nation. Louis Metoyer's *Bayou Talk*, a Creole newspaper based in Los Angeles, now is distributed nationwide; Kathleen Balthazar-Heitzman's *Cane River Trading Company* operates as a news and genealogical newsletter from her home in Climax, New York. Computer networks are developing, and the extended family has become almost a nationwide group. Active politically in state, local and national politics, both secular and ecclesiastical, Creoles have an unbroken history of cultural agenda and leadership in civil rights and multi-racial, multi-cultural issues.

Buried in the traditions of Creole family, church, and foodways are always the roots of cultural transmission and maintenance. A deep reverence for things which operate as metaphors for Creole culture and survival has preserved much of Creole material culture and the Cane River landscape. This study has tried to define Creole identity and to show how it, as the French proverb says, has changed but remained the same, *plus ça change plus c'est la même chose.*

Emphasis has been on sampling a wide range of Creole culture, so the past/present interaction is seen as a dynamic, but maintenance and tradition do not overpower the fact that Isle Brevelle is tied to a wider world. Creoles on Cane River have mastered being who and what they are. There is no identity crisis for the whole culture group, even though stress sometimes rises for individuals. As one leader expresses it, Cane River and Creoles are "comfortable," allowing a place and a culture where people can be who and all that they are.

Over sixty informants, thirty years of conversation, one lifetime of dealing with identity and expression, and a two-year span of fieldwork have produced this view. Creole culture,

defined by Creoles, is for them, by them, and whatever happens, it will remain a state of being "comfortable." It keeps Cane River as its metaphor for continuity and stability, a safe place in nostalgia and for children to visit and slow down in. In short, Creoles see Isle Brevelle, no matter where they go or what they do, as "home."

Dedication

This work is dedicated to the memory of the notable Cane River Creoles of this century who exemplified and protected their culture, especially those who have passed on:

Mr. Lewis "Sonny" Jones
Mr. Tillman Chelette
Mrs. Blanche Monette Sers
Mr. Wood Antee
Mr. and Mrs. Mose Beaudoin
Mr. "Ti' Cont" Constance Chevalier
Mrs. Winnie Conant
Mr. Collin Roque
Mrs. Cecelia Dupree
Mr. Lawrence Mezieres
Mr. Isanor "Tony" Metoyer
Mrs. Annie Dell Severin
Mr. Harvey Kochinsky

Moreover, it is dedicated to those elders who still work at keeping the culture, getting it right and passing it along to their children and grandchildren. Hopefully, this work will contribute to that effort.

It is also hoped that the current generation of Creoles will find something of their world here, too. Younger people are the culture bearers. What happens to a culture is up to its youth. It will be well into the twenty-first century before we will know if our version of Creole culture has survived. We dedicate this work to their efforts as well.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the Creole community of Isle Brevelle, adjacent Cane River, and Natchitoches for their help and insight. This is, in many ways, their own study. Joseph Moran's constant efforts are obvious here, but both he and I have had constant encouragement and help throughout this work.

The late Sonny Jones and his family have always led me to understand and appreciate the Creole people, their hospitality and caring attitudes. Mrs. Gloria Jones has never failed to advise us, teach us and guide this work. Unfortunately, Sonny Jones could not see our project to fruition; we hope it would not have disappointed him. I have tried to keep it up to the standards I think he would have wanted.

Terrel Delphin and the St. Augustine Historical Society have unflaggedly supported this effort, hoping it will help guide the National Park Service in their efforts to understand Creole people and culture. My family and I have come to cherish Mrs. Bernadine Delphin and her family and to appreciate their hospitality and generosity more than can be acknowledged here.

As these acknowledgments are written, I can only recall the efforts of John and Janet Colson; their efforts at conserving the Creole heritage have inspired us all.

Mrs. Myra Friedman and Mrs. Marie Dupre, teachers always, have guided us in understanding the change and continuity at the entire Cane River community. Mrs. Marie Roque and her friends at R.S.V.P. not only make beautiful quilts, cakes and conversation, but allowed us to interrupt their days with our sometimes obtuse questions. They were always patient and helpful to us all. Mickey and Diane Moran have spent more of their time on this study than we could have expected and we thank them.

There is appended to this paper a list of all the wonderful people who, over the years, have tried to care for their community and who have shared it with us. We acknowledge their good efforts.

We lost a lot of wise, good people from the Cane River community over the past two years. Fortunately, we had time with them, brief though it was at times, and we dedicate this effort to them. Like the community, we mourn their passing and acknowledge their contributions.

Dr. Kass Byrd has encouraged us, advised and facilitated this work. Her efforts have steered us through the administrative snarls of the university and have helped us more than she admits. We appreciate her help.

Over the course of the project, Mary Linn Wernet and Pati Threatt, of the Cammie G. Henry Research Center at Northwestern State University, provided us with immeasurable help in locating archival material for this report. For this help, we are greatly appreciative.

Ms. Susan Dollar has typed, computed, edited, interviewed and administered throughout this work. We owe her efforts major accolades. It would never have been finished, much less this coherent, without her efforts.

Mrs. Janet Broadway and Ms. Brenda Falcon have transcribed long interviews, fought our use of bad French and Creole and still provided us a set of great documents.

The office of financial affairs, particularly Vice President Carl Jones, Ms. Rita Graves, and Ms. Carla Howell have stood by us and have helped us solve the exigencies of fieldwork and budgets.

We also want to make clear our debt to Jean Lafitte National Historic Park and Preserve and its staff. Particular assistance has come from Dr. Allison Peña. She has been an active player

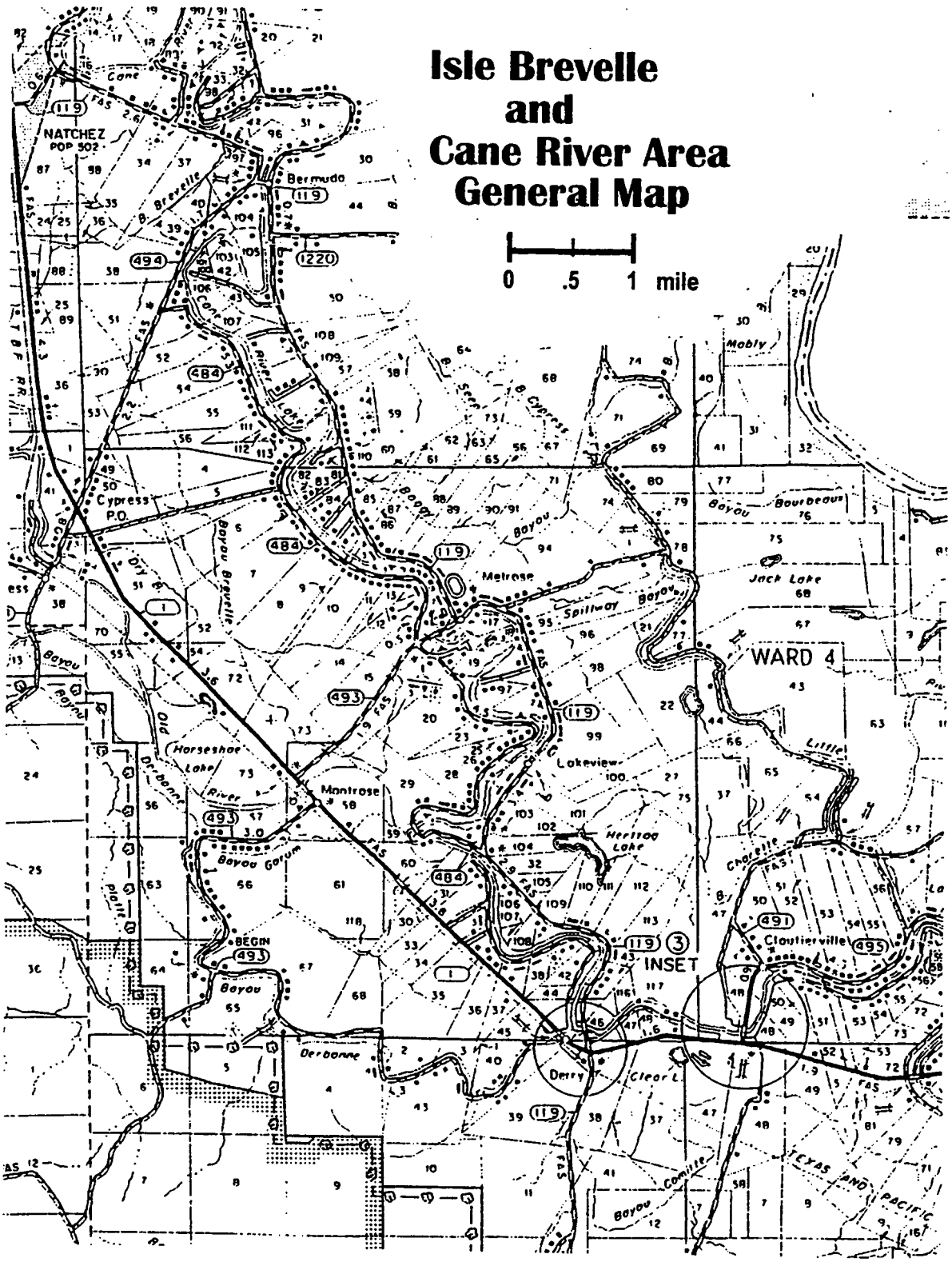
in this project. She has facilitated all our work, heard our sorrows, solved our problems, and, we hope, enjoyed her involvement in Creole life and research. Hopefully, again, we have met her high expectations.

This work began on the watch of Superintendent Robert Belous, and his concern about adequately hearing the Creole people spurred it along. Newly appointed Superintendent Geraldine Smith has since continued support for this project. Both the community and I appreciate their concern and efforts.

Here I am afraid we have missed someone, but have to end this by thanking my family, particularly Jeanette Fried Gregory, for patience and help. Jeanette and my daughters, Leslie and Susan Gregory, likely know the Creole community better than I do and have always shared their affection for them with us all. Joseph Moran's family, especially Judy Moran and his son and daughters, have aided and abetted our work many ways. They have run errands, been our best informants, and put up with the weird hours and schedules that research imposes on us all. I appreciate their kindness and their friendship.

If there are errors or omissions in this study, I take the responsibility. I realize we are only scanning the obvious elements of Creole culture here. Isle Brevelle and the Creole people deserve a much longer, more intensive effort. I hope they realize that we consider this only a starting point and, as always, will forgive and help correct errors they find.

H.F. Gregory


Isle Brevelle
and
Cane River Area
General Map
0 .5 1 mile
NATCHEZ
POP 502
Bermuda
Cypress
P.O.
Melrose
Montrose
Lakeview
Clouterville
WARD 4
INSET
BEGIN
Derbonne
Mobly
Jack Lake
Spillway
Horseshoe
Lake
Bayou Gorum
Herrtoo
Lake
Derry
Clear L.
Bayou
Cane
River
Little
Chapelle
Texas and Pacific

Introduction

When the National Park Service, Jean Lafitte National Historic Park and Preserve, notified the residents of the Natchitoches area of an impending park on Cane River, the Creole community reacted immediately. Representatives from the community along Cane River, particularly Isle Brevelle and Melrose, have attended every public hearing and have sponsored public hearings at St. Augustine Church.

For at least twenty years, the Creole community has been at work protecting its culture and patrimonial resources from outside exploitation.

Inquiries from representatives at the meetings with Secretary of Interior, Bruce Babbitt, and Senator Bennett Johnston (Dem., Louisiana) on Cane River led to the fact that no ethnographic overview was available for Cane River. Consultation between the authors, St. Augustine Historical Society and various community leaders led to the development of this study sponsored by Jean Lafitte National Park. With the encouragement of Superintendent Robert Belous and the park ethnologist, Allison Peña, a research program was funded and initiated. It has continued under the administration of Superintendent Geraldine Smith.

This fieldwork could not have developed without constant community involvement. Joseph Moran became so involved that he stands as a co-author as well as photographer. The leaders of the St. Augustine Historical Society, Terrel Delphin and his family, Mrs. Gloria Jones, and the community as a whole have contributed to this project. H.F. "Pete" Gregory began this work with a community partnership. The whole community has responded in such a way that this is, we hope, more their message than his. As will be seen in the methodological discussion to follow, it is hoped that the National Park Service and any others who wish to know about

Creoles, on Cane River and elsewhere in Louisiana, will realize they should start with the community, not with outside "expertise."

"Inside" outsiders, like Gregory and Moran, can only hope to measure up to the high standards of the community they represent. We thank everyone - over a hundred people at this point - from the community who have actively helped us. We hope we are not too "romantic" nor too pragmatic. Our greatest hope is that this study will still be a "Creole" endeavor. Yet, there is no apology offered here for coming away from this work with the warm, wonderful feeling of Creole culture, an extended family that survives the exigencies of the twentieth century and works at survival into the centuries on the horizon.

Goals of this work soon led to a general overview with specifics about culture, the cultural landscape, and the nature of the community. As is the case with previous works, only the tip of the iceberg is to be found here. Less than two years of active fieldwork in a community of hundreds is likely only, at best, a start for all of us.

Method

This project, funded by a grant (Subagreement #001 to CA7029-4-0013) through Jean Lafitte National Historic Park and Preserve, National Park Service, Department of the Interior, was funded for ten months and was extended for another twelve months.

Fieldwork has concentrated on a combination of techniques. Joseph Moran has helped coordinate fieldwork, directed the project to key consultants and done the field photography which breathes life into this study. His efforts to keep this work "Creole" have given it whatever validity it holds. His photography speaks for itself and needs little, if any, verbal explanation.

Both Gregory and Moran have tried not to disturb the community. Some attempts to tape interviews have been abandoned in favor of old-fashioned, informal interviews which relieve much of the tension engendered by taping. Still, in keeping with the proposed scope of work, we have taped when we could. Hopefully, the taped informal interviews represent a broad spectrum of people connected to Isle Brevelle and Cane River. The tapes represent opportunity rather than formal interviews in most cases and, doubtless, have suffered some for it. However, since we were working with older people in many cases, interviews are fairly non-directive. People along Cane River lead full lives, work hard, and have a range of deeply felt responsibilities to family, jobs, and church. Our project developed its own priority, and the community helped when and if it could. Again, we have tried to be unobtrusive.

We have averaged working a minimum of five to ten hours per week on this overview. Inasmuch as we could not work full-time, either Gregory or Moran, other responsibilities have confused scheduling and the fact that Creole schedules have to mesh with work has not allowed participant observation to develop as it normally would.

Some glitches seem related to taping. Neither Moran nor I have had trouble taping informally, but in order to get permission, tapes have formalized. Some traditional people have politely declined to make tapes, but none have declined interview time. In order to avoid complications, we have avoided direct quotes where we could. Many Creole people have told us their intentions are to write their own books. Once we were invited to just settle down and help with that.

Gregory's connection to the University has been a blessing and a curse. There is deep respect for education, and Creoles have been involved with Northwestern State University for decades. They continue to hold prominent positions in financial affairs and continuing education. They hold managerial jobs in the properties, library, and the post office. Still, until the 1960s, the University was not open to Creole students. Like African Americans, they had to leave home for post-secondary education. Memories of conflicts over civil rights and the fact that Northwestern was <u>not</u> an institution which defended Creole identity and culture sometimes rise to the surface. Having Creole help, and making this a community rather than a university project as much as possible, has helped. It certainly would have been better to contract directly with the Creole community, but finances would not have allowed that. Methodologically, this has not been an obstacle to overcome, but it has doubtless changed the research orientation of this fieldwork. In spite of the fact that the Gregorys have old connections to the community, many Creoles have articulated clearly that the University is interested in only <u>its</u> students. Whatever prior fieldwork has been seen as training, etc. Unfortunately, none of the Creole university students have been anthropology majors, not to mention, history or related majors. So, the University is cast in its self-maintaining role, extraneous to Creole affairs. At least Creoles have not been too polite to

make their sentiments apparent during this project. Perhaps the relationships with the University will be seen as less manipulative, less self-interested, as more community/university projects can develop.

The community is increasingly interested in its history, genealogy, and culture. Moreover, the community has begun to empower itself so that presentation is powered by the community, not outside, interests. Hopefully, the National Park Service can understand the need to help with that process.

Some interviewees had more formal things they wanted to say. Terrel Delphin had given much thought to the "Creole Definition" and his work was so personal, but so important that we have requested he allow us to append his text under his copyright so that he does not encumber his own right to use it elsewhere (See Appendix I). Again, we let the individuals understand copyright and rights to this material.

In order not to bother people, we have used a few earlier tapes, all obscure and unpublished. These have all been made by local people and were made available to us. Particularly helpful in this respect were several tapes made available through the R.S.V.P. Program, directed by Mrs. Marie Roque. The Louisiana Folklife Center also opened its files to us.

With the good services of Mickey Moran, a series of strip maps were made of the community. We toured and taped and located people. It turned into a combination of note-taking and mapping. Joseph Moran helped, particularly on the upper (northern) areas.

Each field interview was preceded by formalizing a minimal set of cultural inquiries, and some later interviews grew from these. Questionnaires were not employed. Ms. Susan Dollar,

well known to the community, helped with interviews, particularly those with community women. Her perspectives on questions about education, women's roles and community relations added much to those interviews.

Early in this project, we were fortunate in that our project overlapped with the development of a community-based workshop on Heritage Area Development. Mrs. Marie Roque, Mrs. Janet Colson, Mrs. Lair LaCour, Terrel Delphin, and Mickey Moran made presentations for that, and they also collaborated on the definition of important sites and landmarks along Isle Brevelle and Cane River. We discussed identity, settlement pattern and historical development, kinship and genealogy, folkways and food ways - including a Creole meal at St. Augustine Church Hall. Not only was this important for the workshop and its participants, but it accumulated much of the information used in this project as well. Consultants were paid, nominal amounts, but that freed their tapes for our use here. It also was a voluntary project and one the St. Augustine Historical Society took great interest in.

This whole project developed with an understanding that we try in every way to allow the community control over the information. Written sections were passed around for comment, and we kept almost constant contact with Terrel Delphin, Mrs. Marie Roque, and Mrs. Gloria Jones. They were our first-line "connections" to the community. Copies of tapes and texts will be provided the St. Augustine Historical Society as our agreement with the National Park Service stipulated.

Participant observation has also given us some deep insights into the Creole community. There have been weddings, wakes and funerals, church fairs, homecomings, christenings, First Communions, Confirmations, Creole Heritage Day, dances, trail rides, and a whole series of

community-based activities. The agricultural year and the ecclesiastical year have merged and passed. The extension was necessary for that.

Through the Creole newspaper, *Bayou Talk*, and the help of Louis Metoyer, editor, we gain insights into the national comings and goings of the people from Cane River. Theresa Demery, Janet Colson, and Kathleen Balthazar-Heitzman have explained the genealogical "web" in such a way that it guides us into the depth and strength of family and history. Balthazar-Heitzman's *Cane River Trading Company* newsletter has helped tie tradition and family together in a modern, dynamic way. History and genealogy have worked their way subtly into this effort. History, particularly, has been a two-way street for Creole people, as it has been used to write about them, by outsiders. Still, documentation has served to engender pride in their culture and accomplishments and, gradually, to represent their view of their culture. Genealogy is seen locally as important as history. Family is history and the primary vehicle for holding tradition together.

The emic view of Creole has, to the best of our ability, been left alone here. The outside world has long been fascinated with the word, *Creole*. It is, in much of Louisiana, a point of pride and engenders some conflict. The community on Cane River is part of a larger Creole world, and it is actively developing that perspective. Hopefully, that perspective will make its way into this work.

This is merely an introduction to the Creole community on Cane River. It cuts across age, sex, occupation, and economic statuses. We opted early on for a broad sample. Creole life is full, and individuals vary from one to another. Unifying experiences, shared experiences, were what we hoped to find. Life histories sort of worked themselves into this, but that was not our primary goal. It would likely be good to do more life history interviews, but time already needed

expansion and our sample needed to be corrected for that. Rapport needs deeper roots for that.

Whatever errors are contained here are likely the contribution of the principal investigator who sometimes failed to "Creolize" this work as much as the people felt it needed to be. The ethnological theory minimally operative here contains enough good, old-fashioned description in order to compensate for that weakness.

Isle Brevelle is a place, complex in its simplicity, that does not yield easily to the quick overview, and it deserves more time, money and consideration than a few part-time ethnologists, inside or out, have given it here. Hopefully, for a place, sacred to many, at least loved by a lot more, and the people who have created and protected it for generations, this little effort will help the community put some more of its heritage together.

Previous Work and the Community

The Cane River Creoles received historical literary attention early in the nineteenth century when the Freeman-Custis expedition described their community on Cane River (Flores 1984). Both that expedition and another traveler, named Malley, described their ethnicity and mentioned their community (Flores 1984).

Debates about Creole identity seem to have developed in south Louisiana, particularly about New Orleans. The classic acrimonious debates between George Washington Cable, Alçée Fortier, and Father Adrien Rouquette about Creoles of color have been detailed several places (Jordon and DeCaro 1996:31-59, Dominguez 1979, 1986). The term *Creole* is still emotionally loaded and has long been considered the label of preference by Creoles. So, while whites argued about it, mixed racial and cultural Creoles tried to explain their position (Desdunes 1914). They continue that struggle today.

By the nineteenth century, literary figures began to focus on Cane River, particularly Kate Chopin, whose short stories often seem to have Cane River settings, and since she lived in Cloutierville, she likely was the first local colorist to fictionalize the region (Jordon and DeCaro 1996). The works of George Washington Cable (1883, 1884) brought Creole culture to the attention of the world, too. Eventually recoiling from fierce opposition, Cable slowed down.

The first three decades of the twentieth century saw the literary and artistic crowd move to Melrose Plantation. Mrs. Cammie Henry, *doyenne* of Melrose, brought writers and artists there to work. The folklorist Dorothy Scarborough (1925:19) visited and gave us descriptions from Melrose of race relations, material culture and music. Most notable of these was Lyle Saxon; his novel *Children of Strangers* focused on Creole and African-American relations on

Cane River. Rose Ann Jordon and Frank DeCaro (1996:31-59) have discussed this period of Melrose history as part of their discussion of Louisiana folklore. François Mignon, Lyle Saxon's friend, came to Melrose to visit and remained. He left his impressions, very romanticized, of Cane River and its people: *Cane River Memoires*. This little work is an example of the rich mix of folklore, fact and fantasy that developed in the 1930s.

It would be the 1950s before writers discovered the Cane River Creoles again. Sister Jerome Woods, a nun in the Order of Sisters of Divine Providence, began sociological research at Isle Brevelle. In an era when sociology and anthropology shifted their interests to community studies, Sister Jerome Woods uniquely recognized the power of ethnicity in community development. Moreover, she caught the dynamics of urban migration (Woods 1972) by Creoles.

Recently Lucy Cohen (1984) has noted the inter-marriage of antebellum Chinese with Cane River and Campti Creole families. Particularly, she met the Creole families who accepted these non-white, usually Cuban, additions to the Creole community.

Another clergyman, Father J.J. Callahan (1956) began writing a history of St. Augustine Church and parish which really is the history of the community at Isle Brevelle. Resident priest at the church, Father Callahan was in a unique position - an inside outsider - to understand local historical developments. His history would stand alone until the 1960s.

In that period, the historians Gary Mills and his wife, Elizabeth S. Mills, came to Natchitoches to do historical and genealogical research. Primarily focused on Melrose Plantation, their interests extended to the Creoles. The Mills' work, *The Forgotten People: Cane River's Creoles of Color*, has become a standard reference on the region. In that it emphasized the role of Marie Thérèze Coin-Coin in the formation of the community, it broke new ground. The

Creole community found its description and genealogy of great interest, and the Mills stimulated a wave of local history - from the Creole point of view - which continues. As one Creole author, Kathleen Balthazar-Heitzman (Personal communication 1996), has put it, "The Mills made me aware of our history. That we had history."

The Mills' work seems to have been stimulated by the contradictions that surrounded Melrose Plantation. Sold by the Henry family to a corporate farm and then donated to the Association for the Preservation of Historic Natchitoches, Melrose was opened to the public year round, and local legends began to become part of the tours. A local historian, Louis Nardini, pointed out that Marie Thérèze Coin-Coin did not build at Melrose, but it was the plantation of her son, Louis. In fact, he pointed out that her grant and house were upstream, nearer Bermuda, Louisiana. The local preservationists, seeking to rationalize the controversy, engaged Gary Mills, and serious research on Melrose began. His initial work resulted in a small work entitled *Melrose* (Mills 1973). Mills continued his work, extending his interest to the whole Creole community on Cane River. Elizabeth S. Mills began translating the records of St. Francis Church, contributing a valuable tool to local genealogists of whatever group.

By the 1980s, only Father Callahan's work seems to have emanated in the Creole community. Still, younger Creoles were beginning to be interested in their genealogy and history. That interest began developing in several directions: history, genealogy and the arts.

In 1986, Virginia R. Dominguez published a classic work, *White by Definition: Social Classification in Creole Louisiana*. The Creole controversy had been re-opened, and while not denying African roots, the Creoles maintained their distinct ethnicity as well. It was their traditional position, and the Civil Rights movement in the South had seen their legal status shift,

but their identity had not. Younger Creoles read Dominguez's study and found themselves there. Coupled to earlier work, it reified traditional Creole identity. Creoles retain fiercely the right to be who they think they are.

The obscure work of the Creole Rudolphe Desdunes (1911), *Nos Hommes et Notre Histoire*, had early argued the traditional Creole definition of Creole, and while non-Creoles had argued about it, he held his ground. Contemporary Creoles have now begun a national, if not international, movement to identify themselves as a distinct ethnic group (*Bayou Talk* 1996).

Genealogical studies attracted Creoles early on. A major overview of Creole history and genealogy was begun by Theresa Demery, a graduate student at Northwestern State University in the 1980s (ms in the Cammie Henry Research Center, Watson Library, NSU). Later, she and Janet Ravarre Colson began collaborating on a genealogical database for Louisiana Creole genealogy (See Appendix II). On the west coast, Creoles began gathering and sharing family information. Louis Metoyer and his family began publishing a monthly newspaper called *Bayou Talk* in 1993. Published in Los Angeles, *Bayou Talk* is nationally disseminated.

In the north, inspired by the Mills' work, Kathleen Balthazar-Heitzman started another New York-based newsletter, *Cane River Trading Company*, to further exchange of stories and genealogy among the nationally scattered Creole families. A desk-top publication, *Cane River Trading Company* is widely distributed among Cane River families.

Joseph Moran, a trained artist, mounted a photographic exhibit on the people of Cane River. His black and white photographs spoke clearly of continuity and identity. His drawings, paintings, and photographs have been shown widely. He has also designed and written brochures for the St. Augustine Historical Society, particularly one on the church. He is collaborator in this

study, the "Creole voice" of the team.

A recent Creole artist, Earvin LaCour, has produced a series of local theme paintings. His work stresses the Cane River country. His tryptic, on a discarded door from Melrose Plantation, stresses Creole architecture, *Grandpère 'Gustin*, and St. Augustine Church.

In summary, there seem to be three major intellectual developments that focus on the Cane River Creole community. The first was literary-folkloristic which resulted in local color novels and romantic history - all but "outside" authors and artists; the second was sociological and historical and spawned the two major objective works on sociology and history of the Creole community. The third period has been stimulated by a national awareness of Creole culture. This last period has seen increasing Creole literary, artistic, and research participation, *i.e.* Creoles writing, painting, singing, doing genealogy for themselves, most often by themselves, to insure their children know who and what Creoles are about.

Creole Identity

Creoles on Cane River have a deep-seated feeling of identity. Their view of their history incorporates the sense that as long as France and Spain ruled Louisiana, they had space in the socio-political structure to exist as a culture. As several Creoles have put it, "There were blacks, Creoles and whites. Then, after the Americans came in, there were only blacks and whites." *American* is still not always a friendly term.

Creoles understand Anglo-American racism, especially their conception of "Negro blood," as a powerful tool for disenfranchisement, leaving them unprotected and at distinct legal and social disadvantages. Their Native American connections became confused in the Spanish period when, in the 1780s, Spain freed Indian slaves in Louisiana. Some were censused as Indians, others as freed slaves, still others as mulattos or mixed and some as blacks. Whenever Creoles tried to explain who they were, who they felt they were, it ultimately was, and is, interpreted as an attempt to *passer pour blanc*, an effort to deny an African connection. Regardless of their historical status as a separate, free population, the new American cultural regime had no real place for them. The lack of power came hard to a population that prided itself on its accomplishments: owning property, paying taxes, and working hard. These are ethical considerations still reinforced by the Creole family, their church and community.

Denial of the black status, that is to say powerlessness, was a necessity to maintain Creole identity. Acknowledging it has been necessary too, and in spite of the fact that historically many, if not most, Creoles could have left their region and drifted into the mainstream as whites, most chose to stay together even in distant places. Creoles have traditionally taken care of one another; kinship ties offered a tool for that, brokering jobs and security for those who left Cane River.

Attitudes about Cane River, almost nostalgic on the part of the first generation to leave the river, tend to draw them back. Many left in the 1930-1960 period, but virtually all of them kept their connections. Most moved to cities: Chicago, Los Angeles, Houston, and New Orleans. Rural life experiences rapidly turned into nostalgia. One Los Angeles lady recalled, "My daddy thought Louisiana was heaven. He talked to us about it all the time." Whatever the motivation, people came home. Christmas, Easter, other feast days, not to mention funerals, weddings, birthdays and the Fourth of July, almost any excuse set people visiting. The Church Fair in October and the Fourth of July rounded out secular holidays. The Fourth of July correlated with the old *Fête du Blé* or cornfest celebrated by Native Americans in Louisiana and is a first fruits ceremonial time. Whatever the origin, it was a good time to visit. Travel from Isle Brevelle to Chicago, or even Los Angeles, was commonplace. Isolation was certainly not geographic. By the 1950s, frequent cross-country trips were, and still are, common.

Sister Frances Jerome Woods (1972) noted the tendency of Creoles to settle together in some cities, but not in Houston. She attributed that to the fact that they had an easier time in Houston where they blended with Mexicans and other dark-skinned people. Her etic interpretation saw that action as avoiding black racial identity in the cities. Creoles, emically, explain such settlement patterns by the fact that they went to places where they had relatives, people to help them, to broker jobs and resources. Their communities clustered around black Catholic churches, and, in as many ways as they could, they struggled to preserve more traditional lifeways. Again, it was important for many to be Creole as opposed to exclusively white, Mexican, Negro, or Native American - any of the groups which could have, and occasionally did, accept them as individuals. Rather than to *"passer,"* the Creoles tended to perpetuate and

maintain their group identity wherever they went.

The military offered most American minorities a "color-blind" institution, but only after World War II. Creoles recall struggles trying to maintain their culture and having to choose either a white or a black identity. In some cases, Creoles in the military, particularly those who chose highly segregated services like the Navy, had to choose to be "white." In the Army, some chose the segregated black units. In either case, they found no comfortable place where they could assert their roots. Some later explained to their children their regrets at not having been able "to be all they were" and at having made a choice either way.

Native American identity was the other alternative. In the first generation, some of the Metoyer family was descended from a *Cannechi* woman, an old eighteenth-century term for Apache slaves in Louisiana, and a part-white, part-black father. Still other families are easily traced to Caddo, Choctaw and Lipan roots. So, in terms of race, they were more genetically Native American (½) than either white (1/4) or black (1/4). Consequently, Native American connections can be made for virtually every family. Still, most prefer identity as Creole. Some who lived in the Midwest and Florida have found ready acceptance as Native Americans. One retiree, home at Isle Brevelle from Chicago, sought to organize an Indian group among the families. He was disappointed in the resistance he met. The related Clifton community, with Cane River connections but an Indian identity quest, rejected his efforts to connect with them.

Like white (French or Spanish), black, Native American or Indian mixtures are easily acknowledged, but only as a part of the mix - Creole. Identity is not tribal, not even racial. Contrary to other part-Indian groups in Louisiana, where only very low blood quantum is required and where Native American roots seem to overpower other cultural and racial connections, they

clearly do not on Cane River. Immediately southwest of Cane River, in the hills west of the Cotile region of Rapides Parish, the Clifton community does have a strong Indian identity. Carroll Jones, the free planter of color who raised some 13 children and added that gene pool to Isle Brevelle, had married Catherine Clifton, thought to be Native American. Many from Clifton who have married into Isle Brevelle are Cliftons, Neals, Terrels, Smiths and, of course, the original Jones family. Still, the Cane River families maintain their Creole identity while their cousins at Clifton hold state legislative recognition as an American Indian community. Another significant difference from the Clifton community is that the Cane River people maintain their ties to French culture and Roman Catholicism. The "hill" folks are more likely to be Protestant and to claim Choctaw, Lipan or Caddo connections. Most attempt connections to the Smith/Austin family (Choctaw) or the Thomas/Baptiste/Neal family (Choctaw).

Over the years, other ethnic groups have mixed in: Mexicans, Chinese, Jews, and others. As was the case with Native Americans, each group is acknowledged, but Isle Brevelle identity remains resoundingly Creole. The "mix" is more powerful than the "parts." The Creoles, like their American Indian relations, still feel their loss of status and community sovereignty. In both cases, their situations were complicated by the interposition of American policy at the end of the colonial period. However, the Creoles have never drifted into confusion about who they are. The government has never been a tool to turn them "white" or "Indian," but only "black," and many rejected that.

So, the Creoles wish to reappropriate their own history. Their heroes and heroines are Creole - their rich heritage created by blending a wealth of cultures and races. Historians and sociologists who have cast them as caught "in between" cultures seem, to the Creoles at least, to

miss the mark. In the first place, their concept of "Creole" involves Old World cultural and biological processes. One has, as the local historians Terrel Delphin and Mickey Moran point out, to look to the Spanish-Portuguese connections to Africans in the seventeenth century to understand the "roots." In spite of a deep respect for Gary Mills's (1977) work on the history of the Cane River families - particularly beginning with Marie Thérèze Coin-Coin and Claude Thomas Pierre Metoyer - most Creoles say simply it did not "go far enough." It is not felt widely that Marie Thérèze Coin-Coin is clearly identified as "all black." Little is known of her father and the possibility she was, herself, "Creole" of some West African or West Indian connection is an old tradition on the river.

No matter how the historical roots are elaborated, Creoles are quick to assert their own skill at what the French might call *bricolage*, that is, taking parts from many wholes to build something unique, adaptive, and creative on their own. Over the centuries, Creoles are proud of the fact that they have created a culture of their own - not just on Cane River, but worldwide. They note their involvement in the American Civil Rights Movement with pride. Literally, they see civil rights and equal opportunity - things denied them because of their African heritage - as important to all people. Legally and politically, they have been racially connected to black communities while culturally they have been distinct people, and that is resented as overt racism. Still, they have not denied their activism in the movement in the 1960s and 1970s, and they look with great pride on their efforts to open the socio-economic and political system for Negroes and Creoles alike.

Race, as an identifier, became, as one person put it, "a problem" only when one left home. In town, in school, in the cities - places where people had to "race" themselves - race was a

problem. Blanks for multi-racial or multi-cultural on school applications, driver's licenses, draft registrations, voting registrations, etc. confronted people at all turns. One young Creole lady remembers her white teacher who, when asked to count her students racially, asked the children to stand when she called black or white. The tension she expressed over having to make that choice among her peers haunts others. Blacks have stated they did not "understand" the Creole position, and a number of people have commented that black peers accuse them of being "uppity" or trying to be white. In Creole environments, there is more of what Terrel Delphin has characterized as "comfort." Since children generally know their family and since they learn about race as a cultural category outside the family, people cling strongly to Creoles - seeking their own "comfortable" identity, while not denying nor boasting of their genetic or cultural roots.

The 1960s brought activism to a proud people, and the obvious connections to both cultures became advantageous. For the first time, the bicultural, better educated and more culturally "acceptable" Creoles found themselves in leadership positions in the community. Teachers, law enforcers, lawyers - professional people of all sorts found niches where they could become cultural brokers, for both blacks and Creoles, not to mention for whites.

The 1990s are seeing a resurgence of Creole identity, to be discussed later, but Creole pride and new interest in presenting their culture and history from *their* perspective now powers a statewide, even nationwide, Creole identity.

Language

The French language persists on Cane River, but usage is restricted to the family setting. People under sixty are seldom fluent, but many over that age either can speak French or at least understand it.

Even among the centenarians and octogenarians interviewed, French usage varied. Most know some French, but also most asserted that its use had been restricted for most of their lives.

In the 1920s and 1930s, many elders used French daily but had already begun to limit access of their children to it. Still, contact between Cane River and Creole communities further into south Louisiana continued, and French language usage was constantly reinforced by those social contacts. Dances, homecomings, church celebrations and the rites of passage all offered opportunities for the use of French. Louisiana public schools censored the use of French, and even the nuns at Isle Brevelle failed to teach children in their native tongue, French-Creole.

S.D. Dickinson's discussion (1991) of the Creole *patois* fits Cane River, but there are notable exceptions. People remember relatively standard French which they use with outsiders, but they also know a local dialect which more appropriately would be termed "Creole." Dr. Miguel Fuster, of the University of Valencia in Spain, working on language retention and death, both in Louisiana French and Spanish, notes that French is very strong on lower Cane River (Personal communication 1995). Many people recall Cloutierville was almost monolingual to French well into the 1920-1930 period. Today, as in the past, francophones are more common as one moves south along Cane River. In some cases, too, children were raised by older people who used French more. So, two sisters raised by different people may not have had equal access to the Creole language. One spoke well, the other only a little.

The French language is, also, basically restricted to Creole and white populations along the river. Like Catholicism, the French language is seldom spoken by African Americans. Blacks in the region tend to be protestant and English-speaking. A few, like the late Clementine Hunter, knew French from a long association with Creoles at Melrose Plantation, but she was almost exceptional in that respect.

Fuster (Personal communication 1996) noted that his wife, a native French speaker, found the language on Cane River "standard." Still, elders have also been observed speaking "Creole" with its own particular syntax and pronunciation. One teacher of standard French, raised in the region, Susan Dollar, has noted (Personal communication 1996) that it was very difficult for her to understand the spoken Creole language. Apparently, Creoles speaking to standard French speakers most often modified their speech to that less personal, less colloquial, form. This may have been an unconscious effort or purposeful. It is hard to determine. Barry Ancelet (1994:LVI) recounted a similar experience in south Louisiana when Creole storytellers modified their French unconsciously to make their stories understandable to him, a Cajun French speaker.

Generally, the French Creole on Cane River follows the rules outlined in Ancelet (1994:LVI). For example, personal pronouns are *mo*= I, me; *to*= you; *nous* or *on*= we, us; *vous*= you; formal/ *vous autres*= you all; *ye*= they, them; *li*= he, him, and *la*= she, her. One sentence gives an example of this usage: "*Mo lame pas li,*" meaning, "I don't like him."

As late as the 1960s, a few elderly Creoles were monolingual to French, and others preferred it. Today, at least a dozen good speakers survive on Cane River although more and more French is used only in stories or as isolated words. One elder, in her eighties, speaks well and uses the language with her children, encouraging them to teach her grandchildren. Another

remarked that she "knew words" but could not "make sentences." Apparently, there is, then, a wide variation in French retention and usage.

One lady recalled that her parents and their friends sent children "outside," so they could speak French. This exclusion of children from exposure to the French language seems to suggest a deliberate effort by some families to force the children to speak only English.

Some elders reportedly pray in French, but most pray and go to confession in English. For many years, priests at St. Augustine Church have used only English. One person recalled that the nuns at St. Joseph's school were mostly "Irish," not French speaking.

People who have "married in" from south Louisiana, Frilot Cove, New Orleans, and other Creole groups, have better control of the language than younger Cane River Creoles. Families so "connected" have more French usage in them. As in most of French Louisiana, Cane River French tends to be familiar rather than polite, no matter what the source.

Joe Sampite, mayor of Natchitoches and raised at Cloutierville, is famous for his line, "I don't speak French, but I don't know English either." Mayor Sampite's English dialect is heavily French accented, as are the accents of many people on lower Cane River. Creoles, then, "sound Creole" even when they speak English.

Kinship terms, terms of endearment, *'ti noms*, and terms for material culture, plants and animals are worked into English paradigms. For instance, people know their *Parrain*, and *Marraine*, as well as *Nonc'* or *Tante* even if they use English most of the time. Lots of people talk of the *Toussaint*, the word preserved with the elaborate celebration of that feast day. Sister Jerome Woods (1972) was again the first to comment on these usages.

Music is another vehicle for French. People have collections of French music: records

and, more recently, tapes. Allen Metoyer, local band leader, has written only one song in French: *Ma Chère Tee Femme*, but he notes that most music on Cane River has been in English. Still, the late Mrs. Winnie Conant, accordionist, could sing some songs in French.

Still, the Creole English is distinct, easy to identify as having a French accent. Even younger Creoles have some French accent, whether they have studied French or not. Sister Jerome Woods's attempt at rendering this dialect stands alone (1972). West coast Creoles have identified the French language with Creole, saying that and Catholicism are requisite to being Creole (*Bayou Talk* 1995). Ideally, that may be the case, but in reality, the situation is less positive.

Recent efforts to instill pride in Creole usage are only just beginning. The Council for the Development of French in Louisiana (CODOFIL) has neglected Louisiana dialects in favor of Canadian or European French. Creoles and 'Cajuns have both been vociferous in their opposition to that emphasis.

Many younger people have studied French in school, but they do not use the language even in social and home situations. However, the swing to Zydeco, Creole and Afro-French music, with the concomitant re-vitalization of the dance hall scene, has begun to pull younger Creoles back towards the French language.

Both Cane River French and English are unique cultural resources of this region. Efforts to preserve them are only now underway. A pan-Creole effort to revive a monthly rotation of dances, moving from community to community and involving the youth from the various Creole groups began in August of 1996. Rougon, Frilot Cove, Grand Marais, Isle Brevelle, and Opelousas youth attended. This new social interaction may add the much needed emphasis to the

maintenance and practice of speaking French. Community-based, this pan-parish *Créolisme* may have the most effect of all efforts to hold on to Creole identity. Cane River Creoles have a major role in that.

A Center for Creole Studies in Louisiana is a popular idea. One of the first priorities of that effort is likely to be a series of detailed linguistic studies of Creole speech, both in Louisiana and the "colonies" nationwide.

Kinship

Nothing seems more dominant on Cane River than kinship. Family overrides many other things and is the strongest community bond.

This does not mean that families exist without social stresses; divorce is not unusual, but the Roman Catholic Church values do constantly reinforce the extended family. Ancestry or "blood" has much to do with who is or is not a Creole. Kinship seems more important than biological characteristics, and almost immediately upon meeting one another, Creoles begin seeking kinship. Sister Jerome Woods noted that Creoles in distant urban areas identified almost instantly with people from the Cane River area of Louisiana. Particularly, this is true of name recognition: Metoyer, Balthazar, Christophe, and others are clear signals of Creole roots (see Appendix III). So, for that matter, are physical appearances. It is not uncommon for people to say to other people that a person resembles another cousin some place. Creoles returning from distant "colonies" begin seeking relatives, making connections, and they return frequently. Some families in the cities have sent their children to uncles, aunts, or grandparents for visits in the summer. These visits may account for some of the warm feelings about Cane River that continue from generation to generation and the nostalgia that people accumulate. It is, from an etic perspective, a constant reification of cultural bonds.

The Fourth of July seems the most intense time of the year for families on Cane River. Individual family reunions occur throughout the year - at least four occurred on Isle Brevelle in 1994-95 - but families consistently try to get together on the Fourth of July. Families usually gather at the homes of the elders, on the river, coming from as far away as Los Angeles and Chicago. They may visit several parties during the day. In 1995, a videographer, himself a



Figure 1: Two men "pull" meat from a roasted pig (*cochon de lait*) for serving at a Fourth of July Family Reunion.

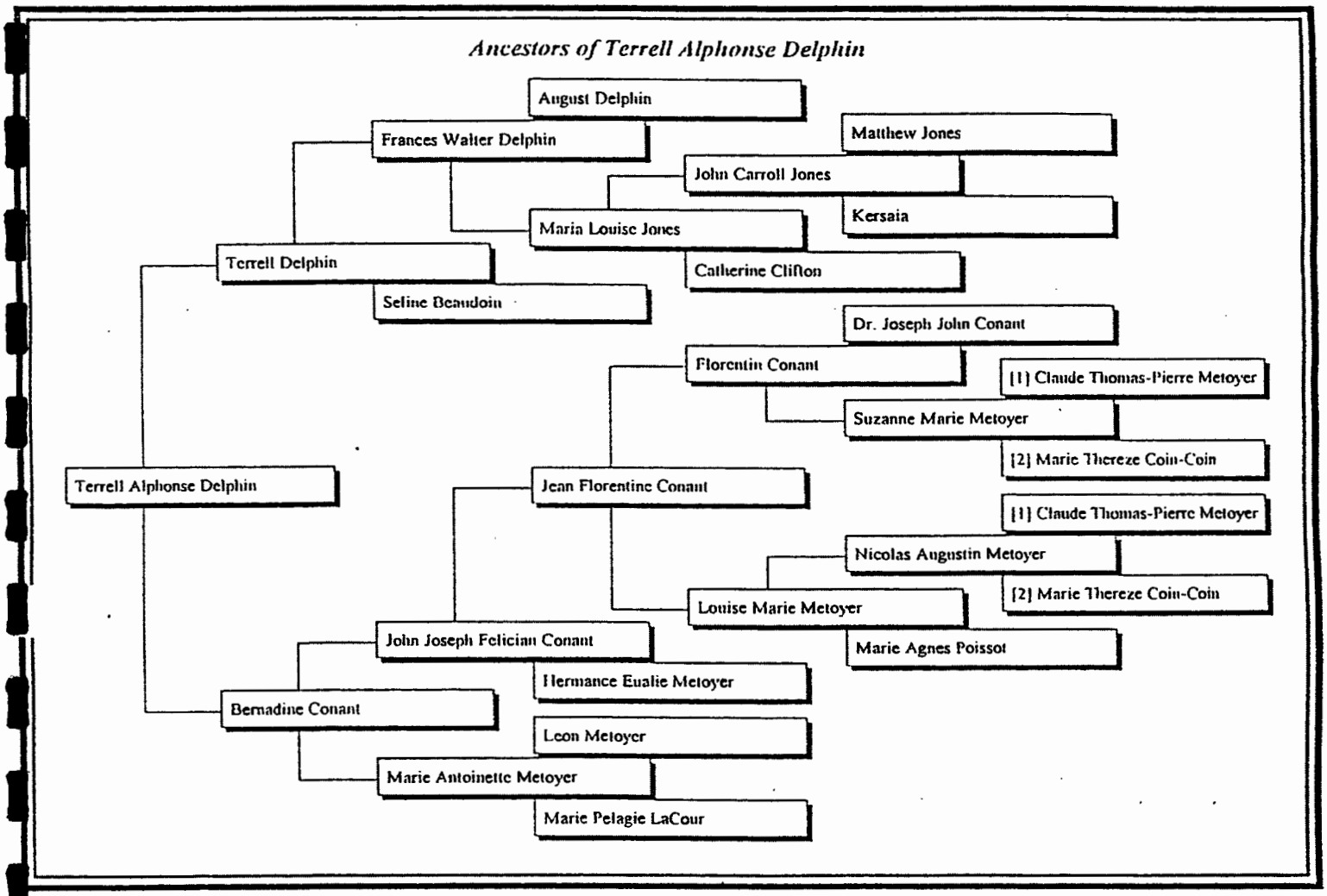


Figure 2: One branch of a Creole family tree reveals names commonly recognized as Creole.

Creole, came home from Florida and began videotaping for family groups. Local historians and cultural leaders were especially interested in his making individual tapes on local history and culture. He moved from party to party easily, being at least a cousin to almost everyone.

Most people try to visit at least both sides of their family on the Fourth. It is both a duty and a pleasure. Food and drink, boat rides, and sometimes fireworks keep everyone busy. Younger people try to do the work while elders visit and rest. Barbecues are popular, and families bring favorite dishes, potluck style (Figure 1). Nobody really seems to know how this holiday was chosen, but a secular holiday free from church obligations remains ideal for focusing on family gatherings.

Genealogy has always been part of Creole culture (Figure 2). So, while race was not discussed very much, kinship was, and is, an important thing. Since Creoles value Creole and Creole marriages highly, identity is important. Endogamy, usually to the third degree of removal, is not only common but smiled upon. First-cousin marriages, while not as acceptable because of Roman Catholic strictures, are not common, although people know of some such unions. These marriages, if church marriages, require dispensation by the Bishop.

Gary Mills (1977:9-15) has concentrated on the first and second generations of the family of Claude Thomas Pierre Metoyer and the slave woman, Marie Thérèze Coin-Coin. Further, he points out how other Creoles join the Isle Brevelle-Cane River community.

Community oral traditions differ from Mills's documentary version at various points, but, in general, the community seems comfortable with the Mills presentation, the first to "name names." Sister Jerome Woods created pseudonyms for the people and places of her work, a standard method in the sociological study of a community. People from the communities now



Figure 3: Portrait of Nicholas Augustin Metoyer, traditional patriarch of the Cane River Creole community, with St. Augustine Catholic Church in the background.

wish they knew exactly who she was mentioning. There are also historical deviations between her versions of community history and Gary Mills's work. Mills (1977), for example, worked to show a letter written from New Orleans was not a valid source. Creoles still cite that letter and have little or no doubt about its validity.

Non-Creoles often point out, as did Sister Jerome, that Marie Thérèze Coin-Coin's grave is not marked, and in the Woods work, one is given the impression that she was a secondary person, one to be almost denied or at least not an ancestor to brag about. Even noting the radical changes in the region since the Civil Rights acts passed, this seems an extreme interpretation. Numbers of people proudly point to her as their progenitress. Neither have Claude Thomas Pierre's children by Marie Thérèze, Suzanne, and her twin brother, Nicholas Augustin, ever been denied. Nicholas Augustin Metoyer clearly has become the traditional patriarch of the Cane River Creoles (Figure 3). Stories about him have passed from generation to generation. He is most often referred to as *Grandpère 'Gustin* or *Grandpère Augustin*. He, like his father, apparently had much to say about the nature of his family. Mills (1977) suggested that Claude Thomas Pierre Metoyer had more or less arranged an advantageous union for at least his daughter, Suzanne.

Augustin's influence reached to his children and their children. This familial model closely resembles the rural French *mezier*, where the grandfather becomes the head of the extended family (Levi-Strauss 1983). This French family form clearly dominated the population on Isle Brevelle. Mills's discussion of the genealogical additions merely reinforces the fact that contemporary Creoles have a marked preference for marriage between Creoles (Mills 1977: Chap. 4). His observations about the development of endogamy ("in-breeding" is Mills's term, 1977: 104) and

Augustin's failure to "reduce" it seem questionable. What seems more obvious is his effort to maintain or raise the socio-economic status of his children. A non-Creole French descendant from Cane River once commented on his family's preference for cousin marriages, to keep the land in the family, has bearing here. That is precisely the function of the *mezier* in France, a management tool. Today over thirty-six family names (surnames) are found in the Creole community. While some of these were admitted after the Civil War - Jones, Neal, and Clifton being the most notable - there is obviously more diversity than when Isle Brevelle was isolated in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

The Free People of Color married in after the Civil War. Carroll Jones did receive a little attention from Mills (1977: 215), but likely deserves a lot more attention here. Not only did he move to Cane River, but he brought with him his wife, Catherine Clifton. Both Free People of Color - local tradition holds that Catherine was Native American - they moved to Cane River from the hills west of Bayou Boeuf in Rapides Parish. Cane River Creoles today point to a community known today as Clifton or "Siepers" which grew out of early Clifton-Smith-Neal family interactions with Indian families: Austin, Thomas, Baptiste, and Brandy. Numbers of Cane River Creole families have intermarried with these mixed-blood people. For example, the daughter of Carrie Clifton, whose mother was a LaCour, married a Sarpy. Numbers of other connections to this upland community exist as well. Gregory (1995) has suggested that although Louisiana law forbade both Indian-white and Indian-black unions, little attention was paid to Indian-Creole marriages, both groups being seen as non-white. Both groups were culturally distinct from African-American communities, and the Clifton or Siepers connection seems logical, especially after the Jones family began extension in the Creole community.

This connection is interesting in that it is yet another, though later, source of Native American connections on Cane River. Mills (1977) has discussed the connections with the LeCompte/LaCour lines, and also the Dupre lineage, but his work seems to focus on the early antebellum community and does not include the Jones-Clifton-Neal-Smith connections. His one reference to Jesse Smith shows him, in 1841, as a white man. Actually, he appears to have been more likely a full-blood Indian, most likely Choctaw. The Clifton Choctaw genealogist, Teresa Sarpy, points out the tradition that he was adopted by a white preacher and was, in reality, an Indian.

Clifton community members intermarried with Cane River Creoles, a by-product of socio-economic interactions. Mrs. Amos Tyler clearly recalls, as does Alvin Metoyer and others, that in the 1930s and 40s Clifton people attended dances at Wood's Hall and Kirk's Hall on Cane River. Those dances were more or less segregated, reserved for Creoles.

A Haitian visiting Cane River wanted to help at a dance and was instructed to turn blacks away. He explained to two young black men that the dance was "reserved for Creole people." They asked him what a Creole was, and he responded, "If you don't know, then you're not one." The young men left. That situation prevailed until the end of the 1940s. Even in the 1950s, dances tended, on Isle Brevelle, to be for Creoles.

Still, Creoles sometimes interacted with blacks on a different level than with whites. One younger Creole opined that Cane River was a good place for blacks because Creoles did not accept abuse from whites and tended to protect blacks, knowing whatever happened to blacks would happen to Creoles.

Creoles who married blacks moved to more nearly black communities. One lady recalled

that was her first contact with Protestants. Attending a segregated black school, she remembered the other children playing "church" at recess. Her Catholic training left her unprepared to join in. Only at Clifton or Siepers were Creoles estranged from the Church; there all became Protestant. Within one generation, whole families became Baptists. Although families there identify as Baptist, many people will tell you they or their parents, from Cane River, were Catholics. Estrangement from the Church, divorce and re-marriage all occur in the Creole community, but extended family ties are not broken.

People not only know one another but can tell you genealogical positions of almost everybody. People are often identified by their position in the kinship system rather than by geography or by occupation: "Oh, you know Ana. Her mother was my mother's first cousin. You know her." On one occasion, a Creole from one of the "colonies" would identify herself by telling people, "You know Larry, he was my uncle."

People use first names along the river, and geography is described that way, too. "She lives in Uncle Alfred's house." "Tante Comète had a store down there near Tony Rachal's mother's old place." Only if the person addressed is a <u>real</u> stranger and has to persist, will geographic descriptors like mileage, place names or landmarks be used. The kinship system overlays the land.

The use of people's names is complicated by the fact that many people share a common saint's name, not to mention a common surname. There are many Theresas, Maries, Jeannettes. Josephs, Neuvilles, etc., are common, too. There are many Metoyers, Rachals, Delphins, Coutees, etc. As further south in Louisiana, this problem is solved by the use of the "tí nom" or nickname. Even in eighteenth-century documents, the French use the *dit* to signify a specific

person, for example, Jean *dit* Bois Sec. People usually seem to get the nicknames in the family, but some acquire them from peers or people they work with. "Sheck" for Shakespeare. Others are more complicated, like "Duma" for Neuville or "Youk" for Alexander. People generally do not know how other people acquire their nicknames, and often people have to "ask around" to get people's "right names," knowing only the nicknames.

Another way of noting who someone is consists of a linking phrase, tying one to one's spouse's name. For example, "Pete *à* Jeannette" would separate one Pete from another.

Kinship terms are equally interesting. Older people will use standard French terms: *Nonc', Tante, Marraine, Parrain.* Younger people who know these terms will link them to a first name like "*Parrain* Neal" or "*Tante* Comète." Mama and Papa are heard more often among elders than Mother, Father, or Daddy. Younger people seem to approximate more standard English usage. Still, young people will use honorifically, "Nanny" or "*Nan'*" Manine (*nainaine* seems used as a synonym for *tante*), for example, or "*Parrain* Neal." The term "Mama" is frequently used for elderly women; "Mama Blanche," "Mama Cora," or "Mama Lair" are good examples. This is a familiar form in the area. Most French speakers use familiar forms of address since everyone is related. Polite forms are known but do not appear as often. In the 1920s and 30s, the French terms like "Madame," as in Madame Aubin, were in wide use. This may be the antecedent for Mama as an honorific label. The French *maman* is heard more as "*Mam'* Adèle."

Divorces are not sanctioned by the Catholic Church, and some couples have married by the Justice of the Peace, some even unknown to their immediate families. Others have, more rarely, become Protestants and have been married in Protestant churches. Still, "out marriage" seems not to interfere with most children being raised Catholic. So the families seem to keep their



Figure 4: Mrs. Bernadine Delphin stands before a French clock that originally belonged to Suzanne Metoyer, her great grandmother. An ancestoral portrait hangs on the left and a portrait of Bernadine as a child is on the right.

relatives, in or out of the Church. Family and Church are linked, of course, but some younger people have recalled the early conflict between Claude Thomas Pierre Metoyer and the Spanish priest, Father Quintanilla. The priest protested so vehemently against Metoyer's cohabitation with Marie Thérèze Coin-Coin that Metoyer was forbidden by law to live with her. As in most of the *Mondiale Française*, an *affaire d'amour* sometimes took precedence even over the rules of the Church. Even so, Claude Thomas Pierre is said to have taken his son by Marie Thérèze, Augustin, to France to visit his family there, and there he saw the Church as the center of the family and community. It is pointed out that later Claude Thomas Pierre Metoyer made arrangements for his children by Marie Thérèze, and maps and documents pertinent to his French family and his Creole family are carefully curated. The clock he brought his daughter Suzanne from France still adorns the home of Mrs. Bernadine Conant Delphin, her great-granddaughter, on Cane River (Figure 4). In its handmade cypress case, it still runs - a powerful metaphor for the continuity of the Creole family and its origin.

Modern Creole genealogists are busy trying to tie the family (-ies) tree together, and there is always much interest in that (see Appendix II). Mrs. Janet Colson, Mrs. Kathleen Balthazar-Heitzman, Mrs. Teresa Demery, Donald Gallien, Mickey Moran, Charles Roque, Mrs. Judy Moran, Terrel Delphin and others are actively researching Cane River families and their connections to other Creole "colonies" in Louisiana and elsewhere.

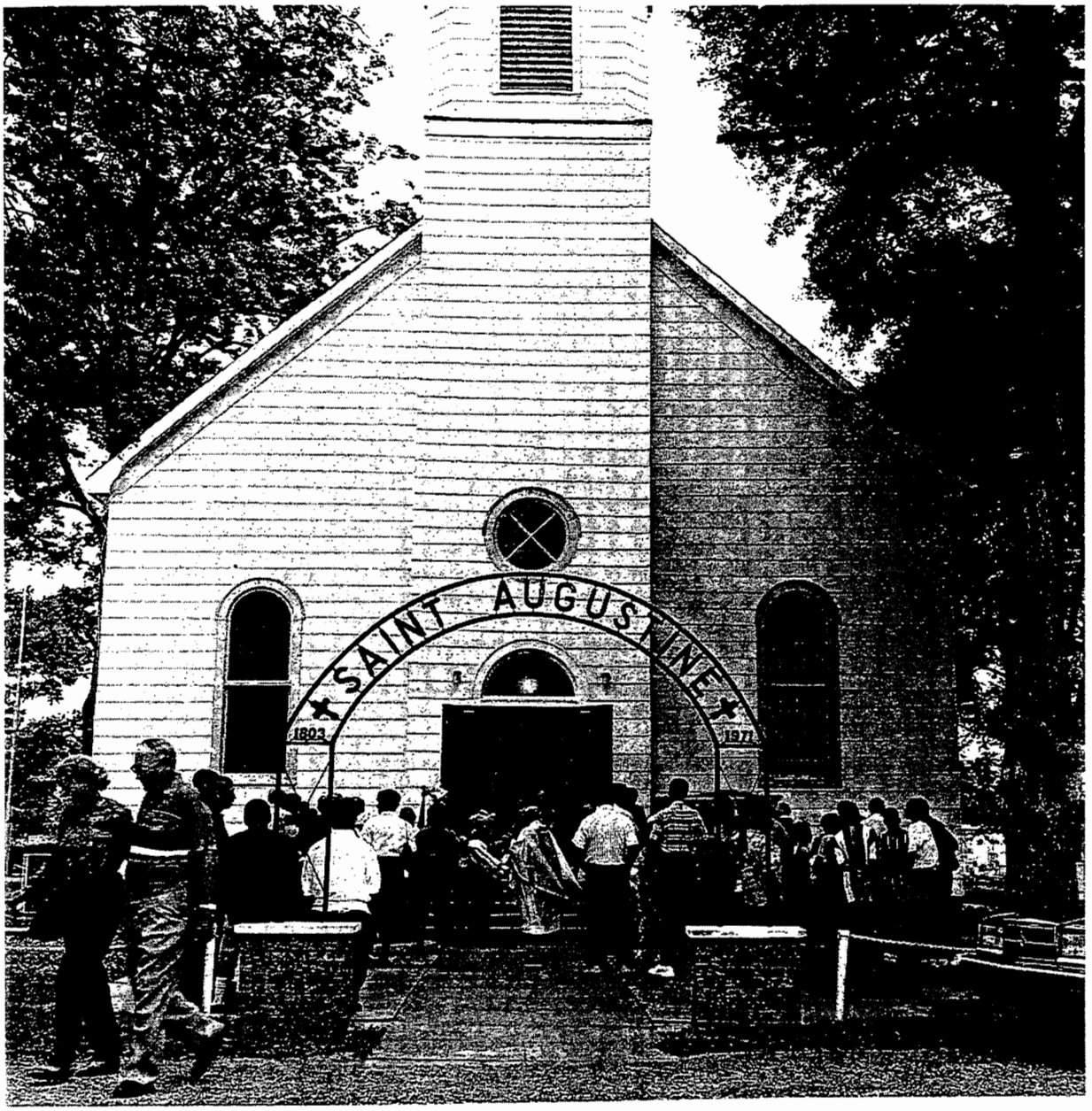


Figure 5: Worshipers gather outside St. Augustine after Sunday Mass for conversation.

The Community and the Church

According to community tradition, Augustin Metoyer donated the property for, and built, St. Augustine Church in 1803. Community tradition holds that he saw it as similar to the church in France which held his father's home community together.

The old church was torn down in 1916, and the current structure was built to replace it (Figure 5). The cemetery has been in use for a considerable length of time, the oldest graves dating to at least the early nineteenth century. When the Freeman-Custis expedition (Flores 1984:115-119) passed up Red River in 1806, they made note of the "small plantations," but no mention was made of the church, a peculiar omission on their part; Gary Mills casts further doubts on the date of the early church (1977:145-150). Still the community prefers the older date; certainly the church is where it has been for well over a century.

The twentieth-century structure is a contrast to the style of the nineteenth-century church, and if the early church was architecturally rendered correctly in the painting of Augustin Metoyer, *Grandpère 'Gestin* or *'Gustin* to his descendants, there exists a model. He had himself painted in a typical planter's pose, but he had the church painted in one corner as background (see Figure 3, p. 29). Community people have discussed whether this was the architectural style of the church building or the artist's rendition of a church. The point is that there are few if any descriptions of the church that burned. A few centenarians who remembered the original church furnished no more details. So even this church is shrouded historically with confusion. Community tradition is oblivious to the opinions of outside researchers; it is the Creole church, built by a Creole patriarch for the Creole community. Local white planters attended Holy Mass and went to that church, but it was, and is, the Creole church. It was long a segregated congregation, but in the beginning,

slaves and masters attended the church. Some say the slaves sat outside the church on the galleries. Nevertheless, St. Augustine and Creole are synonymous in the Natchitoches-Cane River region. Creole tradition holds that more than any other Catholic church it reflects the Creole devotion to their faith. It is the only church built specifically for the Creole population.

Since it was built in 1916, the second church has remained in continual use. Still, elders recall the changes in the church. It retains a painting of St. Augustine which came from the first building. The elaborate wood altar and side altars have been "modernized" and replaced. The hand-carved stations of the Cross have been replaced with smaller, less obvious, painted stations. The original statues from the early days of the second church remain. St. Isadore, the patron saint of farmers, stands in back. Statues of the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Joseph adorn side altars in front of the church. The original baptismal font, of wood, has survived the "new" changes in church policy. It now stands in the modern hall next door. The choir has moved from the church loft to the right of the front of the church. Some say it was a decision to keep the elderly from having to mount the narrow stairs to the loft. Some members of the choir are now well into their nineties.

The large oil painting of Augustin Metoyer hangs over the door in the back of the church. The painting was hanging in the home of Madame Ca'lot Metoyer until she sold that house to the late Alfred Llorens. She insisted the portrait stay with the house. Mr. Llorens kept it until 1922 when, while he was in Shreveport with three sick children, Madame Aubin Roque took the painting to her house. Mrs. Cammie Henry eventually was given the painting by Madame Aubin Roque. Mrs. Henry agreed to have it repaired and restored. It hung in Yucca House at Melrose Plantation until the 1970s, when the Henry properties were auctioned. The priest at St. Augustine

Church and his parishioners came to the auction. Father Rousseau read a piece explaining what the painting meant to the Creole people of his parish and began the bids with $2,000, all they had been able to raise. There were no other bids. Thus, *Grandpère 'Gestin* went to hang in the church. So, St. Augustine Church and its cemetery remain the focus of the Creole community.

The people born and raised in the community are involved with that church throughout their lives. They say people "pass through" the church; they are baptized there, make their First Communions, are confirmed, then married and, finally, buried in the cemetery there. Ritual life flows from the church into the homes, and the traditional value of family solidarity echoes through the whole community. Creoles attend Mass regularly, some on a daily basis and many others on Holy Days of obligation. Some "drop in" to church to offer a prayer at various times of the day.

The parish has long had organizations: the Holy Name Society, the Knights of St. Peter Claver, both men's organizations, and the Christian Mothers' Society represents the women of the parish, maintaining the altar and the cleaning and care of the church. These groups assist with the maintenance and operation of the wider parish. There also are the catechists and the ministers of Holy Communion who actually assist the resident priest. Part of the Diocese of Alexandria, some thirty miles further south, the church has a resident priest, Father Victor Vead, and one nun, Sister Virginia Claire, who both live at St. Augustine. The school, St. Joseph's, now closed, was once administered by the Sisters of Divine Providence. The church complex, then, consists of the church, rectory, hall, and convent. An older church hall and the convent school were demolished to make way for the modern metal-siding hall.

Baptisms, with godparents chosen by the child's family, begin life on Cane River (Figure 6). Some of the people on the river may have been baptized at St. John the Baptist Catholic



Figure 6: The Sacrament of Baptism is the beginning of a lifelong tie to community and church on Cane River.



Figure 7: A sacred and treasured rite of passage among Creoles is First Communion.

Church at Cloutierville, but most are members of St. Augustine Church and most were baptized there. For many years, children attended the parochial school and were instructed in religion there, or they attended catechism taught by the nuns; today lay teachers assist in those areas.

The 1996 First Communion class seems typical (*Bayou Talk* 1996:1). Miss Gertrude Chelette, who has taught catechism for fifteen years, was catechist. She presented fourteen candidates for their First Communion. The 1995 class was similar to that. Families represented then were Antee, Christophe, Jones, Llorance, Conday, Metoyer, Roque, Severin, Evans, Fuller, Poche, and Wright. Eight of the twelve children are of direct Creole descent and come from families living near the church, most on Isle Brevelle (Figure 7).

Creole families have produced a number of clergy, especially nuns, and children who went beyond grades available at St. Augustine school sometimes went to live with relatives in New Orleans where they could attain more education. Boys, in earlier times, were sent to New Orleans to complete their schooling.

Public schools in Louisiana were, until the 1960s, segregated and, of course, Creole children who attended those secular schools were faced with the matter of race, often for the first time. Being of mixed racial heritage, they were usually excluded from white schools, and some attended all-black high schools, particularly the pre-1965 generation living in Natchitoches. Others seemed content on stopping with the eight grades at St. Augustine. Similarly, until 1965 the local Creole population was excluded from nearby Northwestern State University (Normal School, College), and those wishing higher degrees turned to Southern University, Grambling University, and Xavier University in Louisiana, as well as other schools in Texas. While the work force at Northwestern included numbers of Creoles as staff and technicians, they were not



Figure 8: The Sacrament of Confirmation is bestowed upon a young woman by the Bishop of the Diocese.

allowed to attend classes nor to teach. Craftsmen and technicians, janitors, laboratory assistants, postal clerks, library cataloguers and others were daily present at that institution, but their children and grandchildren were barred from attending. Still, numbers of Creoles became the first generation of teachers for the local black public schools, and others left to teach at prestigious colleges like Tuskegee and Xavier University. The segregated St. Matthew's school, a black public school on Cane River, had a Creole principal, and Creoles were on the teaching staff. The Catholic church school at St. Augustine (St. Joseph's) produced a wide range of educated Creoles, many of whom pursued their education to higher levels. St. Joseph's alumni still hold celebrations in California.

Confirmation, not always a highly valued sacrament in French-speaking Louisiana, was important at St. Augustine, and young people were, and are still, confirmed at the time of their First Communion (Figure 8). Again, Confirmation services, held annually in the spring, are an important part of Creole life. Children again have adult sponsors chosen by them and their families - their *marraines* and *parrains,* or godparents may or may not be their sponsors.

The Creole traditional family is virtually identical to the French rural extended family, the *meziers* (Levi-Strauss 1983). The grandfather surrounded himself with his descendants and became the center of the family constellation. It is more than coincidental that Augustin Metoyer - *Grandpère Augustin* - is the important historical personage he is, nor is it a surprise that he established his church at Isle Brevelle. Weddings and marriages reinforce that family structure, and the Church has much control over that. Banns are still published, and today the couples must have pre-nuptial instruction before the Church allows marriage. Traditionally, marriages precede or follow the forty-day Lenten season, a time of penance.



Figure 9: A new bride and her grandfather dance at the wedding reception, a popular Cane River social event.

The most common comment regarding social life at Isle Brevelle is that the preferred marriage is Creole to Creole (Figure 9). First-cousin marriage impediments seem to preclude many of those, but cousins of less kinship have married and still do. Some first cousins have married, but it is not common. Isle Brevelle, like much of rural Louisiana, was isolated. However, when one reviews genealogical data, it soon becomes apparent that Creoles have long intermarried with south Louisiana communities. New Orleans, New Roads, Marksville, St. Martinville, Frilot Cove, Pin Claire, Grand Marais, and other Creole "colonies" have long been connected. Some elderly Creoles remember going to dances by horse and buggy as far away as Opelousas!

Until the populations were so widely dispensed, weddings and parties centered on the church and home. Today this is still often the case, and St. Augustine is a preferred church though geographic proximity has some influence. Sister Jerome Woods (1972) has pointed out that Creole urban enclaves generally clustered about their own churches in New Orleans, Los Angeles, Houston, Chicago, or wherever.

In the old days, certain people were sought to sing at the wedding parties. The most remembered such singer was the late Constance or "Ti' Cont" Chevalier. He always sang two songs. These were a "sad song" for the family of the bride and a "happy song" for the family of the groom. Sung in French, these traditional songs have been lost to the community today. Dr. Yvonne Phillips of Western North Carolina State taped Ti' Cont's spoken rendition in the 1960s, but, unfortunately, those tapes cannot be relocated to Northwestern State University library.

Wedding parties may last for two to three days at Isle Brevelle, and people come from as far as Los Angeles and Chicago to attend. Inasmuch as most have immediate families in the area,



Figure 10: Carrying the Cross in a funeral procession into church.

they usually can arrange for places to stay. Food and drink, and often music accompany these parties.

The most solemn services are funerals and the last rites of the Church. There are now "wake services," and most often a rosary is recited by the Christian Mothers or the Knights at the funeral home. There is always a funeral Mass at the church. The bell is rung as the people follow the person to the grave site. These are, in most ways, comparable to Roman Catholic funerals elsewhere, but there are some differences. Family members may take an active role in eulogizing, with family writing and reading eulogies at the Mass for the deceased. Pallbearers are, as usual in America, chosen by the family, but an additional person is chosen to "carry the Cross" (Figure 10). A wooden cross is carried in the procession to the grave site at the cemetery by this person, who is a man if the deceased is a man and a woman if the deceased is a woman. Placed on the grave or in front of the mausoleum, the cross remains in the cemetery for a reasonable length of time. These crosses have been made by community craftsmen, sometimes by a family craftsman, and they take a great deal of care. Such crosses are almost identical in pattern to the older wrought iron crosses common in the Creole and French cemeteries along the Cane and Red Rivers, the earliest of which date to the Spanish colonial period. These modern ones are painted white, sometimes with flowers attached to them. It is a singular honor to carry a person's cross, and the tradition is practiced at virtually every funeral.

Prayers are also said at the graveside by the organizations the person belonged to - usually the Christian Mothers if a woman or the Knights if a man. These usually consist of "Hail Marys" and "Our Fathers" and follow the priest's graveside service prescribed by the Church. In a few weeks after the funeral, the immediate family may attend another Mass, sometimes just for their



Figure 11: Whitewashing a tomb in preparation for All Saints' Day.



Figure 12: Following a candlelight procession from church, candles are placed on the graves of deceased loved ones and prayers are recited on the Feast of All Saints.

intentions. Mourning is long, and people offer masses and memorials for the deceased for a long time.

Burials have been in raised tombs, dug graves, and, today, in crypts in the mausoleum at St. Augustine Church. Multiple burials, "stacked" in the same gravesite, are common. Grave markers may be wrought iron crosses, marble stones or slabs over tombs or set in the ends of tombs. Stones are increasingly used and made of granite rather than marble. Tombs are whitewashed annually, usually preparatory to the All Saints celebration in November (Figure 11). The brick tombs of Carroll Jones and Catherine Clifton Jones are painted red. Many families still place statues of the saints and/or votive candles at the grave site, and at least one vault has a tile with a favored saint set into it. Flowers are common, and chrysanthemums are the favored flower for the *Toussaint*. A new section of the cemetery has been opened, and now there are nominal charges for care for the graves. Since many live away and bring their deceased people back for burial, it has become necessary to charge.

Some people have their spaces reserved, and their headstones made, before they die. Brick tombs are sealed by merely stacking bricks in the ends - they will be permanently sealed when bodies are placed in them.

The All Saints celebration includes a candlelight vigil in the cemetery, a custom that began after 1960 but which is highly respected in the community (Figure 12). Another candlelight procession and the presentation of a wreath at the tomb of Augustin Metoyer is now an integral part of the community's annual Creole Heritage Day, usually held on, or near, Augustin Metoyer's birthday on January 22. This procession follows a special Mass.

Visits to the cemetery are common, and people keep their plots up. The cemetery is kept



Figures 13 & 14: Shrines to the Blessed Mother are a common fixture in the yards of Cane River Creoles.



mowed and decorated. Contrary to most Catholic cemeteries, this cemetery is not fenced, but it does join the churchyard, which was once fenced and grazed by sheep. Mr. Tony Arceneaux officially monitors the cemetery. Family plots are mapped in the newer section, while tradition and memory regulate older space. Some families have buried some people in the same grave, at different levels, and then a final burial was placed in the aboveground vault on top.

While these rites of passage hold people to their faith, other practices function to help people. Oldtimers can be seen in the evening time saying their rosaries, and many try to attend Mass regularly and some on a daily basis. Personal, family, shrines are still present in homes. Favorite saints are honored there, the blessed palm frond from Palm Sunday is kept there. The fronds may be burned as protection against storms. A fine example has been preserved by John "Oswald" Colson. This once was a widespread practice. Rosaries, prayer cards, statues, blessed candles and containers of Holy Water also are kept in these shrines. Some are in glassed-in china cabinets; others are just on shelves. Sick call shrines, some over a century old, are cherished heirlooms in some families. Made commercially, they look like new.

Crucifixes are present in virtually every household, and shrines to the Blessed Virgin Mary are common in front of Catholic homes. While these outdoor shrines tie the Cane River folk to their French Catholic neighbors to the south, they remain an integral part of the Creole landscape (Figures 13 & 14). Some of these shrines have candles with them, and at least one is lit by an electric light. One Creole on the West Coast noted that speaking French, practicing Catholicism, and preparing Creole cuisine are the ethnic markers for Creoles, and the Cane River Creoles are certainly tied together by their church.

The church hall at St. Augustine remains a center for the community. Church-based

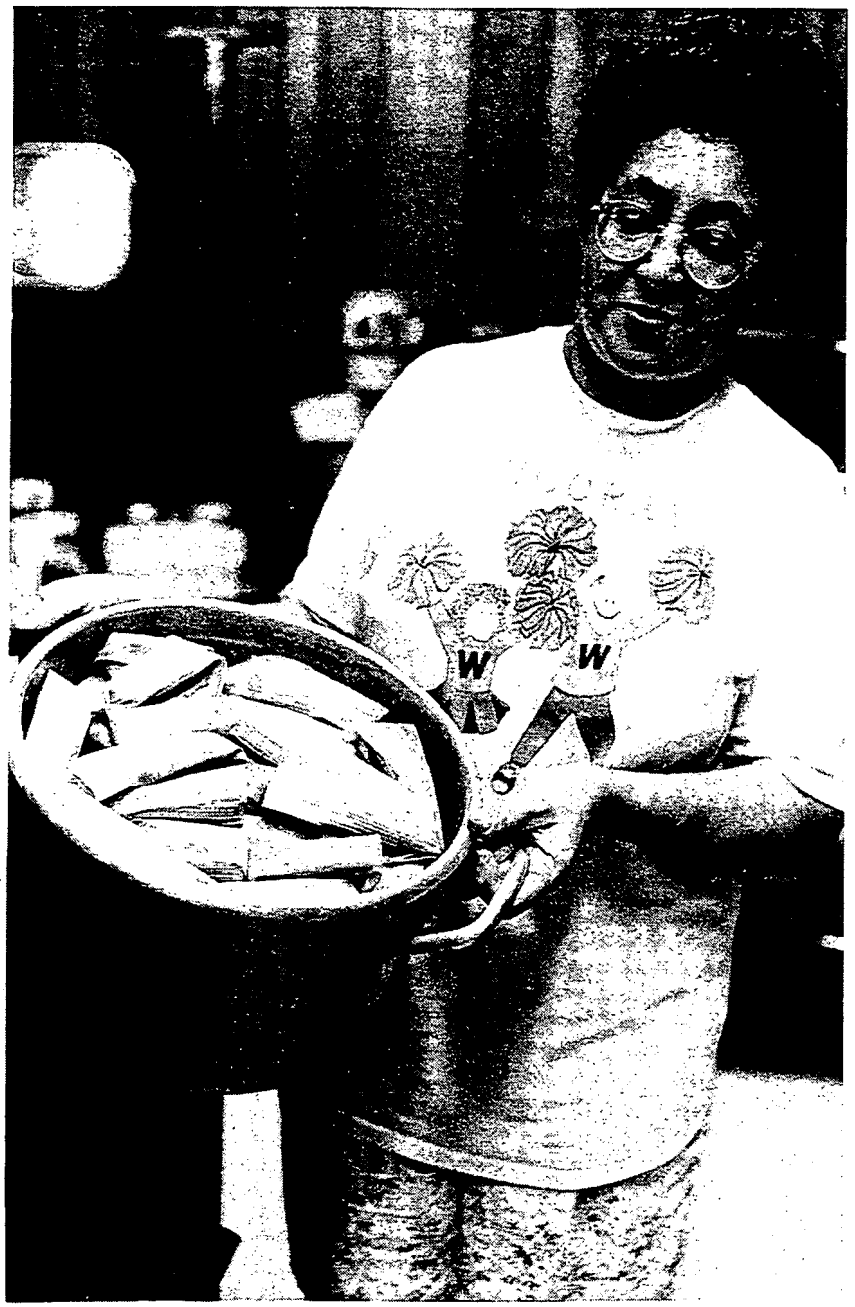


Figure 15: A staple of the church fair is "Creole" tamales.



Figure 16: Two men tend a game booth at the annual church fair.

organizations have always sponsored an annual church fair. That fair has long been an established event on Isle Brevelle. It preceded the current influx of tourists to the plantations of the area and was a fundraiser for the church. In earlier times, during cotton-picking time - usually late October or November - a wagon would pass from house to house, and people would contribute cotton to the load. Those gifts of cotton would be baled and sold, providing money for the church. The wagon would end its trip at the church, and a gumbo and a dance would follow. Eventually, there have evolved four such fairs celebrated by the Creole community: St. Augustine, St. John the Baptist at Cloutierville, St. Anthony in west Natchitoches Parish, and St. James in Alexandria. These fairs are homecoming events today, and the various generations of Creoles come home, bring their children to play games, eat food, attend the dance and visit their extended families. The dates are staggered so the four churches can be visited by the same people. Church fairs are also now Creole events on the West Coast and are advertised regularly in *Bayou Talk*, the Creole newspaper.

Outsiders are welcome at these events, and at the St. Augustine Fair, large numbers of tourists come to the church hall to purchase meat pies, gumbo, tamales, dirty rice, salad and cake. These are the standard menu, and many buy "carry-outs," especially meat pies and tamales (Figure 15). This Creole cuisine has replaced the cotton as a source of church support. Tourism has been captured by the traditional meal rather than the reverse. Raffles and cake sales also raise money at the fair. Quilts are made by the ladies of the parish and donated to the raffle. There are also booths and games outside in the churchyard (Figure 16).

Tourists remain scarce at the evening dances at the fair, but most of the people who have cooked, cleaned and served food all day do attend. The church-based organizations coordinate

the Fair and provide the workers. The nuns and older ladies sell holy items and cakes. By the end of the day, virtually everyone has participated in one way or another in the fair.

The Cloutierville and Natchitoches churches are not as involved in tourism as St. Augustine since they are not adjacent to Melrose Plantation, now a mecca for Cane River tourism. Both St. John the Baptist and St. Anthony's are tied to local, more parochial, populations though the fairs have very similar structures. The fair at St. James in Alexandria reflects a concentration of Cane River families from the Cane River region and, like the others, stands alone without tourists.

Other celebrations seem to pale in comparison to the Fair. Mardi Gras, the pre-Lenten celebration, was once more important and more closely resembled the *Mardi Gras Couri*, or the "Running Mardi Gras," of southern Louisiana with masked revelers going from house to house, ending at a communal gumbo and dance at the church. Today St. Augustine has seen the beginnings of a carnival ball, with a King, Court and Krewe - all Creole. This Mardi Gras ball is only a few years old but appears to be well established.

In Cloutierville another such gathering formerly occurred on St. John's Day, but only centenarians might recall it. Similarly, the masked riders up the river are seldom remembered. Even the older people seem to think of that as more like Halloween than Mardi Gras. They experienced it only as small children; still, they recalled the maskers coming from home to home.

Lyle Saxon's novel *Children of Strangers* described a custom, the *papegai*, where men shot at a target for cuts of meat and suggested it was a Christmas or New Year's seasonal event. It apparently disappeared long ago and is not commonly remembered now. It is no longer practiced.

Christmas and Easter are the two most celebrated feast days of the Catholic Church, and both are very important at St. Augustine. The Midnight Mass at St. Augustine attracts many non-resident Catholics and a few tourists as well. The church is decorated, the choir sings and the place is packed, with standing room only. In 1995, the children of the parish presented their version of *Posadas*, the Mexican procession, with small boys and girls going down the aisle, knocking on the pews and asking for a place to stop. They were followed by a small boy and a little girl representing St. Joseph and the Virgin Mary. Other children joined. This *Posadas* celebration is a new tradition inspired by other parishes. Contact and intermarriage with Hispanic populations in both Texas and California may be a source of this event. There a few Hispanic influences in the region. *Tamales*, in local cuisine, long a Christmas food, clearly date back to the antebellum period on Cane River (see Lyle Saxon's *Old Louisiana*). After Midnight Mass, people are invited to breakfast at someone's home. They eat, visit and then go home to rest and entertain children and friends.

Easter Sunday is a solemn day, but in and around the Mass, there are Easter egg hunts. The tradition of "pocking," or "knocking," eggs, tapping the ends together until one breaks - [with the person holding the unbroken egg "winning" the cracked one] was strong on Isle Brevelle. This custom is also very strong along the Mississippi River and at Marksville, Louisiana, is an adult game played at the courthouse. It does not seem to extend much farther up Red River than to the Natchitoches area. Children and adults have always enjoyed the egg "knocking" as much as the hunt. People went to the Mass and then to family gatherings at homes along the river, another excuse for a feast. These secular gatherings, tied to the Holy Days set by the Church again, hold families tightly together.



Figure 17: The May Queen, St. Augustine Church

Also in the spring, there is the May Procession for the Blessed Virgin Mary. A Mass and procession celebrate her day. It often is near Mother's Day. A young girl is chosen to carry a "crown" of flowers to place on the statue of the Virgin, symbolizing her role as queen of heaven. This is a high honor for the young lady chosen, and she is a special person on that day (Figure 17).

Patron saints are everywhere - St. Jude Thaddeus, St. Peter Claver, St. Isadore (patron saint of farmers), St. Joseph, St. Augustine and others. Everywhere there are symbols of respect for Jesus and Mary: crucifixes, statuaries, rosaries, crosses, prayer cards, etc. Prayer cards, each dedicated to a saint, are commonly tied to personal, private devotions. Many people cherish these little cards, and they are often printed for dispersal at funerals or on other special occasions. In late summer the people go to the hills on St. John's Day (June 10) and/or the Feast of the Assumption (August 15) to gather the leaves of the sassafras tree for drying and pounding into *filé*. The leaves are ready for gathering at that time.

Prayers are published for favors granted or to obtain help from a favorite saint. *Bayou Talk* usually carries such ads as do the Alexandria *Town Talk* and the Natchitoches *Times*. Like rosaries, these traditions are deeply ingrained in the community.

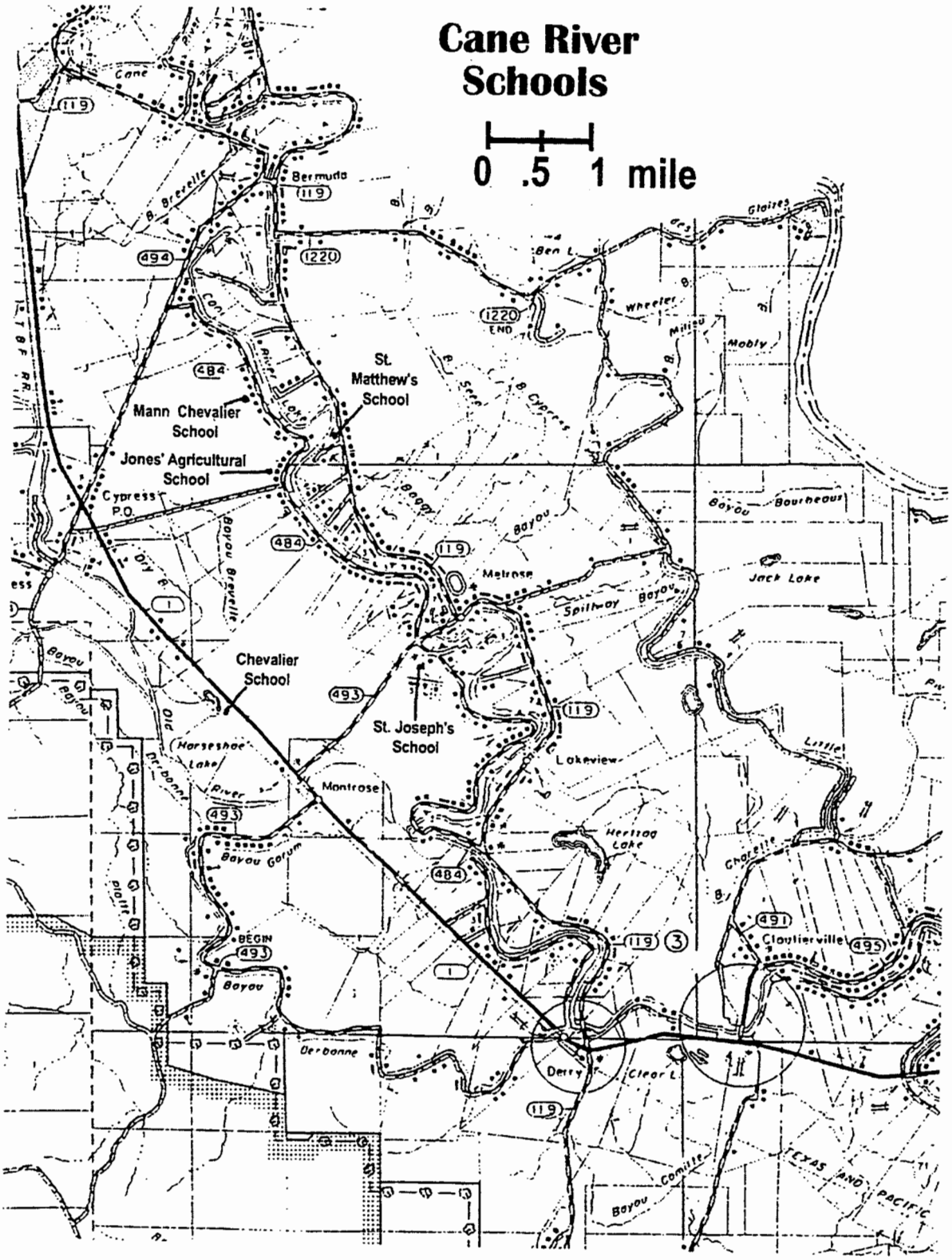
Leadership, both by men and women, seems tied directly to leadership roles in the church and the church organizations. Participation in the liturgy, regular communion, and service seems to be a universally sanctioned Creole value. Those "outside" the church maintain their connections socially and, to a more limited extent, politically through their interaction with these groups. Non-communicants continue to stay connected through social and familial ties although not regularly taking communion.

The church choir is especially important and practices regularly. If the church is not available, it will practice at the hall next door. Recently (since the 1980s), tours of St. Augustine Church are conducted for visitors/tourists. Creoles volunteer as docents for that tour which includes the cemetery and the church. These tours are free, but donations are appreciated. A brochure on the history of the parish and church has been prepared by the Parish Council, and these are sold, at cost, but are intended mainly as a public service.

One essential point is that the St. Augustine congregation contains many children, and young adults are actively involved in church activities. In an increasingly secularized America, St. Augustine seems a stalwart multi-generational congregation and community.

There is a strong oral tradition that the church buildings were close to the home of *Grandpère Augustin*, and young people were expected to be respectful when they passed his home. Some have a family traditional story that recalls meals with *Grandpère* after Mass.

Older people raised "towards the back" or "far down the point" - not in convenient walking distance from the church - remember staying with relatives when rains made the roads impassable, so they would not miss Mass on Holy Days of obligation during Christmas and/or Easter. Certainly no external institution has had as much cultural impact on Creole life along Cane River as the Roman Catholic Church. On Cane River, the symbol of that identity is clearly St. Augustine Church. The intentions of *Grandpère Augustin* have certainly been honored.


Cane River
Schools
0 .5 1 mile
St. Matthew's School
Mann Chevalier School
Jones' Agricultural School
Cypress P.O.
Chevalier School
St. Joseph's School
Melrose
Montrose
Lakeview
Cloutierville
Derry
Clear L.
Jack Lake
Bermuda
Glaires
Wheeler
Mobly
Bayou Bourbeaux
Spillway
Bayou Gorum
Horseshoe Lake
Herring Lake
Bayou Comille
TEXAS AND PACIFIC
BEGIN

Schools

The literature surrounding Isle Brevelle and Cane River is rather misleading in respect to formal education. Creole children were educated to the best of their families' abilities, and formal education was expected.

The Daughters of the Cross established a school for Isle Brevelle over a century ago - tradition holds they lived at the Badin-Roque House - and while some people disagree about that, it is clear they came and that there was a parochial school established at St. Augustine. Children went to that school through the eighth grade. Still, it was not a public school but a Catholic, parochial, school, and it was maintained by Creoles for Creoles.

Some families had sent their children to visit relatives in France, but they returned to Cane River. Nevertheless, such a continental tour showed them part of the world that many nineteenth-century Americans only heard about. Moreover, it reinforced cultural connections with French culture. Still, the eighth grade at St. Augustine was all the education available to the Creole children in the community.

When possible, children were sent to boarding schools, nearly always Catholic and most often in New Orleans. If schools did not board children, arrangements would be made for children to stay with relatives or approved families in the city. Again, French and Creole cultures were reinforced by that cultural environment.

As early as the 1830s and '40s, Creoles were literate; some even trained as accountants and by the 1900s had turned their attention to educating their children. At least one or two schools developed on Isle Brevelle. One came later, to be known most often as the Chevalier School, so-called after its first teacher, Mann Chevalier, who came to the island from south

Louisiana. He is remembered as having taught school in a dress shirt and tie, going home and carefully putting it away so he could farm his land! Matthew Jones opened another school, Jones Agricultural School at Cypress Lane on Isle Brevelle.

In the 1933, a Creole, educated at St. Joseph's School and in New Orleans, Mrs. Myra Friedman, approached the Natchitoches Parish school superintendent and asked for a school for local children. He told her if she could subscribe such a school and find a place, he would support it. She began teaching at St. Matthew's Baptist Church, a black Protestant church, used for a one-room school. She recalls having to take her one hundred students to sit out under the trees during funerals and, eventually, raising money along the Cane River, and on Little River as well, to build a school. St. Matthew's developed into a segregated, grades 1-12 school and operated until it was closed August 8, 1989. Some Creoles attended that school also, but it did not replace the parochial school.

St. Joseph's School at St. Augustine Church was closed in 1967, and the children on Isle Brevelle began attending public schools. Tommy Roque, a member of their last 8th grade class, recalls its demise. Gradually, the classes were phased out and only two nuns, non-teaching nuns, remain at Isle Brevelle. The two nuns in residence at St. Augustine today are the last representatives of the orders who lived and worked with the Isle Brevelle children. Today buses carry the children to Cloutierville, and others attend St. Mary's School, a parochial school in Natchitoches.

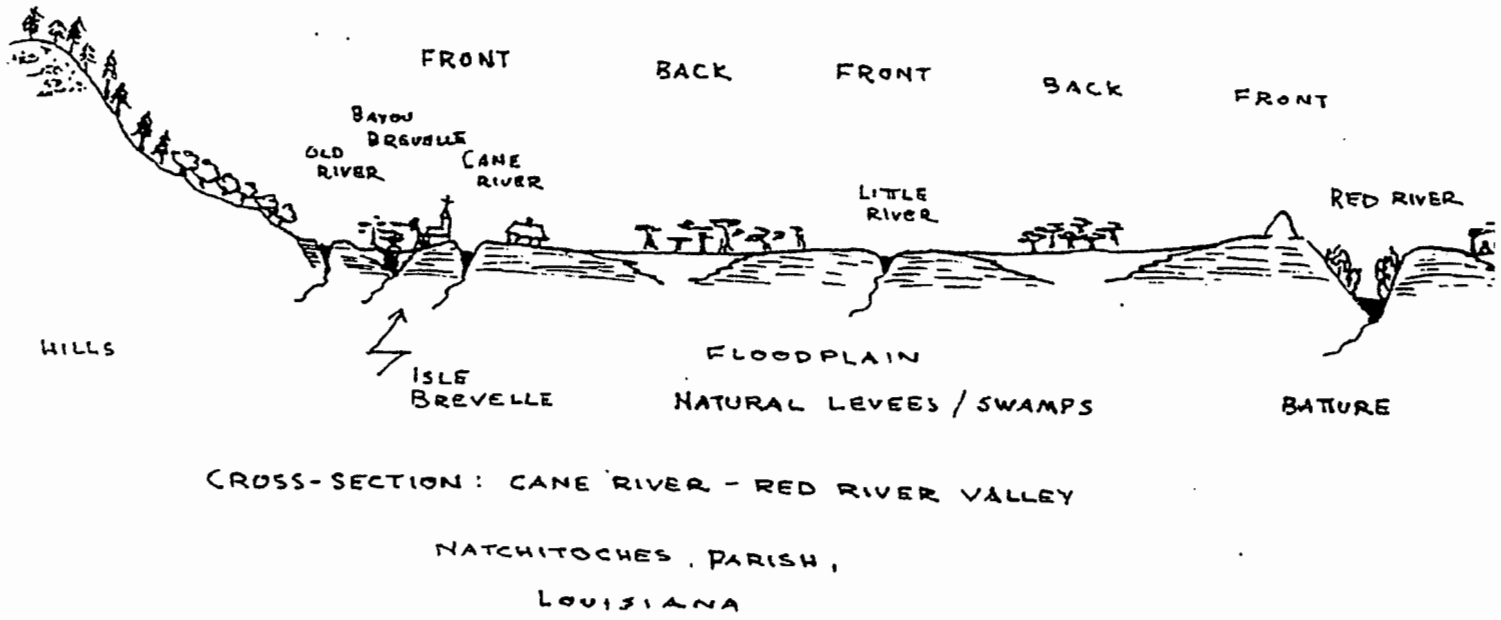


Figure 18: A geological profile of the landscape features of Isle Brevelle.

Landscape

Since the nineteenth century, the landscape along Cane River has been in a state of dynamic equilibrium. Like most rivers in alluvial areas of the earth, the Red River has meandered across its valley from west to east (Figure 18).

The channel systems created meander belts marked by natural levees and backswamps which have been cross-cut by crevasses and bayous. The Cane River region has at least four such meander belts: Old River, Cane River, Atahao-Little River, and the modern Red (once the *Rigolet de Bon Dieu*). So each channel has built up a natural levee (silt, loam, and sands) and a back swamp of lower elevation with heavy organic clay soils. Sometimes the modern systems mask the older systems with new deposits of silt and sand, actually cutting across and even erasing them.

The Red River flows into the Cane River basin, a ten-mile-wide valley which narrows to a mile wide on the north end where the uplands constrict the valley at Grand Ecore-Campti. Similarly, the valley is constricted again in the south, to a couple of miles near Colfax. These uplands are actually high hills eroded from a mix of Quaternary and Tertiary deposits. This situation complicated the courses of the Red-Cane Rivers, no matter which meander belt one looks at. At each end of the basin, Red River was "rafted"; that is, it was clogged with logs and other debris (Guardia 1927). At various times, the river was not navigable because of this rafting. It slowed the current of the river, and the stream dropped some of its iron-rich silt load (Newkirk and Mueller 1981).

Older raft impacts on the western, Old River, channel left two large raft lakes: *Lac Terre Noire* and Lake Acusa at the western margin of the basin. Today, *Lac Terre Noire* is partially

flooded by Sibley Lake, the Natchitoches city water supply, and ephemeral Lake Acusa is called the Flora Lowland, frequently flooded by Kisatchie Creek run-off. Another large wetland, called "the Lake" or Sang pour Sang Lowland, existed west of Cloutierville - it, too, seems a raft lake area.

The Tertiary hills with Quaternary deposits along them border each side of the alluvial floodplain of Red River; on lower Cane River, they are visible from the valley. These are heavily dissected with outcrops of Catahoula Sandstone - a calcareous marine deposit and some claystones; cherty gravels, especially pebble to cobble size, are common in the Quaternary deposits. These upland clays are clearly differentiated from the red sediments of the valley. Derived from the Permian Basin red sediments in New Mexico and Oklahoma, this is some of the most fertile alluvium on the Gulf Coastal Plain.

Natural vegetation is horizontally zoned. Cottonwood, Sycamore and Willow dominate the edge (batture) of the active river. Flooded when the river rises, this area is inundated annually at least once or twice a year. The natural levees, higher and drier, often frost free for more days a year, supported rich growths of mixed bottomland hardwoods: Bitter Pecan, Water Oak, Overcup Oak, Red Gum, Pecan, and Pin Oak. The backslopes graded off into swamps and ox-bow lakes filled with Cypress and Tupelo Gum. Honey Locust seems to fill abandoned clearings in the back-swamps.

The uplands rise into terraces or bluff lands before they turn into the sandstone hills of the Catahoula Formation. These lower terraces are silt-loam, sand and clay soils. Their dominant climax vegetation seems to have been Oak-Hickory forest with Beech and Gum in the creek bottoms. This is a very diverse ecozone, and Sassafras, wild grapes (at least three varieties), wild

cherry, and numbers of other lower-story plants made it a high-use area for hunting and gathering.

Spanish moss was abundant in the backswamps, and on parts of the natural levees - particularly up to Little River - there once were cane breaks. Swamp or Black Haw was another wetland tree. These areas once attracted herds of white-tailed deer. Squirrel hunters and other hunters used the backswamp-backslope areas as primary food areas.

The highest uplands were dominated by immense stands of Longleaf Pine, now replaced by more rapid-growth pines. Low growth included various grasses and berries. It was a fine area for grazing cattle and hogs. It, too, was hunted and gathered. Not only did it supply food, medicine and lumber, but sandstone blocks for buildings. These uplands are mostly in Kisatchie National Forest now, protected by the U.S. Department of the Interior and far less accessible to the Creole community than they were in the past.

These were the lands the Creoles called home by the end of the eighteenth century and which they knew well before that. They remain in this same area still.

Settlement Pattern

Local folk terminology usually divided the valley into a series of "fronts" and "backs." The front land is the natural levee near the active or abandoned streams. It is primarily well drained silt-loam, grading into the "back," a series of poorly drained organic clays. Even today, land use is structured to make maximum use of these econiches.

The Freeman-Custis Expedition in 1806 left a concise early description of the area, one which still - a hundred ninety years later - seems to describe the region well (Flores 1984: 115-119). It bears repetition here:

> From the confluence of little river with cane river, to Natchitoches, the land on both banks is generally cultivated, particularly the left bank, which presents a series of small plantations, each having one field in front, and extending back 80 to 100 perches to the Cypress Swamps. The inhabitants are a mixture of French, Spanish, Indian and Negro blood, the latter often predominating, and live in small cottages on the banks and near the river.

The comments on ethnicity were omitted from one published version of the journal (Flores 1984:118). It belies the prejudices of the Anglo-Americans but otherwise does clearly note the rich ethnic heritage of the area. Moreover, it succinctly describes the arpent land division which covered front to back lands, levee to swamp land.

Culturally, it suggests some other early Anglo-American myopia. Small cottages already coexisted with West Indian-style raised cottages built of substantial materials: brick and cypress. Also, there may have been one church, St. Augustine Catholic Church (Callahan *et al.* 1956), which may date to 1803. All were along the river bank and in plain view of travelers on the Cane River! There exist drawings of such raised, large houses along Cane River as early as the 1780s and the 1790s (Maes Maps: 1794: Cammie G. Henry Research Center, Northwestern State

University).

These early settlements did contain small "cottages" built, like the Badin-Roque House, of *poteaux en terre*, posts in the ground, half-timbered construction in-filled with *bousillage*, a mixture of mud and Spanish moss, but these comprised part of a line of very substantial plantations where Creoles were commercially growing tobacco and indigo. The *indigoteries*, or processing plants, also were strung along the river - in plain view.

Still Freeman and Custis were correct, the land division offered everyone access to the *cyprières*, the cypress swamps. Such backswamps were super important because the Bald Cypress (*Taxodium distichum*), which grew to prodigious sizes, provided a source of timber, not only for buildings but for commerce as well. Moreover, these wetlands were a place to hunt, graze cattle, gather moss, and find other resources.

Over the years, the Creoles on Isle Brevelle and along the river adjusted to plantation life styles. Farming was, from at least the 1780s, important. Cash crops evolved: First, there was tobacco, joined by indigo and, eventually, both these crops yielded to cotton. All these crops were labor intensive, and most labor was human.

Over the years, even by the early nineteenth century, some 18,000 acres of land had been acquired and much of the natural levee area cleared and cultivated. Roads followed the natural levees, and lanes connected settlements and landings on the river. By the 1780s, the Creole settlers had clearly established plantations, landings for boats, and the beginnings of roads. By 1806, the settlement that Freeman and Custis described had been in place on the land a quarter century. Cane River was hardly a frontier. By the 1830s, when cotton was in widespread production in the area, the Creole plantations were well established. Like the Indians before

them, the Creoles made major landings at the cutbank side of the river where, although bluffs developed, boats found it easier to leave the stream and to be propelled by the current towards the bank. Homes were built some distance back from active, caving banks of the river overlooking the landing, more prosperous ones with *allés* of Live Oaks (*Quercus virginiana*).

Yards were often fenced with picket fences; some were eventually replaced by wire fences. Fence palings, or *pieux*, were split from Cypress, cut in the back swamps, and neatly surrounded yards and gardens. Front yards were often planted with flowers: Lilies (St. Joseph's Lily and Easter Lily, various "Rain" Lilies), Sweet Olive (*Douce olive*), and Cape Jasmine were popular. Three Sisters roses were common. Sunflower and Princess Feather, both rich producers of oil seeds which were feed for chickens, guinea fowl, geese, and ducks, were frequently planted. Herbs, especially mints, were grown as well and frequently mixed with flower beds.

Many houses had *pigeonniers*, pigeon houses, and these seem to have sat in side- or front-yard areas. Some were built of wood, others of wire. Squab were a favorite delicacy. These were inside the yard space shared with chickens, geese, and ducks. Guinea, a favorite bird for *gombos*, also, like geese, doubled as "watch" animals - making lots of noise when people or stray animals approached. Guineas also eat ticks, making them a handy yard animal to have around.

Gardens usually were planted near houses. They almost inevitably contained Okra, Onions, or Shallots, often some Garlic, Tomatoes, and Red (Cayenne) Peppers. Squash, *Merlitons*, Gourds and Pumpkins were other popular vegetables. Corn, Beans, and Peas were other garden plants. Crops were planted in rows; beans most often were staked with poles. Tomatoes, too, were often staked. These crops, near the houses, were all planted in the fertile alluvium and grew well. Exotic plantings occur, too, including among others Althea and Wisteria;

Mimosa, Chinaberry, Fig, and *Zis-Zis* trees; and fruits including Pomegranates, Peaches, and Plums. Yucca and Nopal Cactus were popular decorative plants, not to mention boundary markers. Trees, especially Pecan or Oak trees, were planted near homes. The Pecan tree at Landry Dupree's old house place was, for example, planted in 1918. It was the year of World War I. Most of the Live Oaks are well over a century old.

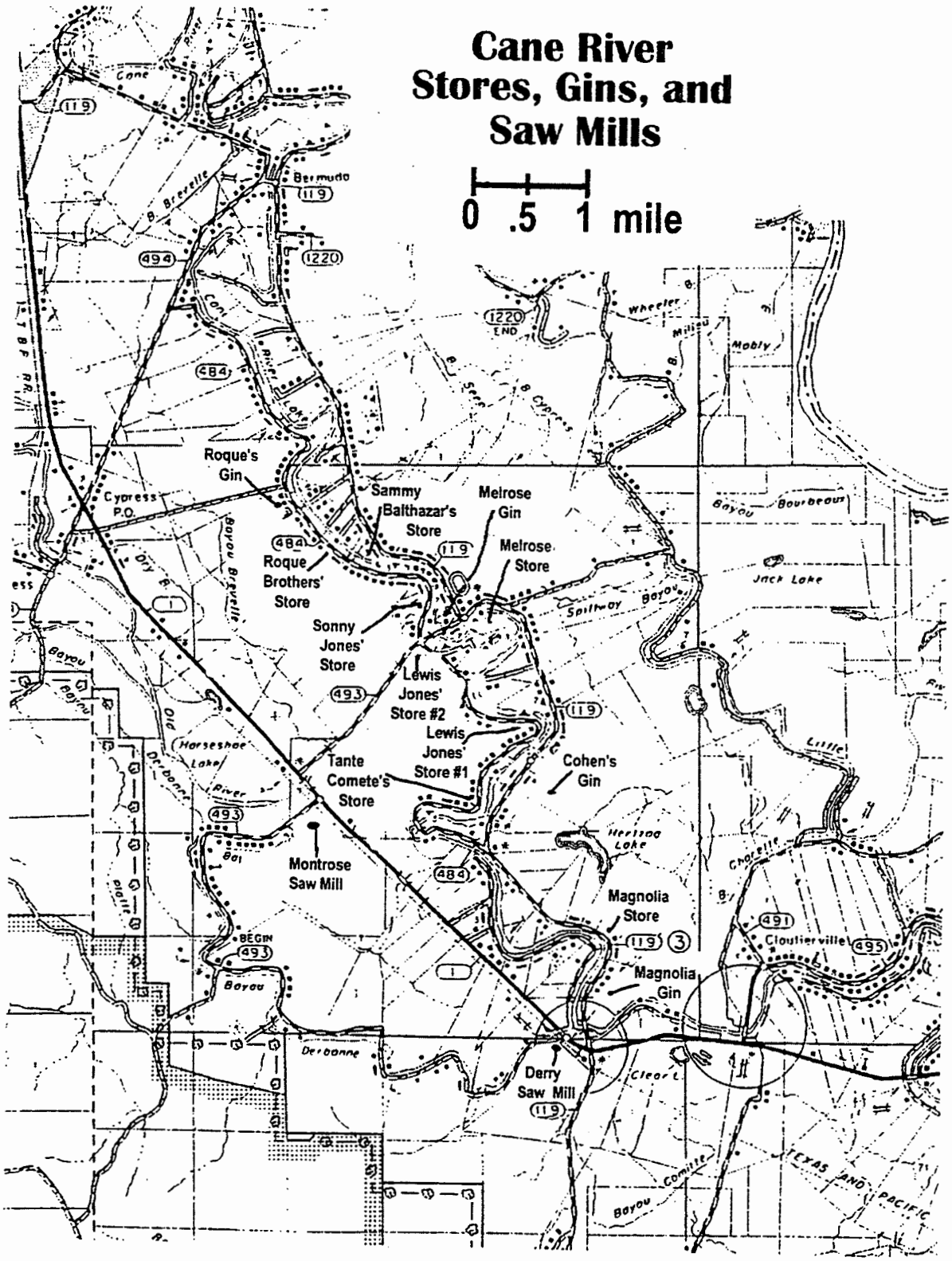
All this exotic vegetation blended with the lush semi-tropical landscape. The original vegetation, especially cane (*Arundinaria* sp.) which gave the river its name, began to change early. In 1806, Freeman and Custis noted the cane was more abundant on the river than it is today (Flores 1984:114). Cane is extremely rare along the river today. It was easily cleared by burning and was replaced early by cultivated crops. Dense stands exist in the bottoms in the uplands, and these are scarce.

Only second- or third-growth Cypress, and even older hardwoods, exist only as "grow back" timber. Commercial logging took its toll - Montrose, Cypress, Flora and Derry all had sawmills that tapped the climax forests. Only a few stands of Bald Cypress exist along the back-swamps today. The sawmills "cut out and got out"; the Montrose mill town flooded out, and today no active logging goes on along Cane River. Land clearing severely modified the back-swamp forests in the 1970s. Soybeans were a primary crop, and wetlands, unsuitable for the cultivation of cotton and corn, were extensively cleared for soybean production. Only second- and third-growth timber, much of low economic value, covers that area today. Some families have re-converted their bean land into pasture; however, cattle production has declined recently because of dropping market prices. It seems possible that these forests will revive.

The river has - since the 1930s at least - been a major recreation area. By the 1940s,



Figure 19: Roque Brothers' farm store.


Cane River
Stores, Gins, and
Saw Mills
0 .5 1 mile
Roque's Gin
Sammy Balthazar's Store
Melrose Gin
Melrose Store
Roque Brothers' Store
Sonny Jones' Store
Lewis Jones' Store #2
Lewis Jones' Store #1
Tante Comete's Store
Cohen's Gin
Montrose Saw Mill
Magnolia Store
Magnolia Gin
Derry Saw Mill
Cypress P.O.
Bermuda
Cloutierville
Jack Lake
Horseshoe Lake
Old Derbanne River
Bayou Brevelle
Spillway
BEGIN
119
484
493
494
1220
491
495

several plantation families maintained private camps as did prominent people, like a former mayor, from Natchitoches. Ashley Kirkland developed a store, fishing camp, and dance hall at Melrose. Other camps existed below Melrose, and Wood Antee maintained the Friendly Place, a dance hall on Isle Brevelle. Kirkland's Friendly Escape, a larger dance hall, collapsed and was cleared in 1995. Only a site reminds people of Duncan Kirkland's hall below Melrose. Dances became public affairs, held at the "halls," with both local and extraneous "outside" bands. Dances and parties were also held at private camps, especially during election campaigns. Other dance halls like the Green Derby near Lakeview Plantation and Dugas's at Magnolia have also disappeared. Today only the old Metoyer Brothers' bar at Melrose has survived, much beat up by time.

Stores have long existed along the river. The late Collins Roque recalled over twenty stores between Natchez and Cloutierville at one point in time. The Roque Store, now closed and used as an office by the family, is essentially intact (Figure 19). It was a traditional gathering place for the men at Isle Brevelle; they gathered there after Sunday Mass. The Louis Jones and Sonny Jones store, once located near the Melrose bridge, seems to have moved up the river to the site nearer the church and bridge. The Melrose store and post office served the families on the east side of the river and the post office brought in a wider clientele. Today only a cold drink machine sells anything there. A newer store, operated by Mickey Moran, is open on a part-time basis but has only convenience store stock.

The other stores are all closed. The Sammy Balthazar store, open until the 1960s, has been razed. Sonny Jones's store burned. Older structures nearer the "point," that area below St. Augustine Church to the dam, seem to have clustered around the 24-Mile Ferry site. Old timers recall the store run by Tante Comète, near the eighteenth-century house now owned by Dr.

Anthony Rachal, and documentation has been presented by Gary Mills (1977:130) for an antebellum store run there by the Dubreuil family.

Race tracks existed at the 24-Mile Ferry, near the dam, at Kirkland's dance hall and near the Metoyer Brothers' beer hall at Melrose. Racing was a common activity well into the 1960s. The Balthazar family has maintained a training track near the 24-Mile Ferry and continue to train race horses and jockeys. That tradition among Creoles extends back nearly two centuries.

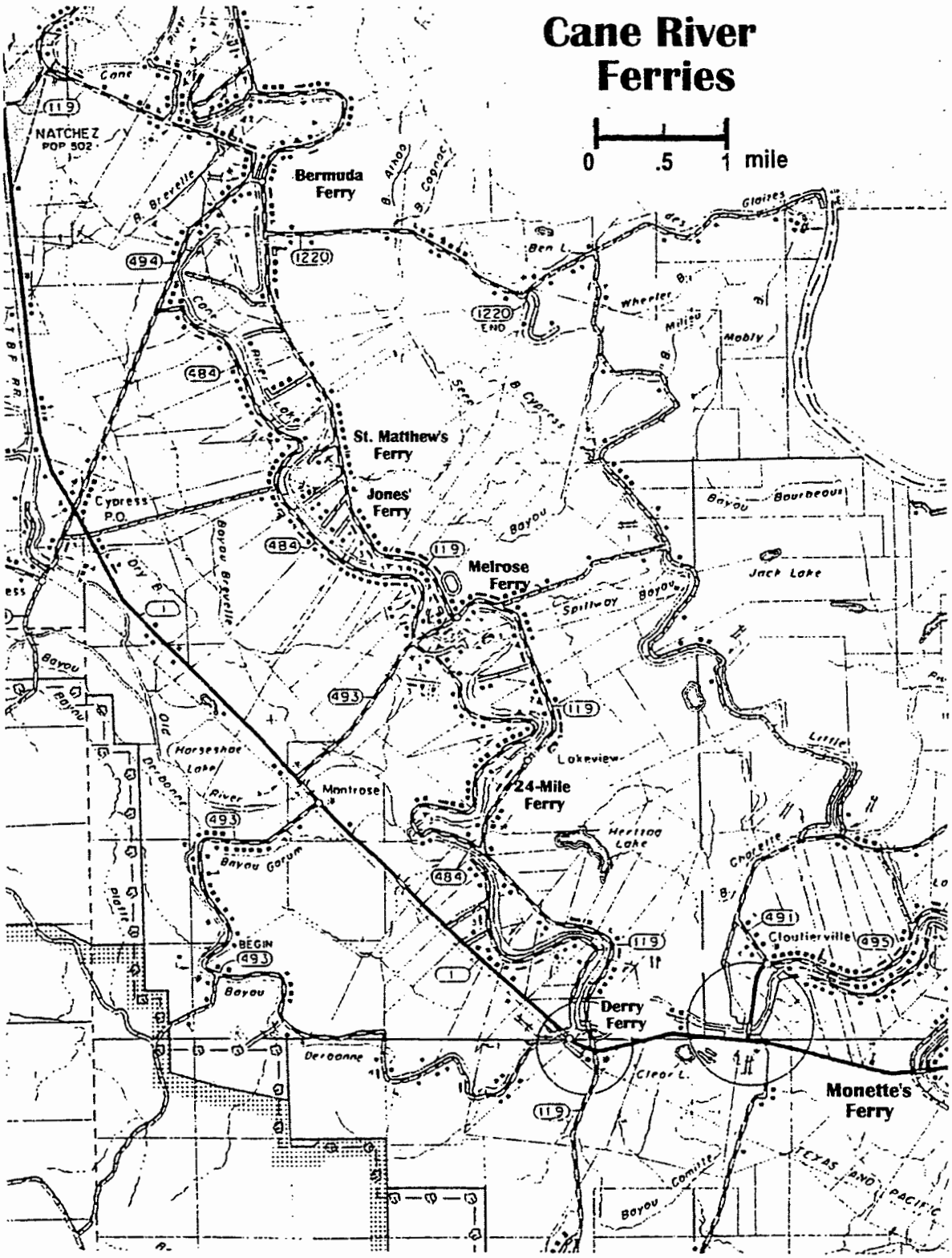
The decline in stores seems to mirror the shift in demography after the 1930s. As sharecropping declined in practice and families extended, people began to leave the river. After World War II, the presence of successful relatives in Houston, New Orleans, Chicago, and Los Angeles drew Creole youth away. The exodus of southern blacks is echoed in the loss of that population as well. Both Creole and black youth went to Natchitoches and Alexandria, local safety valves for the forced heirship which fragmented the *arpent* system along Cane River. One way or another, though, the Creole families have maintained control over some 14,000 of the original 18,000 acres they had amassed by the end of the Spanish colonial period. The Melrose Plantation remains the largest block of alienated land, and recently a subdivision on the "point" portion of that place saw young, upwardly mobile Creoles purchasing back even a part of that land. A Creole Chicagoan has purchased back the original eighteenth-century house of Marie Thérèse Coin-Coin, one of the matriarchs of the Creole community. Not on Isle Brevelle, it is north nearer Natchez.

Major changes on Cane River resulted from the damming of Cane River in 1914. First, the river boats could not come upstream; packet boats still supplied some areas of Louisiana well into the 1930s, but not Cane River. Secondly, the river became a deeper, less ephemeral water

body, and bridges replaced most fording places and footbridges. Hand-pulled ferries also gradually disappeared, and people crossed the dam and the bridges and "rode around."

Octogenarians remember the ferries; at least four are well remembered, the most famous being 24-Mile Ferry. These ferries continued to operate, under license from the parish government, until at least the 1920s. A ferry at Willow Point was abandoned when landowners objected. It took children across to St. Matthew's School, the first public school for black children on the river since Reconstruction. Its ferry shifted downstream. Bridges replaced the Bermuda Ferry and the Melrose Ferry, and the dam removed the need for the 24-Mile Ferry. Footbridges across the low-water Cane River disappeared, never to be seen again, like the ford that once allowed people to ride horses across at Melrose; the maintained water levels erased that early, pre-1914 landscape.

Still, as George Stokes (1964) has pointed out, this landscape and settlement preserve some of the most traditional French elements to be found in Louisiana.


Cane River Ferries
0 .5 1 mile
NATCHEZ
POP 502
Bermuda Ferry
St. Matthew's Ferry
Jones' Ferry
Melrose Ferry
24-Mile Ferry
Derry Ferry
Monette's Ferry
Cypress P.O.
Montrose
Cloutierville
Lakeview
Jack Lake
Bayou Bourbeaux
Bayou Gorum
Horseshoe Lake
Spillway
Cane River
Bayou Brevelle
Cane River Lake
Bayou Cypress
Bayou Amoo
Bayou Cognac
Wheeler
Mobly
Herring Lake
Cleor L.
Bayou Comite
BEGIN
119
1220
END
494
484
493
491
495

Roads, Ferries, Fords, Bridges and Travel

Transportation along Cane River - or Red River for that matter - has, since prehistoric times, seemed to have been twofold: by watercraft and by road or footpath.

Before Cane River was dammed in 1914, there were shallows and deeps. These reflected the dynamics of the Red River before it abandoned that channel. Deeps were usually at the crossovers where the current impacted the cut-bank side of bends, and shallows were at the point bars where deposition took place. When river traffic was a common mode of transportation, people tended to settle on the high side of the cut banks. Landings were facilitated by the current, and even steamboats took advantage of it. Shallow-draft packet boats continued to bring supplies up the Cane River even after Red River abandoned that channel. Some Creoles have suggested the dam was a response to the competition between stores at Natchitoches and the boats.

Dugout canoes were early craft on the river; one remains at Magnolia Plantation and another at Melrose. Both of these have pointed bows, a Euro-African twist on the Native American form which was punt-ended. The Melrose specimen has a flat bottom and nearly vertical gunwales. A buried example of an identical form was found near Shreveport. These may reflect an Anglo-American style found primarily in the Red River region. Cypress board skiffs (rowboats) and bateaus (paddle boats) dominated river craft until metal and fiberglass boats replaced them in the 1960s. A school boat operated to carry children to school on the river. These boats, once common in Louisiana, were the predecessors of modern school buses. The Willow Bend Ferry, designed to carry children across to the St. Matthew's school, was controversial and finally was shifted downstream to appease local landholders. At that point, the

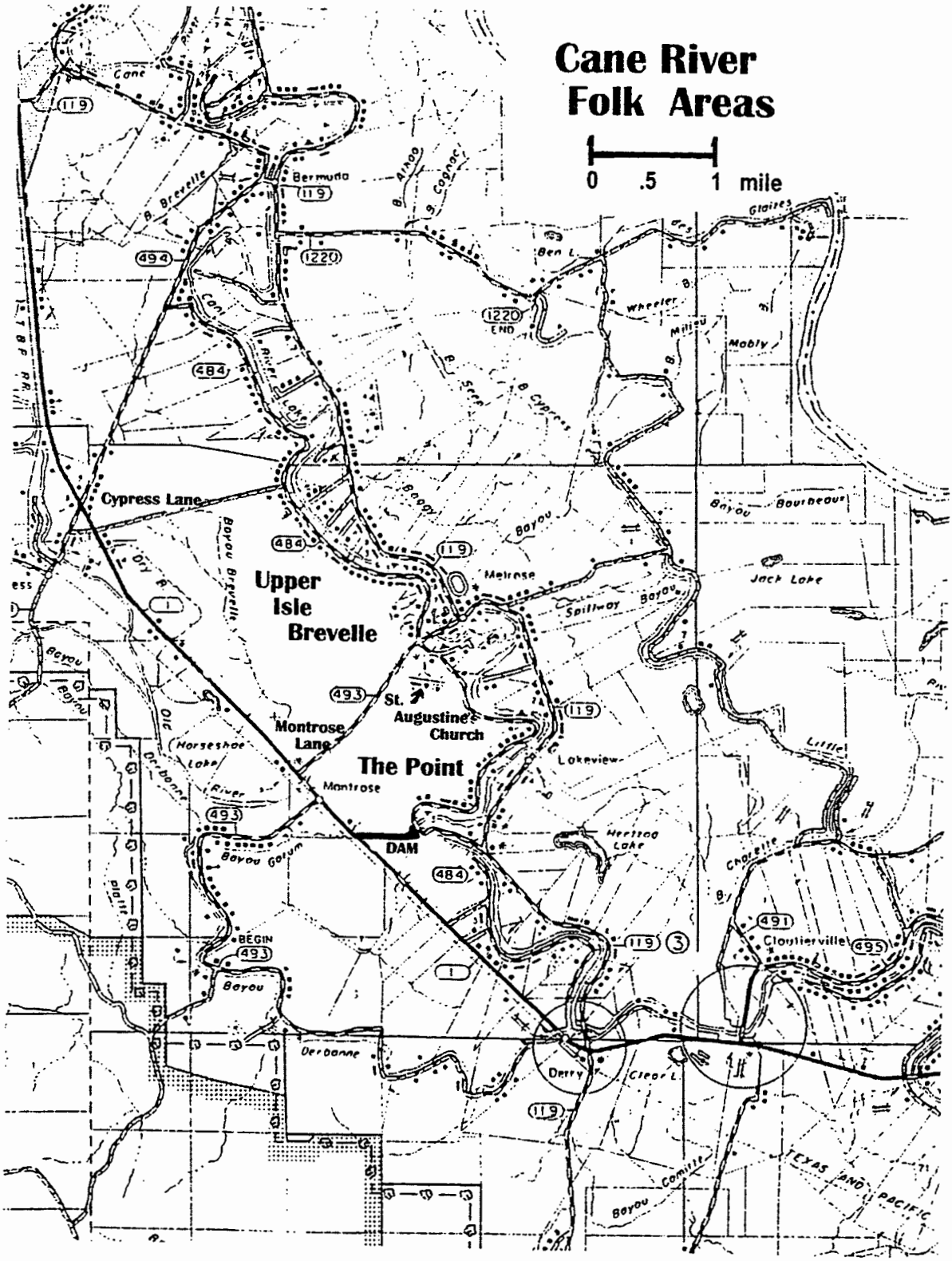
children could walk to school.

The roads have tended to hug the "fronts," near the crest of the natural levees. These were sandier, and until roads were surfaced with gravel, or blacktop today, that well drained area was easier to travel. Roads sometimes cut across the necks of long bends; short cuts overland, these may reflect older portages. The best example was the road (now part of La. Hwy. 484) across the bend south of St. Augustine Church - it clearly linked the Metoyer family to the Church and was well established by at least the time of the Civil War. Eventually, "lanes" were cut which hooked the settlements on Old River and Little River together with the Cane River. These were well established, and two major roads, Montrose Lane and Cypress Lane, remain in daily use.

As mechanized farming increased, other access routes, most of which ran along "turn rows" from front to back, have been plowed across. These "little roads" or lanes often were the connection to the rows of tenant houses, both shotguns and cabins, which disappeared as labor shifted from people to machines. These houses have mostly been demolished or replaced by trailers. People recall staying with relatives during Holy Week so they would not miss Mass because the roads were sometimes impassable in wet weather.

Horses have always been important on Cane River and, as the twentieth century dawned, so were mules. Horses were the status mode of transportation, and having one's own horse or pony was an important thing. The primary function of the ferries was to get horses and mules and wagons and buggies back and forth across the river.

These ferries formerly existed at Bermuda, at LaCaze Point, at Willow Bend, at Melrose, and further down the "point" at the crossing to Lakeview Plantation; just above the present-day dam was located 24-Mile Ferry (so-called because it was 24 miles by river from the Natchitoches

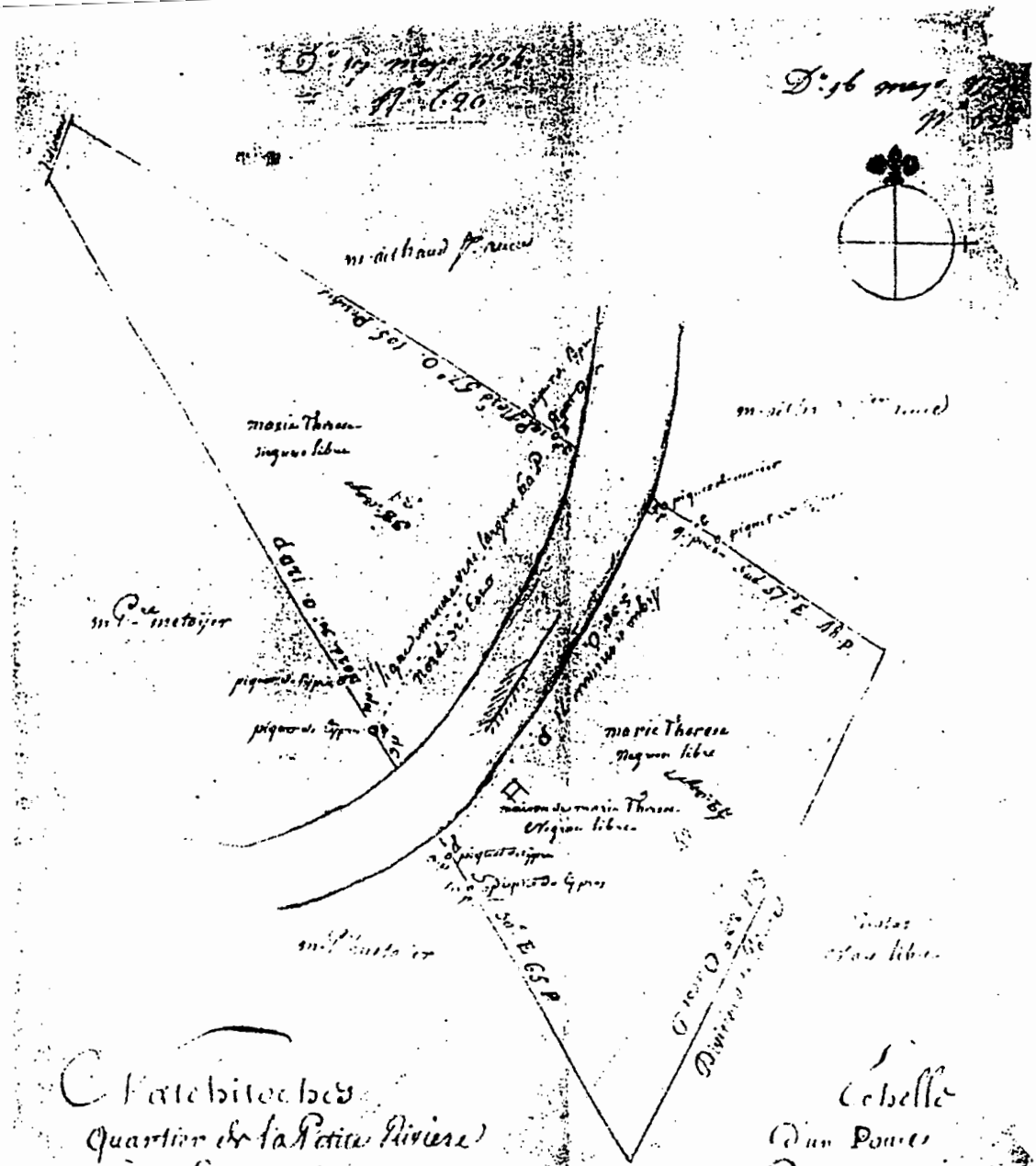

Cane River
Folk Areas
0 .5 1 mile
Cypress Lane
Upper
Isle
Brevelle
Montrose
Lane
St.
Augustine's
Church
The Point
Montrose
DAM
Melrose
Lakeview
Jack Lake
Mobly
Cloutierville
Derry
BEGIN
Bermuda
Cane
Bayou Brevelle
Bayou Gorum
Horseshoe Lake
Old Derbanne River
Derbanne
Bayou Bourbeaux
Little
Chorelle
Spillway
Comite
TEXAS AND PACIFIC

Parish Courthouse). That ferry was operating by at least the time of the Civil War. In the early twentieth century, these ferries were still "sold" on the courthouse steps at Natchitoches. They continued to function until they were replaced by bridges.

The roads along the crest of the natural levees seem to have been used since at least Spanish colonial times. On the east bank, La. Highway 119 replaced the old road which fronted and followed Cane River. Some people refer to the long strips of Louisiana 119 that cut across the backswamp as the "Huey P. Long road," and local lore holds it was built by the Long administration to help planters through the Great Depression, the state purchasing the lowlands for the right-of-way.

Certainly, the bridges, like most bridges in Louisiana, were improved in the Long-Allen administration era.

The island side of Cane River has more nearly preserved its old settlement pattern, while the road shift on the east bank has left homes isolated, next to the river, connected by access roads.



Je Certifie avoir Mesuré au Jardin et en Pre. cultivé par
Etienne negresse libre et en Remuage des voisins limitr
dans Terres figurés comme sur Plan cy Dessus ; lequelle Te
Situés a environs Dudit lieu de Legrise en Demandant Pr
Valebiteches le 10. Janvier 1793.
Marie Gaspart Arpent. Cadas

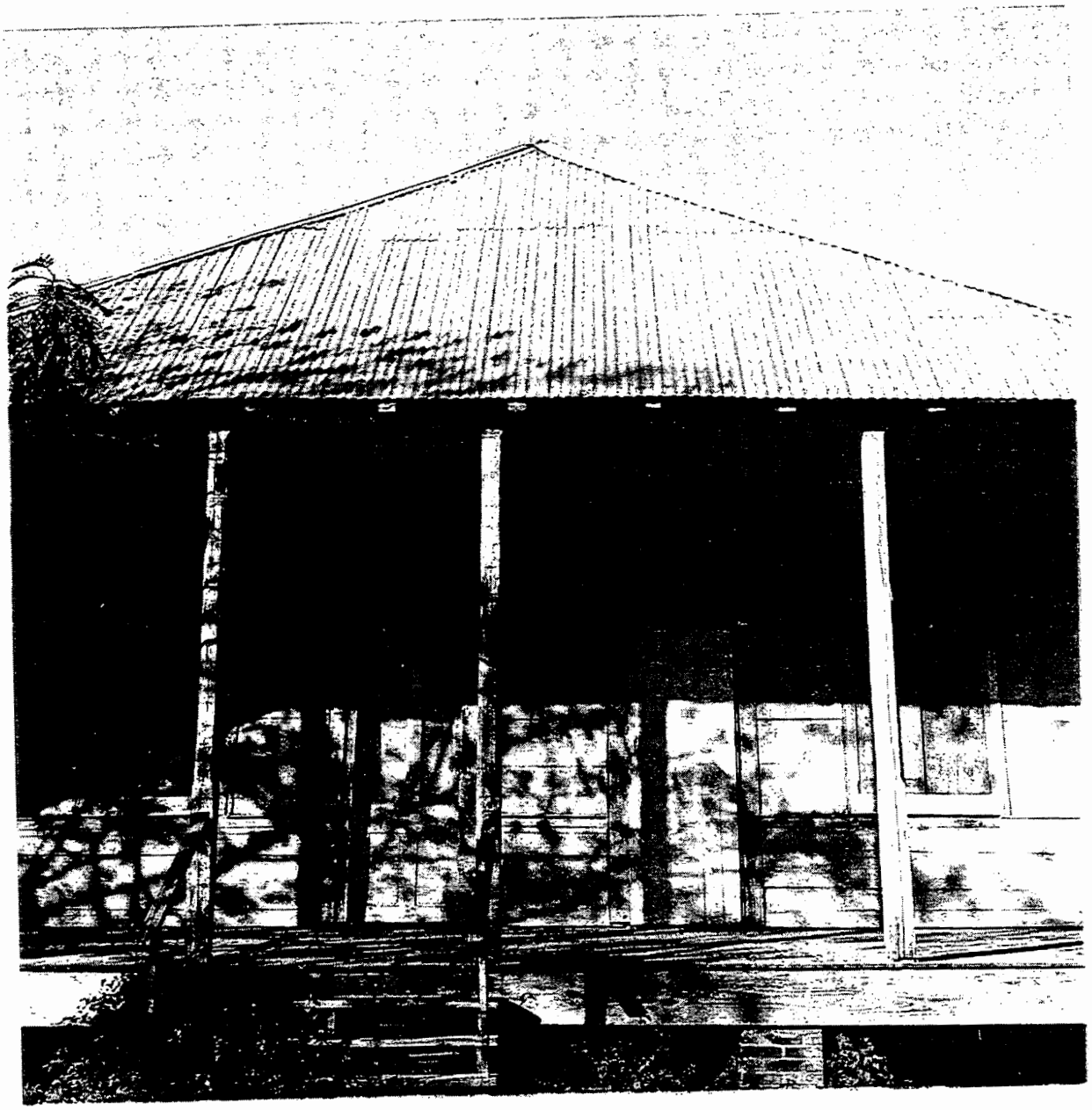


Figure 20: Marie Thérèze Coin-Coin's house.

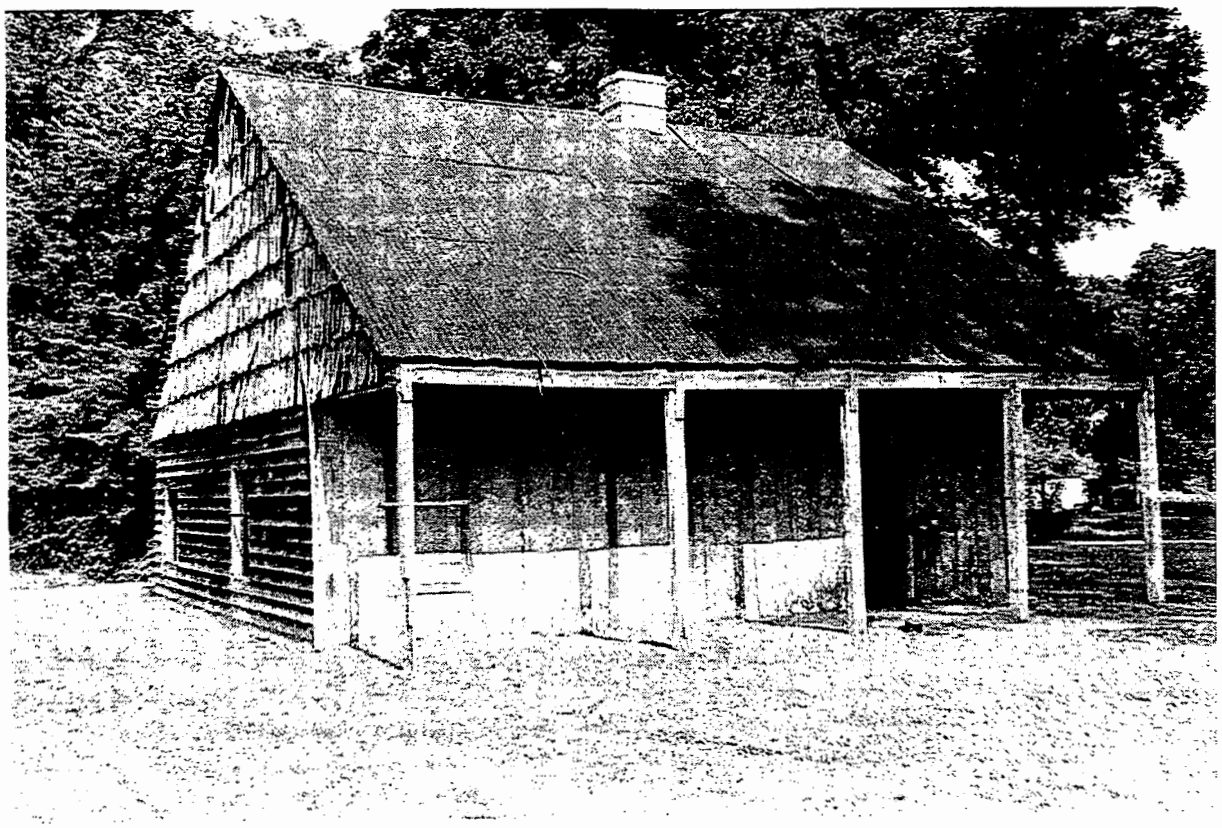


Figure 21: The Badin-Roque House.



Figure 22: The Rachal House.

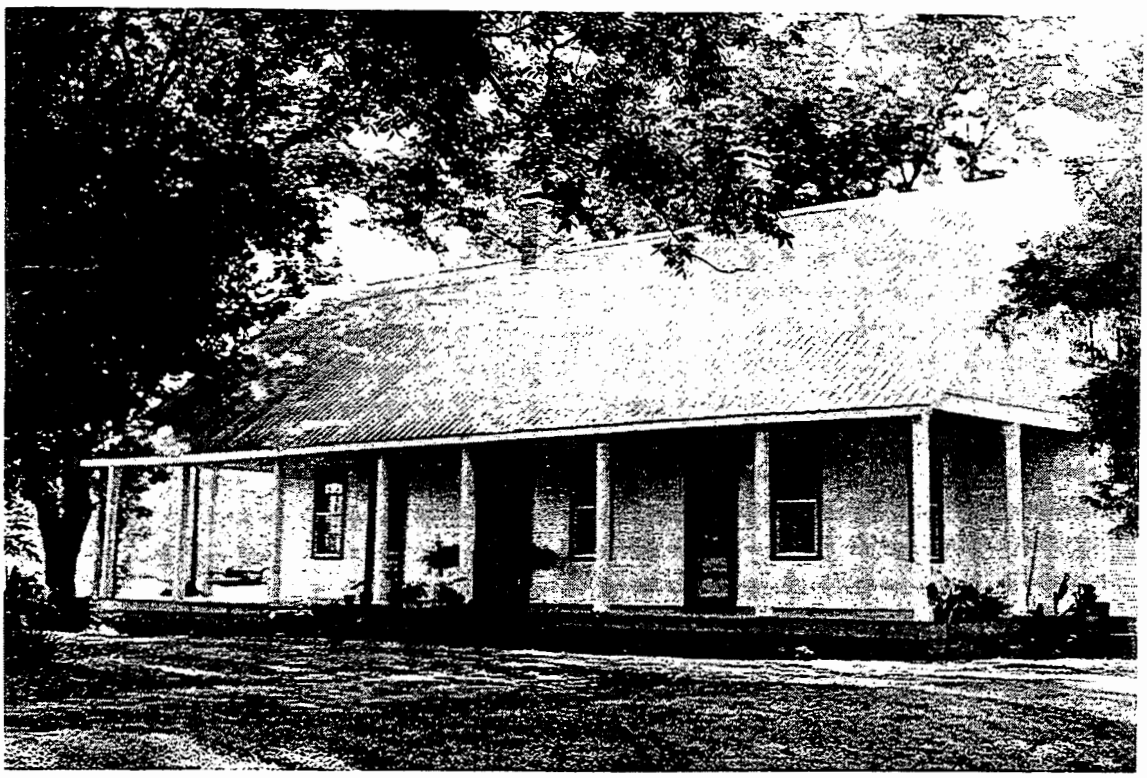


Figure 23: The Jones House.

Houses

As early as the 1780s, the Spanish maps show "big" houses on Cane River. Raised West Indian style houses are neatly shown, carefully denoting one or two chimneys - like a product of Spanish taxation.

Carol Wells's thesis (1973) has carefully discussed the evolution of colonial houses in Natchitoches, noting post-in-the-ground (*poteau en terre*) construction as the earliest and then post-on-sills, *bousillage*-filled, half-timbered construction.

The Creole architectural history still stands on Isle Brevelle and on the point above Bayou Brevelle where Marie Thérèze Coin-Coin's property map shows her house. A raised cottage, *sur selles*, sits exactly there where P. Maes mapped it in 1794 (Figure 20). As one moves south along the river, there are other structures that mark the historical development of Creole architecture in Louisiana - one of them, the Badin-Roque house being the only post-in-the-ground house remaining in Louisiana (Figure 21).

Creoles continue to live in some of these older houses. Dr. Tony Rachal has restored his ancestral home (Figure 22). Henry Earl Metoyer, a resident of Chicago, now owns Marie Thérèze Coin-Coin's house and hopes he can preserve it. Patrick Jones and his family have successfully renovated and are living in the Lewis Jones house (Figure 23). A non-Creole has maintained the Carroll Jones house (Roubieu Plantation), a two-story West Indian cottage, and the Association for the Preservation of Historic Natchitoches now owns the unique architectural complex at Melrose Plantation. Other, less well known, Creole structures are in the community, and although many have been lost, these buildings serve as constant reminders of the past - visible remnants of that heritage.

People talk about them, worry about them. The Aubin-Roque House, supposedly built by an ex-slave, Pacale, and moved to Natchitoches in the 1970s by a local politician-businessman turned tourism promoter, stirred deep emotions. When, later, the *bousillage* kitchen from Badin-Roque followed - moved by a professor turned entrepreneurial tourism developer, the community responded by starting its own preservation group, the St. Augustine Historical Society. In 1996, the professor deeded the kitchen back to the St. Augustine Historical Society, and it was moved back to Badin-Roque. The badly "restored" Roque House remains in Natchitoches - a daily reminder to the Creole population of non-Creole exploitation of their traditional resources. In spite of Creole efforts to accommodate their present and their past, preservationists' efforts remind them of their losses. Mrs. Cammie Henry, the *doyenne* of Melrose Plantation in the 1920s and 30s, surrounded herself with writers, artists and folklorists. Not only had the Henry family acquired the Hypolite Hertzog land - which he acquired from the Metoyers - but they had acquired some of the finest examples of Creole architecture on the river, Louis Metoyer's Yucca Plantation (its earliest known name). It still remains the largest block of land alienated from the 18,000 acres the descendants of Marie Thérèze Coin-Coin acquired. The worst thing is the impression left by that. Namely, that the Creoles were landless, powerless, dispossessed people, living marginally on their pitifully small holdings. In *Children of Strangers*, Lyle Saxon lamented the tragedy of their assimilation into black culture. *Children of Strangers* made Melrose famous. He described the region and the people faithfully, but the isolated story of Fammie left the Creoles depicted as a marginal people, a dying culture.

The impact of Melrose intensified with the sale of the property. It was one thing for the Creole community to know that, by one means or another, Mrs. Henry had acquired their

heirlooms to furnish her houses, making Creole heritage her hobby. Some saw her interest as a compliment, but most saw it, at best, as preservation.

The 1970s brought preservation back to the river. The late Dr. Tom Wells purchased the Tauzin-Wells House in Natchitoches and began restoring it to its original 18th-century form. He began buying doors, hinges, and millwork from Creole houses on Cane River. Innocuous as it might seem, it damaged the integrity of Creole structures and had a wider effect. The house of Madame Aubin Roque was abandoned and disintegrating. It was decided in Natchitoches to purchase it and move it to town. The mayor, Robert DeBlieux, hoping to preserve and develop the city's cultural tourism, saw the house as an example of architecture and history. While the effort saved most of the structure, the "restoration" altered the house in serious ways - so much it is hardly recognizable. Still it is preserved. There is little or no history of the house available at its present site, and Creole heritage, as presented in the city, deals primarily with white French culture. So, while the house has been "saved," the Creole community has lost a piece of its classic architecture.

Another such ambivalent situation centered on the removal of the kitchen from the Badin-Roque property. Dr. Lum Ellis, a sociologist, offered the property owner another storage house in return for the kitchen. No money exchanged hands. The small *bousillage* building moved to town, to the riverbank near the Roque House. At that point, the Creoles began to realize their losses were compounding. Ellis, like Mayor DeBlieux, sought to develop cultural tourism as an entrepreneur and used the kitchen as office to schedule guided bus tours of the Cane River area. Knowing what was happening, the Creole community leaders met and decided to form the St. Augustine Historical Society, a group dedicated to the preservation of Creole culture by and for



Figure 24: Zeline Roque and Juliette St. Ville on the kitchen porch at Badin-Roque. (Melrose Collection, Cammie G. Henry Research Center, NSU)

Creoles. It has continued to meet for nearly 25 years. The St. Augustine Historical Society purchased the historic Badin-Roque House (sans kitchen) and began attempting to preserve it. A grant from the Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation paid for restoration and archaeology at the house. Again, the restoration severely altered the property, but intervention by federal and state officials saved the integrity of the house.

Creole elders felt they should not have had to have outsiders working on the house. One very articulate lady pointed out that the archaeology cost enough to build a new roof! Another elderly man stated he had enough cypress in his woods to re-shingle the house! In 1995, the house had to be re-roofed, with another grant from the State Office of Historic Preservation. This time a community carpenter did the work. Efforts to move the kitchen back to the site were realized in 1996, when Dr. Lum Ellis gave the title to the building to the St. Augustine Historical Society (Figure 24).

In 1995, the Badin-Roque House was added to the tour of historic properties on Cane River, and in 1996, it will be joined by Patrick Jones's home. Gradually, the Creole community hopes to have its own tour. A prototype for that was developed in the summer of 1995 under a grant from the National Center for Preservation Technology and Training as part of Northwestern State University's Heritage Area Workshop. Terrel Delphin, Marie Roque, Lair LaCour, Janet Colson, and Mickey Moran were active participants. They picked a number of properties important to the history of Isle Brevelle: Marie Thérèze Coin-Coin's house, the Carroll Jones House, the site of the old hospital, Roque Brothers' Store, the site of Madame Aubin Roque's house, the Clara Jones and Herman Christophe houses, the Friendly Place or Wood's Hall, the Badin-Roque House, St. Augustine Church and cemetery, the site of Augustin Metoyer's house,

Patrick Jones's home (originally Lewis Jones's house), 24-Mile Ferry crossing, the Balthazar Log Cabin, Balthazar stables and racetrack. On Highway 119 going north, they pointed out the site of the Green Derby and racetrack, Melrose Plantation house complex, the Alfred Llorens house, Kirkland's Friendly Escape (now razed), and Mrs. Bernadine Delphin's home.

All these properties reflect community history and that makes them very important for preservation. Fortunately, only one house, Badin-Roque, is not occupied. History for the community instead of about the community is a new, but popular, concept for the Creoles.

Any number of older Creole houses have been lost on Isle Brevelle. The old hospital, Madame Aubin's house, the old Chelette house, the old Landry Dupree house, the old Chevalier house, the old Lewis Jones store, the old church hall, and others are remembered well but are gone. Fire seems to have gotten many older structures - a real problem in an area where wood is the dominant architectural fabric. Many of these structures were lost by the 1930s, fire being the most common explanation for their losses.

Some houses have been remodeled and "hide" older houses inside them. Carroll Balthazar points out that his bungalow covers their old home. His mother, Mrs. Cora Balthazar, preserved her "outside" kitchen behind the house. Shine Delphin's house has been re-roofed, so it looks "new." Still, it has an outside ladder instead of a stair, a colonial trait.

A serious folk-house-type study (1980s) by Dr. George A. Stokes of Northwestern State University notes that fully 80% of the houses at Isle Brevelle are in French-Creole styles. French carpenter's marks are still closely visible on the Balthazar house.

All these Creole characteristics daily remind the people they are home and that there is still a Creole place. One lady recalled her father telling her as a child in California that there was no

better place than Cane River.

Somehow, with no real plan, the people on the island, along the river, up Bayou Derbonne, along Little River into the towns and cities have preserved their home. Dr. Rachal saved the Rachal house; Patrick and Lita Jones saved the Lewis Jones house; Mrs. Bernadine Delphin saved the furnishings of Suzanne Metoyer; Carroll Balthazar saved his family home; his children have kept after him not to demolish the old log cabin. Thomas Delphin is working to save their old cabin, once a Melrose house. The Roque family has kept their old store. Time and tragedy erode the material culture, but the people have kept it going. At least a dozen traditional structures have survived from the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. With the exception of the Badin-Roque house, there has been no outside involvement in any house maintenance or preservation. People have done most of the work themselves; their incentive comes from mainly within the community.

Agriculture and Cattle

Agricultural practices along Isle Brevelle echoed those of the larger region. Creoles planted cotton, corn, small patches of sugar cane and in later years, soybeans and pecans.

There was variation in the size and quality of the Creole landholdings, and some families have had more success farming than others. In hard times, people would rent land to their more successful neighbors and kinsmen; for example, a widow with children but no one home to farm would rent. Farming generally was a man's responsibility; although women were knowledgeable and capable of managing their own lands, men usually did the farming. People farmed with just family members to serve as labor, but most with sufficient land had people who lived on the land and who farmed for them. Most of these tenant farmers were "half hands" and worked for half of the crop they produced. In almost all cases these half hands were Blacks. Tenant families usually occupied houses furnished by the farmer, and these generally seem to have stretched towards the "back," usually connected to the main roads (LA-484 or LA-119) by a "turn row." The Black population on Cane River has diminished tremendously since the end of tenancy. Creoles point out that, where they had several houses full of people on their land, most had none or only one or two houses with older folks left. Laborers today are hired seasonally or as "day labor" by the hour, by the day (8-10 hours). Families tended to move out of the rural South, or at least into its neighboring towns as agriculture shifted economically.

Stores were scattered along the roads and served the families on the land. Mills (1977) has pointed out that there were sizable stores on Isle Brevelle - older Creoles have pointed out that the earlier stores were "on the Point" - at early times. Today only one original store building remains, Roque Brothers, along LA-484. People could, however, walk to the stores, and there

were more in the past when transportation was more limited.

Creole families sometimes did their own labor - that is, they "put in" a crop by themselves. They plowed, planted, hoed out grass and weeds, fertilized and/or poisoned the crop, and then "pulled" the corn or picked the cotton. All this involved tremendous amounts of hand labor, and men, women and children worked in the fields. Only smaller holdings were such "family" farms, but some Creoles did work on adjacent plantations. Creole men were overseers on several plantations, and the "quarters" were divided into "French" and Black areas, clearly recognizing the differences in the population. Overseers usually lived apart from labor, sometimes on their own lands.

Creole farmers, like their non-Creole planter neighbors, seem to have been more or less successful. Most, however, struggled to hold their properties together.

There was a technological shift from oxen and mules to tractors and then, by the late 1940s, mechanized farming replaced, increasingly, the mules and hand labor. The early use of slaves is regretted, but acknowledged by Creoles; like their white neighbors, their proprietorship of land, resources, and humans is part of their history. The shifting relationships between slaves and masters among the Creoles has been documented (Mills 1977). The sequence of crops along Cane River also is historically well known. Creole tradition holds that their ancestress, Marie Thérèze Coin-Coin, introduced indigo to the region, while the historian Gary Mills (1977) says he can only document her extensive production of tobacco in the 1780s; local Creoles see her as one of the earliest planters on the river and note that she was a leader - as were her children - in shifting from the Indian trade, the trade in horses, cattle and deerskins, in the colonial period. Tobacco from the region was highly regarded in the French colonial period; it was replaced by



Figure 25: King Cotton has been an important cash crop in the community for nearly two centuries.

commercial production of indigo and that yielded to cotton (Figure 25). In the Spanish period, maps show the *indigoteries,* or processing plants, scattered along the plantations of the Côte Joyeuse, north of Marie Thérèze Coin-Coin. Her children would literally open the land on Isle Brevelle to farming and cattle production. By 1807, the Creole "small plantations" combined to nearly 18,000 acres and were already well established, with their church, on the river.

At several points, the economics of cotton have literally driven people into periodic tenancy or off the land entirely. The forced heirship of Louisiana's Napoleonic Code tended to fragment the land into smaller and smaller strips. Some 20-acre strips were so narrow, front to back, they could not be effectively farmed with tractors; mules had had no problem turning to plow!

In the 1930s and 1940s, during the Great Depression, Creoles left home and headed to the cities or towns. Successful Creoles established "off the river" would help broker jobs for others moving to their areas. They settled around Catholic churches and formed ethnic enclaves of their own (Woods 1972). In some cases a man would move to a city and work, sending financial aid home to parents and/or siblings, often paying taxes so they would hold on to their land. Renting the land to "big" farmers was also a way to hold land when a family could not afford to farm it themselves.

Radical changes in some areas took place by the 1940-50 period. Large areas of land were planted in pecan trees, and commercial production of pecans changed the landscape. Creole farmers seem not to have given over too much of their land to the crop, but several small groves were planted. Planting isolated pecan trees was an old practice on Isle Brevelle - one was planted in 1918 by Landry Dupree's family to commemorate World War I; it stands today on his son's

land. Still, pecan groves do not seem to have become as important to Creoles as they were on non-Creole plantations at Melrose or at Chopin.

Modern mechanized farming clearly dates to the 1940s, and it has intensified since the 1950s. Many Creoles lease their lands today, and one Creole farmer, Emory Jones, is farming nearly 6000 acres. Such mechanized farming requires more land to make it economically profitable.

In the 1970s, soybeans brought new emphasis to land clearing, and drainage took place in the backswamps; the wet "stiffer" clay soils were put into production. As the bean market declined, many of these cleared areas have become pasture or else have begun to re-forest themselves.

The 1990s have seen bumper cotton crops, but also a marginal crop, and 1996 saw vast areas of corn. Corn poses some economic difficulties because of costs incurred in drying the crop. However, the land seems productive.

Cotton gins have virtually disappeared along Cane River. One after another has closed. Large farms now truck their crop to Three League Gin Co. at Powhattan, Louisiana, north of Natchitoches - over twenty to thirty miles away. The Roque Farms had a gin on Isle Brevelle, now partially razed; Melrose Plantation had a gin, so did Lakeview Plantation and, earlier, Magnolia Plantation. The Lambre, Lawton, and McNealy families had gins at Bermuda. These nearby gins have all closed. The Cedar Grove Gin on LA-119 south of Natchitoches - also called the Cane River Gin Company - began selling equipment in 1996, and it is rumored it, too, will soon close. The loss of gins seems to correlate with changing technology - especially improved transportation.

In the old days, cotton was picked by hand. Pickers pulled a long sack made of unbleached domestic, *Lowell*, which was slung by a strap over the shoulder. In the 1960s, a few cotton pickers could still be seen, but it was a rare sight. When the sacks were full, they were taken to a hanging scale and weighed. Pickers were paid by the pound. Cotton was put into wagons, or sometimes dumped into cotton houses - little frame, slatted houses which were placed around the fields; these little cotton houses were emptied into wagons which first mules, then later tractors or trucks, pulled to the gin.

When mechanical pickers were introduced, they dumped into large metal wagons. These held tons of cotton, to be ginned and baled into bales of, normally, 350 pounds. In the days of handpicking, a really good picker could pick 200 pounds of cotton in a workday. Mechanical pickers far outstripped that. There are problems though: in wet weather hand pickers could sometimes work where the machine could not.

Herbicides have all but eliminated the hoe gangs, too. However, Black hoe gangs are occasionally working in the fields again. Day laborers, they are "hauled" from nearby Natchez or Natchitoches, Louisiana. Hoes were used to thin the young new cotton and then to keep the grass and weeds at bay. Gangs worked the fields with breaks for lunch. There were water boys who carried water to the workers, and all these workers were paid, usually by the day.

Overseers were responsible for the work on the plantations, coordinating the necessary day-to-day tasks of farming with the owners. Creoles were sought as overseers. They were good farmers, better educated and, above all, had a fierce work ethic. Since some white plantation owners were, at best, "shade tree" farmers, the profits and losses on many local plantations depended on the skill and acumen of Creole overseers.

Before mechanization, the day began early. The plantation bell regulated the day. It was rung at dawn, midday, and dusk. Mules were harnessed "by starlight" and were in the fields by the bell's first ring. The owner or the overseer regulated and kept up with production.

Once cotton came in, it was plowing - planting - picking - and ginning. A regular year began with the cotton planted before the end of May, and usually the crop was "in" by October. Trips to the cotton buyer with samples pulled from the baled cotton followed ginning, and then the cotton was sold.

Boll weevils, cotton boll worms, and other insects plague cotton, especially in wetter years. In early days, cotton poison was spread by a person riding a mule, shaking the "dust" - usually an arsenic - onto the cotton. More recently, it is applied by a sprayer rig with a tractor, or it is sprayed by professional crop dusters. Oldtimers remember the "Arsenic Green" well; it gave them respite from the weevils. Today, as in the past, one can find the farmers in the middle of their "patch," checking for bugs. The U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Soil Conservation Service regularly work with Creole farmers. Many years the Creole farmers bring in the first bale - a special event in cotton country.

Creoles like the late Lewis "Sonny" Jones and Mrs. Gloria Sers Jones served not only their community but, by working on commissions and boards regulating agricultural policies, have served both Louisiana and the nation. Terrel Delphin now serves as the Assistant Commissioner of Agriculture in Baton Rouge and is responsible for the whole state of Louisiana. "Boo" Carroll Balthazar taught agriculture in the public schools for many years and continues to farm his own lands. These public service connections remind one of the old Creoles' talk about the "helping hand" - volunteers who helped someone roof a barn or put in a crop! Public service - community

responsibility - seems part of Creole life.

Sugar cane was grown in small patches for home consumption or, at least, local sales. Mrs. Lair LaCour recalls her father made *sirop* and a by-product she called "shinny," made from the fermented "skimmings" off the cooked cane juice. This is the lineal descendant of the colonial rum called *taffia*. The cane was usually ready by the first frost, and people would take it to the grinder. Today nobody makes syrup at Isle Brevelle, but at Sieper or Clifton syrup is still made every autumn; however, recently the sugar cane was purchased from a plantation near LeCompte. That cane is harder, yields less sugar than the traditional cane grown by farmers. Called "Ribbon Cane," it was sweeter and easier to cook according to Corinne Tyler and Ana Neal. Stories about people agreeing to do the syrup making, even brothers planting their cane together, suggest that, as at Clifton, syrup making was a family affair on Cane River - at least several adults were involved in it. It has never been a real commercialized product anywhere along the river.

Mrs. Blanche Sers recalled taking corn to an adjacent plantation to have it ground into meal, and mills existed on the island. Nobody has recalled pounding it "Indian style" in the *pilon*. That implement had a variety of uses, so it could have been used for *filé* or rice as well as corn.

When mules provided most of the extra-human power, corn was grown to feed horses, mules, as well as cattle and hogs. Such feed corn was harder than the sweet corn ground for meal or human consumption. Still, every household had a corn crib. Whiskey making was usually done in the hills, but stills have been identified at Hertzog Lake! Corn was "lyed" to make *masa* or dough for *tamales*, long a traditional food. Today, corn is much more a market crop and vies with cotton or beans for crop land. Literally thousands of acres are in corn in 1996. The traditional corn crib is virtually unknown.

Mechanized equipment ranges from a 1940s tractor that once belonged to Amedee Metoyer, now owned by his son-in-law, Isaac Dupree, to multi-row cultivators, cotton pickers, and tractors (now air conditioned!). "Pole barns" are built of creosote-treated pine poles and metal sheeting to accommodate the pickers, "high boys," or sprayers, and other equipment. Only a few older frame barns are seen on Isle Brevelle today.

Landowners resist changes by the younger farmers. Mrs. Marie Roque, for example, has pointed out that many of the turn rows are now cultivated, and it makes it very difficult to have access from the "front" to the "back."

These "shoestring" land divisions, dating back to the colonial practice of giving everyone access to batture, natural levee, and back swamp, are still measured, at least in the minds of some elders, in *arpents*, that French measure being more compatible with both forced heirship and the old front-back rules than the squared sections of the American township and range system.

According to Mills (1977), Marie Thérèze Coin-Coin maintained a *vacherie*, or ranch, on Old River with a man to care for her cattle. She was not alone, and the pattern was well established before the Americans ever saw the region.

Open-range livestock were confined to the deep backswamps and the hills west of Old River and Bayou Derbonne - the latter area now part of the Red Dirt area of Kisatchie National Forest. Fenced pastures held most livestock, usually just behind the fields nearer the natural levee crests. Cattle were moved from these pastures to the swamps in deep winter where the tree tops covered with Spanish moss could be cut down to augment grazing - as John Colson has put it, "to keep the cattle fat." Improved pasture has virtually replaced these practices.

Flooding posed special problems for cattlemen. The cattle had to be moved to the hills.

Early on, they were herded and driven to the hills. Sometimes the cowboys fell from their horses and drowned during such activities, a real danger that complicated the normal, expected risks of working cattle. Once the cattle were in the hills, the men sometimes stayed with them, camping in the woods to guard the herds.

Catch pens are still strategically placed along the roads, but near the pastures. Emory Jones maintains two large pens at Highway 484, another on Hwy.-119. Other pens are scattered along the edge of the backswamp along Bayou Brevelle.

Fences were common everywhere in the old days, and the roads, like Highway 484, were more like fenced-off lanes. Cattle were moved by men on horseback. Isaac Dupree points out that when fences began to be removed and people began to want open lawns, the herding was more complicated and that the less often cattle were moved by driving them , the less easily that could be done. Today, most cattle are moved by truck.

Earlier, when horses were more common than other vehicles, wagons and buggies were common. As late as the 1920s and 1930s, children were given ponies to ride. Mrs. Bernadine Conant Delphin's pony was famous. All the older Creoles recall her riding her pony to St. Joseph's School. They would carry the pony across on the ferry. She recalls riding the little horse to Melrose where she could visit with Mrs. Cammie Henry's daughter. Mrs. Lair LaCour remembers her father carrying meat to sell at Montrose mill town and along the road before there was refrigeration. He would kill a hog and a beef which he butchered and sold each week. He went along in a buggy with a box containing the cuts of meat. Wagons carried people, cotton, plows, everything. People went for wagon rides, especially groups of young people going to the house dances.

Open-range stock are not currently permitted. Hog pens and even calf pens are located at the edge of the river where there is available water. These are basically feed lots, and the animals are kept there to fatten for market or butchering. The owners feed them daily. One oldtimer, the late Tillman Chelette, recalled open-range hogs, "They were for the little men; the big men stole them." Earmarks were used to distinguish ownership of hogs and cattle, but cattle were always branded. People had their own brands, and some inherited their parents' or in-laws' brands. In the 1960s, the Natchitoches Parish Cattlemen's Association invited Creole cattlemen to join. Today, the president of that organization is Mike Roque, a local Creole cattleman and banker.

While many people raised cattle and horses, fewer raised hogs and that was mainly for home consumption. One Creole lady preferred pork that was not "woods hog," stating the wild hogs had a "strong taste." In a culture whose roots were colonial French and Spanish, cattle and horses were status animals. Men were extremely fond of their horses and horse racing a widespread recreation on Cane River. The Balthazar family down the "Point" of Isle Brevelle has long been famous for training race horses and maintain a stable for race horses. A training track, with starting gates, is still in use on Isle Brevelle. It circles a plowed field and is identifiable only be the gates, usually set off to the side, and the visible dirt track.

There have been several "recreational" tracks on Cane River. There was one near the dam, on the point. Once called 'Nonc Pep's track, it is remembered by octogenarians as a colorful "fly-away" track where riders would sometimes divert horses into the woods, losing the race. "That's when the fights began!"

Other tracks were at Melrose, across from the Metoyer Brothers' bar, at the Green Derby near Lakeview Plantation, and at Kirkland's near Melrose. Others existed at Magnolia Plantation

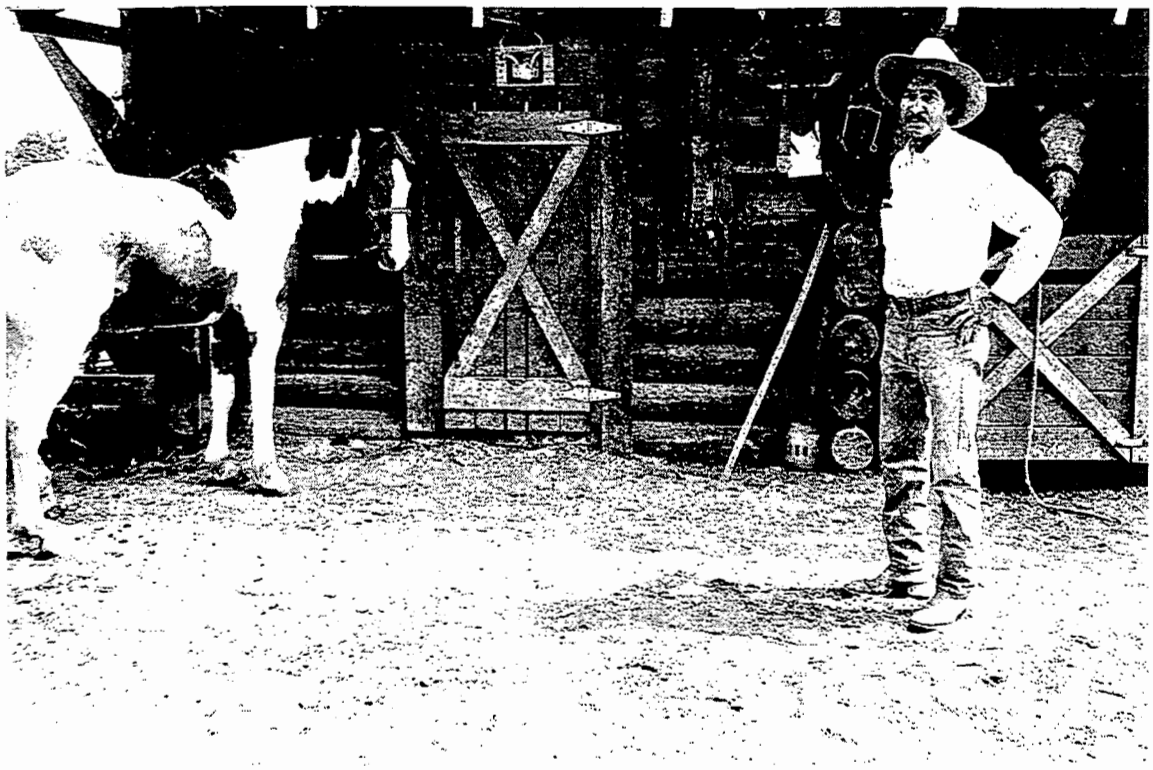


Figure 26: "Cowboying" is a continuing tradition on the river.

and at Derry. Today there are no active tracks on Cane River. Still the track at Melrose was active throughout the 1960s, and people came from other areas to race there. Unofficial betting took place at all these races, but they were more recreational than for gambling. Gambling was not considered a moral problem although it did engender conflict at times.

The earlier races began "by mutual consent," that is, there were no starting gates, and when the horses were considered lined up by all the riders, they began the race (Personal communication: Mrs. Ambrose Hertzog, Sr. 1996). Races were attended by Creoles and non-Creole residents alike. Sometimes as many as 200-300 people might attend a race. By the 1960s, some owners of race horses came from miles away to race at Melrose. Before Louisiana had legal racetracks, these unofficial tracks were very popular. The Cane River region had more of these than were to be found in almost any part of Louisiana.

Cattle were, and are, worked by "cowboys" (Figure 26). Isaac Dupree is famous across the area for his skills with cattle. Retired now, he only works cattle periodically, but his son keeps the tradition going.

Cattle are bought, branded and pastured. People feed them out and then sell them or some, like Emory Jones and Mike Roque, actually maintain herds and sell their "increase." Between vaccination, castration, branding, de-horning, and feeding, the cattlemen mend fences, work on stock pens and tend their horses. Branding irons have become part of Creole patrimony: Isaac Dupree still uses his father-in-law's, Amedee Metoyer's brand. Brands have been registered for generations.

Cattle pens were maintained on all the "big" plantations: Melrose, Starlight, and Magnolia. Creole cowboys worked cattle on most of the plantations as well as maintaining their own hands.

Large cattle pens exist at several points along Cane River, and at least two are located along LA-119. Emory Jones keeps two pens on the "front" and has a pen on the "back." Isaac Dupree keeps a pen up on his place; Mike Roque also has such a pen and is chairman of the Cattlemen's Association in the parish. The Melrose Plantation pen sits at the edge of Creole lands. Isaac Dupree notes the presence of selected grazing lands in the "hills," some of which have generated pens. These were areas where people once moved herds for refuge during floods or where timberlands have been converted into pasturage.

Dipping vats filled with water and creosote were used to protect cattle from ticks and were once scattered along the Creole and adjacent farm lands. Today cattle are sprayed periodically for ticks and other insect pests. It is still part of "cowboy" work.

Much of the work with cattle is still done with horses and, as in the past, there is much pride in horsemanship. While racing has declined, recreational horsemanship has been maintained. The late Tillman Chelette rode his horse until he was 100 years old! Mrs. Bernadine Conant Delphin likes to recall the pony her father gave her - older ladies in the Creole community all reminisce about "Bernadine's pony." The most recent recreational use of the horse is the riding club. Creoles in southwest Louisiana organized these "clubs" first. People would get together, make a trail ride of several miles, re-group for food, drink and dancing. The clubs journey to south Louisiana to ride with other Creole clubs and are well organized. People dress western style, usually with a sort of "Indian element" - turquoise and silver, beaded hat bands and belts - and ride to make a display.

Creoles explain these riding clubs as a multi-generational way for people to have fun. Some see them as safer than the dance halls and drier than the "halls" as well. Whatever the



Figure 27: After a butchering, pork quarters are hung in the kitchen to drip before being cut and packaged for freezing.

reason, the cult of the horse is powerful in Creole life. The Cane River Riding Club consists of members who pay dues. Some trail rides will involve 70-100 people.

Blacksmiths and farriers are still, for obvious reasons, important people on the river. Adam Sarpy continues in that role, maintaining a long family tradition. Isaac Dupree repairs saddles and other horse gear. Choucouroute and Joe Roque made horsehair ropes and "cow whips" for people. A couple of contemporary Creoles have noted they can braid 8-plait whips although they are not in the cattle business anymore.

This whole preoccupation with horses and cattle seems rooted in the very earliest activities along Red River. Indians, French, Spanish and, later, Anglo-Americans all herded open-range cattle and hogs. Gradually, as "the front" was cultivated, cattle moved to the back lands. The woods were particularly good winter pasture; families even "topped" trees to provide Spanish moss for feed.

Hogs were not widespread at Isle Brevelle although in the past pork was an important foodstuff. Today hogs are grown in pens, usually at the river's edge, where the pigs are fed daily until it is time to butcher them or to sell them.

Traditionally, hogs are killed in the winter; before refrigeration, that was a must. The hogs are killed, gutted and scraped (Figure 27). Virtually the whole animal is consumed. One Creole was the community "butcher," going from house to house selling beef and/or pork from his buggy until well into the 1930s. In those days, one could kill only what could be eaten speedily before it spoiled. Much in the manner of corn cribs, the traditional smokehouse has all but disappeared on the river. Meat was smoked: ham and bacon, sun-dried *tasso*, strips of thick meat, were once major products and are now quite rare. *Gratons* or "cracklings," sausage and boudin are all

important as Creole foods. Refrigeration has changed many of these practices, and the *boucherie* seems less a communal sharing than it once was. Recent medical practices' warnings against the use of "hog lard" in cooking have contributed to a decrease in fat pork consumption in general in recent years. Similarly, "red" *boudin* made from blood is rare.

Hogs' ears are still marked. Cattlemen and hog raisers alike once used the earmarks, but cattlemen mark livestock by notching the ears more and more rarely. Still, the marks are recalled, at least the elements that made them up, e.g. the "Bullet Hole" or hole-in-the-ear.

Still, it is rare for people to gather without discussing beef prices or conditions of their livestock. While women own numbers of cattle, it seems still to be primarily an occupation dominated by the men. Most often, men "work" the cattle for the ladies who own them and the land they are on. They still point out proudly, as in the case of Mrs. Myra Friedman, that cattle were more important to them than cotton.

These traditional occupations, modified many ways by transportation and other technology, seem nonetheless to keep Isle Brevelle rural and doing many very old things.

Creole Folk Crafts and Traditions

The affluence of Creole families brought commercial products to them throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Families have curated fine armoires, tables, clocks, statues, even an early handcrafted cotton gin, not to mention documents and maps.

Still, certain handmade products were made at home, on Cane River and by Creoles. In hard times, say after the Civil War or in the Great Depression, such traditions seem to have been useful. Some things were so integral to activities that they have persisted to this very day.

Many things related to household chores have continued to be used into the present. Others are remembered, but have generally, in the past half century, been replaced with more "modern" technology.

A couple of examples may suffice to illustrate this. The best example is the *pile et pilon*, the cypress or other wood mortar and pestle (see Figure 31, p. 125). Only a handful of people remember these *piles et pilons*. The last one on Isle Brevelle disappeared in the 1970s; it was a standard piece of nostalgia sitting on the gallery of the Badin-Roque House. A fine example is now at Melrose Plantation. Mrs. Rosalie Chevalier Metoyer recalled her mother's set on the "back" gallery of the old family home on Little River. These tools, like much of Creole material culture, seem to have both African and southeastern Native American roots. Widespread in West Indian Creole communities, these articles were once ubiquitous in rural French households in Louisiana. Isle Brevelle and Cane River were not exceptions. *Piles et pilons* were replaced by the handmill or by larger commercial gristmills. Once used to pound corn, rice, sassafras or, rarely, cayenne pepper, these tools symbolized Creole culture. Today they are not seen, even in barns or storerooms.

Similarly, the *tarabi*, an Arabic tool introduced to the New World by the Spanish, spread to the Native Americans in Louisiana. It became a hallmark of French Creole horse culture and was used to spin horsehair into rope. Dr. William Knipmeyer photographed a fine example at the Badin-Roque House on Isle Brevelle in the 1950s and showed a horsehair rope hanging there in another photograph made at the same time. Attempts to elicit information about the *tarabi*'s use or to find someone to make one in the 1970s failed. One older man, called by his *ti' nom*, Choucouroute, made a variety of things: horse-hair rope, *tarabi* for that task, and other things. One elder recalled the *tarabi*, but interpreted the photograph as a "noise-maker," a "clacker" used to make noise on Halloween or Christmas. This may reflect a child's reinterpretation of the tool as a toy (Interviews with Mose Beaudion 1975 and Wood Antee 1978).

Funnels for stuffing sausages and *boudin* were cut from gourds. Some oldtimers can still find and show their "stuffing" tools. Still, like the other kitchen crafts, these have been replaced by mass-produced tools.

Mrs. Lair LaCour recalls the old folks who lived in the Badin-Roque House had little wooden beds, homemade, in the house when she visited there as a child. A related art was recalled by Mrs. Mary Rachal and Mrs. Rosalie Chevalier Metoyer. They remember the mattresses made of dried corn shucks and also of Spanish Moss. The "black" or inner fiber of the Spanish moss made the best mattresses. Made by the women, the mattresses were taken out, cleaned, and "fluffed" each spring. Young girls were assigned that task. Elders recall pulling the moss each spring to make more comfortable mattresses. The best mattresses were made of goose down - feather beds. These, too, were made by women in the family, and down was saved for them. Feather beds were taken out and "aired" in the sunshine periodically. These traditions

persisted until quite late in the 1930s and even the 1940s. Today modern commercial products have practically replaced the traditional forms.

Mrs. Lair LaCour recalls the hanging cradle, *eine brame* in Creole French. Evidently, there were two forms of this cradle. One, described by an ethnomusicologist visiting Melrose, was described as a rectangular frame covered with a "sheep skin. (Scarborough 1925). This rectangular form was still in use at Monette's Ferry near Holy Family Church in the 1960s. None could be found in this study. However, Mrs. LaCour recalls another form made on a rattan vine hoop. This round *brame* seems to be the style most recalled on Isle Brevelle. It was covered with *Lowell* or "cotton sacking," an unbleached domestic cloth also used to make sacks for picking cotton. Then there were four ropes attached to it for hanging it. A string was attached so the infants could be gently swung to sleep. This cradle may be a Cane River Creole specialty; it has not been noted elsewhere in French-speaking Louisiana. The Caddo Indians who lived in northwest Louisiana also used hanging cradles - suspended from tree limbs (Personal communication, Mrs. Billy Huff 1995). In fact, at least one Creole elder recalled the Creole cradles were sometimes suspended between two trees (Personal communication, Kathleen Balthazar-Heitzman 1995). This may be the clearest reflection of Caddo influences at Isle Brevelle. Mrs. Lair LaCour is making two *brames* for the Badin-Roque House and the St. Augustine Historical Society. There seem to be none in use on Cane River at this point; one is on display at Bayou Folk Museum in Cloutierville.

Men's crafts follow the same utilitarian vein. Aside from ropemaking, mentioned earlier, there was whipmaking and saddle repair. The late Joe Roque is widely remembered as having been the major whipmaker at Isle Brevelle into the 1950s. Today, Isaac Dupree repairs saddles

and his son, a welder, makes branding irons.

The hoe and the adze were once wrought by local smiths. Spring steel shears, axes, and a variety of other tools were once made locally. The most elaborate iron crosses were wrought for the cemeteries in the 1830s and extend back to the 1770s in this region. Both the St. Augustine and the Shallow Lake cemeteries had numbers of them. Another local manufacture was harpoons; used for spearing and for killing garfish and buffalofish, these tools were often wrought from iron hoes. Commercially made harpoons are still used periodically, but game laws limit their use, and this older tool is mostly retired.

In the collections of Mr. Isaac Dupree of Isle Brevelle are two heavy bracelets that were found in the fields behind his father's (the late Landry Dupree) home. These have been called "slave bracelets" by local oldtimers. They seem to be hand wrought from stock and may represent an eighteenth-century craft at Isle Brevelle.

Ox yokes - wood and hardware - were made on the river. A few remain in Creole family possession. One hangs in the Roque Brothers' Store, a lonely memorial to pre-machine age agriculture. Single and double trees - the gear used to harness mules and horses - seem to have been purchased. Still, they are prominent artifacts, and many have survived in barns and sheds along the river.

One can quickly move from crafts to such skilled occupations. The late Harvey Kochinsky was locally famous for his skill at furniture repair and finishing. "Doc" Couty continues this craft in and for the community. Earvin LaCour is known for his *faux* and specialty finishes. Preston Conant is respected as an upholsterer, and yet another, Terrel Delphin, is a trained jewelry maker, and lensmaking is his brother's skilled occupation. Three others are

trained electricians. Others are carpenters and painters, and several work in building trades. A classic example here is Herman Christophe and his son, Sam Christophe, both well known carpenters. Herman often makes the wooden crosses used in traditional funerals. The deep respect for the craft of whatever occupation seems to echo the older folk traditional respect for handmade crafts.

Small items, like rosaries, are still made locally. Tied of string, these old-time rosaries are still popular among the local chapters of Catholic women's organizations. At Siepers, or Clifton, community, Amos Tyler still crafts the beautiful Tupelo Gum "dough bowls" common to his family. The Siepers-Cane River connections are long standing, and bowls, baskets, and tanned skins were often traded to the river.

Artists, some formally trained - at least two who either teach or have taught university art classes - have come from Isle Brevelle. One folk artist continues to paint local scenes and to memorialize community history and places. Others are photographers, painters, and sculptors. Creole and Afro-American influences are strongly in evidence in all their works. Joseph Moran and Earvin LaCour are links between community tradition and a widening circle of southern artists. People, landscapes, and traditional objects are preserved in these more contemporary works. Trained artists, such as Joseph Moran and Earvin LaCour, often combine their arts: drawing, painting, photography, and ceramics with more practical occupational skills like carpentry and finished building painting. Two women are famous seamstresses, making dresses and wedding dresses.

New folk crafts seem to "pop up" along Cane River. Mrs. Atwood LaCour produces unique cross-stitched three-dimensional models, not sold but collectible. At least three craft



Figure 28: "Mama Lair" and her famous Maman dolls.

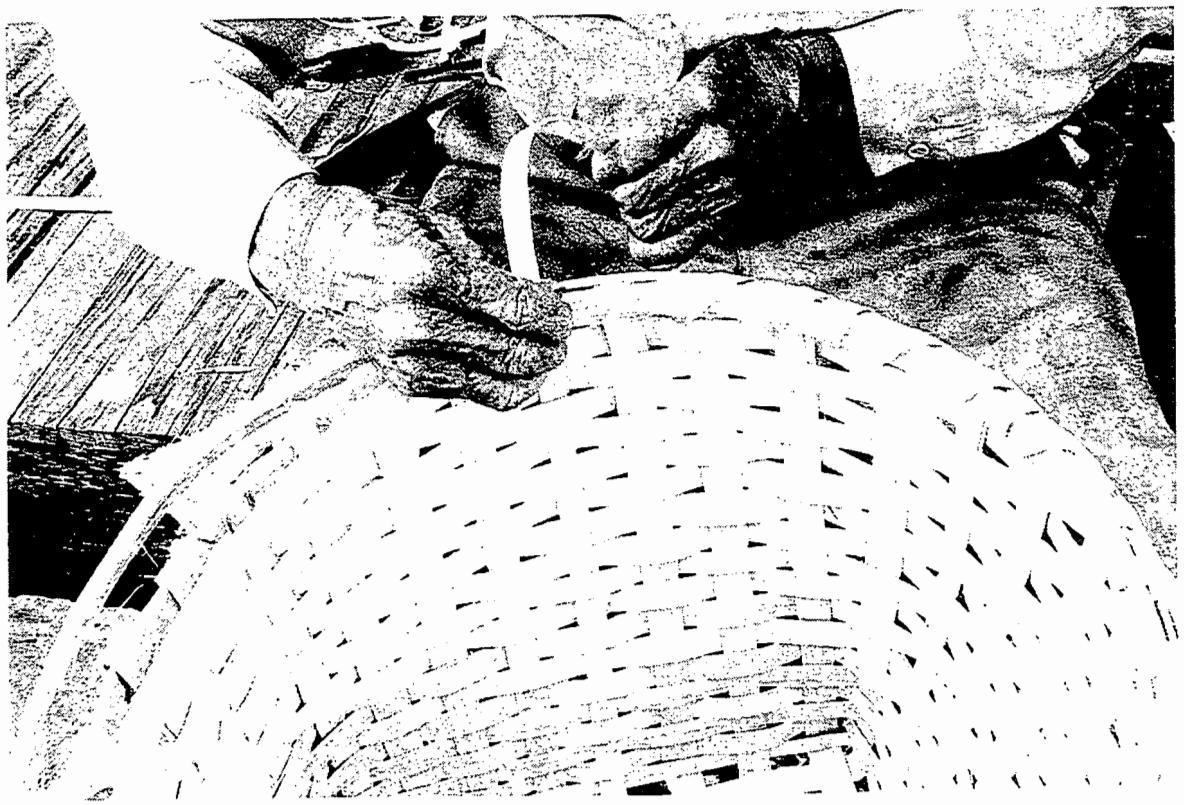


Figure 29: White Oak basketmaker in the hills.

shops are operating - one belonging to Janet Colson is on Isle Brevelle; another belongs to Betty Metoyer and is located on Cat Island Road nearer to Derry and Cloutierville. Items like *filé* and ground pepper, rag dolls, and other traditional crafts vie with hot-glue decorated flowers, artificial flower wreaths, plywood cutouts, and kitchen plaques with poems and sayings painted on them.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Lair LaCour sells quilts, bonnets (*Gardes Soleil*), her "Maman" dolls (a locally famous folk doll - actually the Louisiana Bicentennial Celebration Doll), rag dolls, white oak basketry, *filé* and cayenne pepper. Her little shop is called LaCour's Doll House and is located along Highway 1 South near the Montrose Lane road to Isle Brevelle and Melrose (Figure 28). Her stock items are almost totally folk items, and her shop is noticeably void of more popular "craft" items. She and her friends work at the shop, often gathering there to quilt, sew, and drink coffee. While this is certainly a commercial venture, one is immediately aware it is a bit different, grounded in tradition and unbent by competition with more "pop" concepts of folk art and crafts.

Mrs. Cecile Monet adds her *gardes soleil*, sunbonnets, to the list of women's crafts and sells them at Mrs. LaCour's as well. White oak baskets, made back in the hills by Thadeus Kerry and his son Kenneth, also appear at the Doll House, as well as at Metoyer's Crafts in Derry (Figure 29). This Appalache-Irish family is the only surviving source for this craft in the whole region. One younger Creole artist has learned, for his own satisfaction, to make these baskets from Mr. Kerry. Indian cane and white oak basketry were once standard household items in Creole country, often used as cotton baskets. These baskets are rare on the river today; none are used at cotton gins any longer, and mechanical pickers preclude their use in the field. The Kerrys, from the hills marginal to the river in the Creole area, still operate in a traditional mode; since



Figure 30: Quilting, not only an important and traditional craft, is also a social event.

white oak was most available in the hills, it is not surprising the craft survives there.

The crafts that are strongest on Isle Brevelle, in the larger Creole community, are still communal and social in nature. Quilting is likely the best example of this. Women like to quilt in a group. Three or four elderly ladies may quilt together; sometimes an aunt and a niece quilt together, and sometimes a lady will piece and quilt a quilt by herself. They exchange pleasantries, visit with folks who happen by, and pause for coffee and cake or cookies. News and gossip, nostalgia, and general sociability mark these gatherings. A few of the quilters best known in the region are Mrs. Lair LaCour, Mrs. Betty Coutee, Mrs. Marie Roque, Mrs. Lottie Metoyer, Mrs. Rosalie Chevalier Metoyer, and Mrs. Mary Rachal. There are many more wonderful quilters; unfortunately, we cannot list them all here (Figure 30).

Quilts are sold, but also given away, donated to the church so they can be raffled, and generally have a place in community life. The practice of donating quilts to the church seems to have replaced the donation of cotton to the church. It is still a gift of cotton, but in a different form. Ladies also piece and quilt commercially. Better quilters will be asked, for a price, to make a whole quilt or to quilt a top made by someone else. Handsewn tops are more highly regarded, but the sewing machine may be used to put the tops together.

Quilts are "passed down" in families, curated almost, for generations. Not only are such quilts cherished as heirlooms, but they serve as patterns as well. Patterns are cut from paper - wrapping paper or newspaper - and these are passed on as well. Some of these patterns are quite old: *Monkey Wrench* or *Wrench du Macaque*, *Wedding Ring, Rambling Road, Sweet Gum Leaf, and Fan* are examples which have been "handed down" for at least four generations. They are today augmented by patterns from others' quilts and pattern books. A woman will often give

another a "square," telling her to start a "top." Such squares show traditional patterns and are models to follow. Older quilters will recall who passed a pattern to them. They remember their teachers, their inspiration.

Isle Brevelle and lower Cane River are interesting in that traditional material culture, like architecture, has somehow survived. Things have been curated by families or individuals, often things that only seem to occur in Creole or Louisiana French context. Whatever the case, these things lie around, are placed about and stimulate interest in people. Memory ethnography, then, becomes linked to things, just as to people or places. Objects may certainly have outlasted their original function, but people curate them carefully. As in much of the South, the past is important to the people, and it is part of Creole identity. Long before universities or public schools were using ethnicity and material culture to teach history, the Creoles were subtly about the task. Today they point with even more pride to things "Miss Cammie" or others did not carry away.

The families on Isle Brevelle have always had access to commercial, manufactured products. In early times, roads for horses and wagons or automobiles and the river for boats or steamboats kept them connected to towns and cities. Eventually, the railroad ran through the backswamps and offered yet another link to towns and cities. Plantation stores and private stores stocked wide ranges of products. Access to these places and things meant that material culture was constantly changing as in the rest of the nation. Still, there were economic levels; not all Creoles were simultaneously wealthy or even middle income, and the economy of Isle Brevelle and Cane River rose and fell with the market for cotton, corn, cattle and, more recently, pecans and soybeans as did that of the rest of the region. Some Creole people remained relatively uneducated and poor. Having been Free People of Color, Creoles tied their status and self-

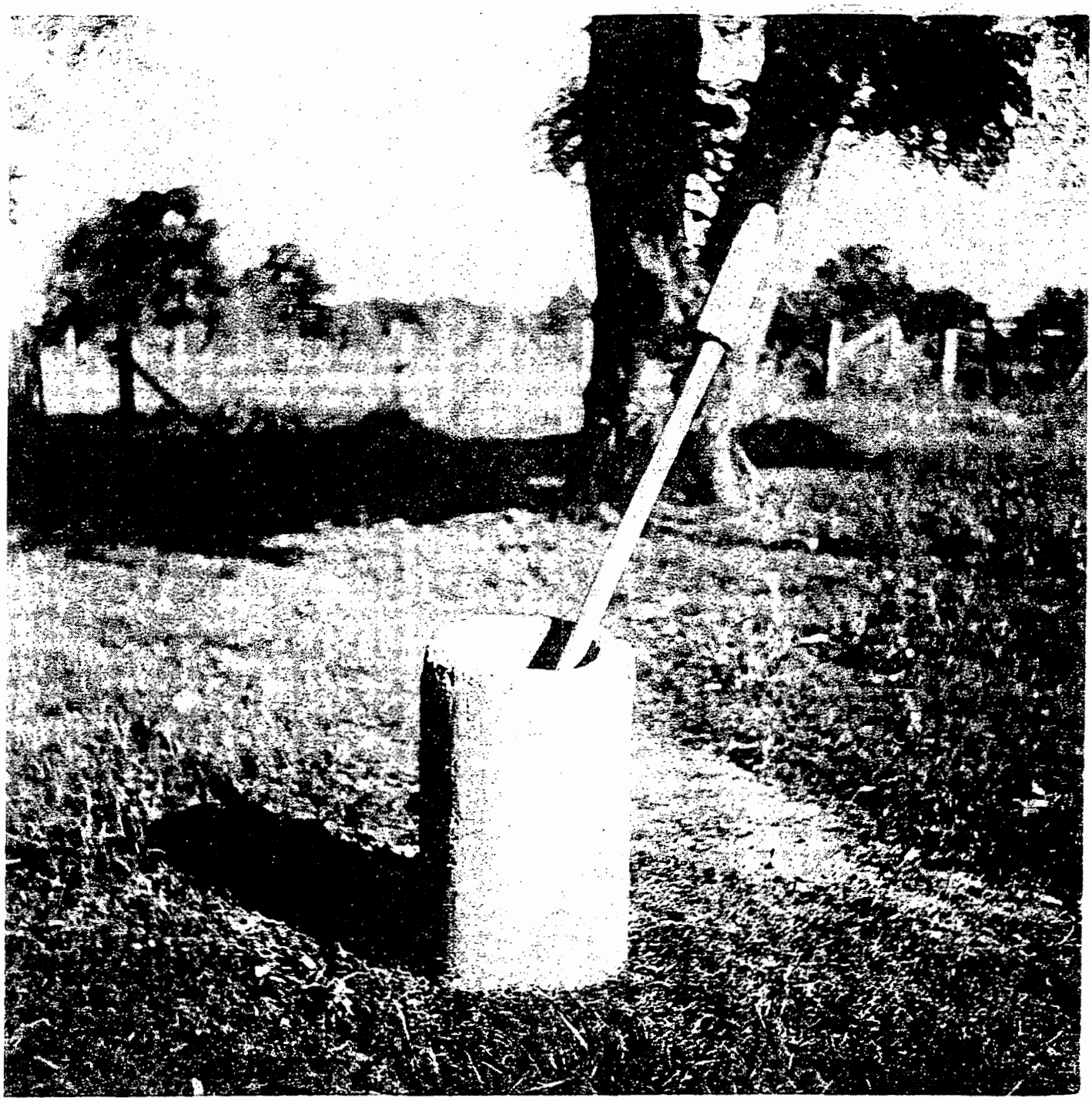


Figure 31: *Pile et Pilon*, Badin-Roque House. (William Knipmeyer, Photo)

concepts to family and identity as much or more than to economic status.

The Badin-Roque House, itself an amazing architectural anachronism, was always a repository for the history of the community. In the 1920s and 1930s, it was occupied by old people: Zeline Badin Roque, Juliette St. Ville, Joe Roque, and Choucouroute. Creoles visited these people at that place, particularly Creole children, for a variety of reasons, and almost all the contemporary older people have stories about it and the people living there. Not an isolated place, it stood in the line of structures strung along the crest of the natural levee, along the road that would eventually become Louisiana Highway 484. It was a special place, with special people in it. As late as the early 1960s, the house was still occupied, with no electricity; a woodburning stove had replaced the fireplace cooking, but little else seemed to change. There, sitting on the front gallery, stood a *pile et pilon*, a log mortar and pestle (Figure 31). Old tools lay scattered about; even the doorsill was a flattened wagon tire. The old man who lived there was loquacious and told stories, recited poems. It is rumored (Mills 1977) that Zeline was Lyle Saxon's main informant for the ethnographic detail he wove into the novel *Children of Strangers*. Certainly, many events described in that novel were archaic at the time it was written, taken from the memory of some older people. Certainly, contemporary Creole elders use Badin-Roque as a referent to the past, and it works its way in many conversations. When the last owner, Wood Antee, swapped the old kitchen house to a local tourism developer, Dr. Lum Ellis, for a new shed, it mobilized the community. St. Augustine Historical Society organized, and one of its first acts was to purchase the house and a lot.

Like the painting of Augustin Metoyer that hangs in the church, St. Augustine Church, built originally in 1803 at his request, the house at Badin-Roque is an overt symbol in people's

minds of who and how they are Creole.

Even before they lost the kitchen house, they had lost the house of Madame Aubin Roque, before that, the painting of *Grandpère Augustin*, and before it all, Melrose Plantation had passed into non-Creole hands. Gone were Marie Thérèze Coin-Coin's house there (she may have lived in Yucca House, according to local tradition, at some point) and her son Louis's architectural contributions. Mrs. Cammie Henry, fascinated by what she found in Creole hands, began collecting, and the furnishings at Melrose were pulled together from all over the Creole community. Her role as a preservationist is appreciated by many, but Creole feelings towards her are ambivalent. Many point out that she managed to glean items from people that might not have understood their value to the community. The feeling that she took advantage of people's needs runs deep. Even now, if some older objects have disappeared, Creoles will say they may "be at Melrose."

Craft maintenance, then, at Isle Brevelle is often linked to the preservation and maintenance of the Creole culture.

Traditional Crafts

Quilts

Sunbonnets (*Gardes Soleil*)

Aprons

Maman Dolls

Rag Dolls

Hanging Cradles (*Les Brames*)

Dresses

Cotton Sacks

Gourd Dippers

Gourd Sausage Stuffers

Shuck Mattresses

Feather Beds

Looms/Shuttles - weaving once done widely

Furniture:

- Armoires
- Beds
- Clock Cases
- Chairs

Mortars and Pestles (*Piles et Pilons*)

White Oak Baskets

Funeral Crosses (wood)

Whips

Saddles

Branding Irons

Ox Yokes

Harnesses

Spinning

Carding - Carded Cotton for Quilting

Cards

Spanish Spinners (*Tarabis*)

Traditional Folk Practices

There is a deep sub-state of voodoo, called *Hoodoo*, on Cane River. It is generally attributed to the African Americans, but Creoles have been identified who knew about it. The active practitioners/patients cannot be identified. Specific examples cannot be given here. In a community as close-knit as the Creole community, masking people and events is practically impossible. Suffice it to say, it exists in the memory ethnology of older people and also in the minds of some middle-aged people as well.

Some curses or "fixes" are discussed, and some people are said to have "power." People were intimidated by that, and a threat that certain people might "burn a candle on you or whatever . . ." seems to have worked. Both men and women were thought to have had the "power," but most people do not believe in the efficacy of magic and witchcraft to the extent that it has widespread impact on daily life in the community today.

Curing, at least folk curing, does not seem to be connected to the hoodoo, except a few older people remember being told that specific ailments were due to someone "laying down a *gris-gris* in their way." Curers prescribed specifics for that. At least three kinds of curers are identifiable in the community: herbalists, people who can cure with their hands by rubbing muscles, etc., and people who specialize in "raising the palate" in babies. People in their eighties refer back to specific people that prepared herbal medicines, etc. "When I was young. . . ." One man is often referred to as "knowing about plants"; he declined any interview efforts. At least one other person is known for a disdain for modern doctors and a preference for the use of salves made at home. There also is a strong memory of particular people who were "finders." They could "cut the cards" and tell people where to find lost items, and one was able to make

predictions.

Recourse to the Virgin Mary and the saints is, of course, widespread. The changing practices of the Roman Catholic Church have weakened traditional devotions to the saints only a little. Blessed palm or cedar fronds, once burned to ward off storms, are less often a Creole practice although most older Creoles know about it. These fronds, given out after Mass on Palm Sunday, are kept in most Catholic households. Rosaries are a favorite devotion, and older women often sit late in the evening and say their rosaries. Virtually every household has a collection of rosaries and statues, usually of the Blessed Virgin Mary, but often of other favorite saints as well. Holy medals, holy water, and blessed candles are kept by almost everyone. Shrines were kept in the homes where there were private devotions. One is in a cabinet and had statues of the Virgin, palm leaves, rosaries, saints' cards with prayers, candles, memorial cards, and crucifixes. Some families also have very old "sick call" hanging altars - boxes with glass fronts containing candles, crucifixes, holy water and oil - necessities for emergency baptisms or extreme unction - over even the visit of the priest to bedridden patients. While these are practices sanctioned by the Church, folk practices develop around them. Candles burned for the Virgin are seen at several shrines in yards, and at least one had an outside electric bulb to light it.

Cemetery activities also reflect community folk practices. Statues of saints adorn several graves - one in an elaborate glass cabinet appears and disappears - brought for special occasions. Flowers are common, both fresh and artificial, and are placed regularly. In at least one Catholic cemetery in the hills, families placed personal items on the graves: toys, cups and saucers, even a tricycle. Priests have objected, and most such practices have disappeared. They are not associated with the cemetery at Isle Brevelle.

Roadside memorials to victims of violent deaths are seen all across the area. Usually a cross, with a name or names, some have wreaths or bouquets of flowers attached to them. While not exclusively a Creole practice, they are seen on Highway 119 and also on Louisiana Highway 1-South. In nearby Sabine Parish, they may mark homicides as well as accidental deaths - a widespread Indo-Hispanic practice. No clear evidence of that practice exists for Cane River.



Figure 32: Women clean pig entrails at a butchering. They will be cooked and served as chittlins.

Foodways

In an article in the west coast newspaper, *Bayou Talk*, a California Creole stated that a Creole was a person who spoke French, was Roman Catholic, and ate Creole foods. Knowledge of Creole cuisine is the pride of the Isle Brevelle-Cane River Creoles.

One expert, Mrs. Lily Delphin, has divided Creole foodways into meats, breads, desserts, sweets, vegetables, and "extension" foods, such as *filés, gumbo, and étouffé*. She likes to point out the frugal nature of Creole cookery by which people tried to use the whole animal - at least as much as was possible. The hog became meat: ribs, chops, loin, and ham. The head was conserved for meat for making *tamales* and/or "souse," and the brains were eaten. The intestines were saved for sausage casings, and the stomach was also cooked and eaten stuffed (Figure 32). The scalded and scraped skin was fried into *gratons* or cracklins. The fat was cut off and rendered into lard. The tails were used in soup, and the feet were pickled in vinegar. The blood was conserved for sausage/*boudin*. The famous rice and sausage stuffing of casings known as *boudin* was a popular pork food. Two kinds, red and white, were, and are, made on Isle Brevelle. Only the white *boudin*, which did not use the carefully conserved blood from the *boucherie*, can be sold commercially now. Some traditional cooks, like Mrs. Lair LaCour, can still show you the gourd funnels once used to stuff *boudin*. Other kinds of meat was packed in lard and salted or smoked to preserve it.

Beef animals, likewise, were not wasted. Hides became leather; horns became blowing horns, and all the rest of the animal was considered as food. Even the hooves were powdered and taken as a tea to cure colds. Again, brains, tongue, heart, liver, "sweet meat," testicles, and even some other *débris* were kept as food. Steaks, chops, roasts, tail (ox-tail) and ribs were standard

cuts. Even the testicles were roasted and eaten by some. Veal was made into *grillades* which were most often served with grits.

Almost all Creole foods were cooked and eaten with a gravy or *roux*. *Roux* was the base for *gumbo* and *filé gumbo*, a redundancy recognized even by non-French speakers. *Filé*, pounded or ground sassafras leaves, was the "thickening" added to *roux* and soups. It was also used, sometimes, to flavor smoked meat. *Gumbo*, or okra, was, like *filé*, cooked and added to thicken the *roux* base in a dish which bore its name.

Meats were eaten rapidly in the old days. Once a beef was slaughtered, the meat was either "put up" in strips which were smoked and dried as *tasso* or cooked immediately. A butcher in the 1930s would kill one beef a week, load the meat in his buggy, and take it to Montrose, then a thriving mill town. He would blow his horn, a conch shell, and people would buy up the beef. Mid-week he would slaughter a hog, and the same process would result in the pork being preserved - "put up" in hot lard in buckets, smoked in smoke houses as bacon, ham or, again, *tasso*. Pork was also made into sausage - at least three kinds on Cane River: *Andouille*, *Zandouille*, and hot sausage. *Andouille* was a favorite, smoked sausage for eating as is. *Zandouille*, in spite of the similarity of the name, is different. It was made primarily for seasoning and was cooked, sliced thin, into *gumbo*. Ground hot sausage was also made, but until refrigeration, smoked sausage was easier to preserve. Although these food preferences persist, home preservation of meat is very rare. Not a single smoke house was found on Isle Brevelle, and *tasso* making seems to have stopped by about 1940.

Electricity and refrigeration have changed this whole situation. Animals are slaughtered at Natchitoches now, and the meat refrigerated or frozen. Still, people bring French or Creole-style



Figure 33: A staple of Creole foodways, meatpies are perhaps the most well known Creole dish.

products back from south Louisiana. Ville Platte and Lafayette are the famous sources of Creole meats. Still, until recently, two Creole butchers worked in Natchitoches, and another's son became a famous local chef in New Orleans. Creole meat foods were highly valued in both places.

Meat pies - stuffed "pies" containing a mixture of ground sausage, ground beef and spices - are a Creole hallmark (Figure 33). Since both beef and pork are in them, it seems appropriate to speak of them now. Tradition holds that the meat pies were first sold by ladies who carried baskets of them from door to door in Natchitoches in the 1930s and 1940s. Subsequent to the World War II era, meat pies have been sold out of people's homes. Virtually everyone in Natchitoches has some individual whose meat pies are favorites. Recipes do vary a great deal, and some argue the pies must be fried, while others prefer baked ones. The annual St. Augustine Church Fair, each October, draws crowds of local non-Creoles to the church hall. The St. Augustine ladies' and men's organizations work together to sell meat pies, gumbo (usually containing chicken and sausage), tamales, and turkey and dressing. Cakes are raffled or sold; sweet potato pies and pecan pies are sold, too. Pralines are sold. For outsiders, this is the most frequent first encounter site for Creole culture. It is, as has been stated earlier, now a popular stop on the annual tour of Cane River plantations. Natchitoches meat pies are now famous, but Creoles view them as a relatively recent addition to their whole range of cuisine. Their popularity seems tied directly to tourism, particularly the annual Natchitoches-Cane River Historic Tour.

Aside from roast and steak, the *boulet*, or meat balls, made of highly seasoned ground beef (sometimes of fish) were another favorite meat food. Served in a rich *roux* or tomato gravy, they were common on Cane River.



Figure 34: Red peppers are strung in lengths, ready for sun drying.

In the old days, Creoles viewed *gumbo* as the traditional food for large, especially large public gatherings. The Mardi Gras and the annual Church fair produced *gumbos* cooked in large black iron pots outside in the yard. Most often these gumbos are, like those still served at the fair, made of chicken. As Mrs. Lily Delphin points out, these are "extension" foods. More water, more *gumbo*, but local Creoles are critical if it gets too thin.

Spices are integral to Creole cooking. Like the *roux*, which must be just the "right" color and which is easily burned, the exact amount of spice is important to virtually every dish. Most important is cayenne, or red, pepper and black pepper. The red pepper is grown in Creole gardens, and local "experts" prepare it. The pepper is dried in hot, dry places, a room in the house or a shed. It may be "finished" by heating it on a stove. Strung whole, it is dried, seeds and all. Otherwise, the peppers are stripped away from the seeds by hand which yields a less hot product. The seeds are the really "hot" portion of the pepper pod. John Colson, whose mother and whose neighbor, Mrs. Clara Jones, were and are the best known "experts," describes it as a painful process (Figure 34). He reminisces that his father would leave the house when it was being done! It burns the eyes, and great care must be taken not to get the hands near the eyes. Young people helped strip, de-seed, and string or grind the pepper. Their hands would be stained red from the pepper, and it was a slow, delicate process. People sat on the gallery and did the "pepper." It was ground in a handmill and then packed into bottles with a small stick, sometimes a peach limb. The Happy Place furnished the bottles in the old days. Dark brown whiskey bottles were preferred containers for ground pepper. Traditionally, two or three ladies made enough pepper for the whole community and sold it to those who needed it. Some people on Cane River still grow large patches of cayenne. They hesitate to admit they sell it, fearful of taxes and



Figure 35: Sassafras leaves, gathered from the woods, are hung in a hot shed. Once dried, they will be prepared and ground into a fine powder for *gumbo filé*.

controls on their work. Under a grant from the Louisiana Office of Folklife, the Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism, the St. Augustine Historical Society has begun documentation of "pepper-making" and also the preparation of the other favored spice, *filé*. Joseph Moran is following the local "experts" through the process, photographing and recording preparation.

Native Americans used the sassafras leaves as flavoring, even smoking meats with them, and the dried leaves were pounded into a powder for a food additive. In Creole, and also Cajun, cuisine this Indian foodway has remained intact. Where Native Americans lived in close proximity to Creole communities, they sold *filé* and other herbs along with cane basketry to the Creoles. It is a plant *(sassafras albium* sp.) that grows best in the uplands, usually in the "sand hills" or terraces. Creoles on Cane River traditionally gather their sassafras leaves at the headwaters of Bayou Derbanne in the hills. An expert, Aznore Sers, is traditionally consulted about the time and place, but the leaves are always gathered in August on the Feast of the Assumption, August 15. John Colson notes that a number of variables are right then and that color and the shapes of the leaves make significant differences.

At *filé* gatherings, families would go to the hills, carrying cotton sacks, and literally fill them with the leaves (Figure 35). The leaves would then be brought home, put in a dry, hot room - sometimes piled waist deep - and these would be stirred regularly until they were properly dried. Then they were pounded into powder after the stems had been removed carefully. The *pile et pilon* were employed for this task, but early on they were replaced by handmills used to grind the leaves. Once ground, the *filé*, like pepper, was stored in dark-colored bottles. Today beer bottles are popular for both products, but commercial spice bottles are recycled for *filé* as well. As with pepper, today women are famous for their *filé*; Mrs. Clara Jones and Mrs. Severine Kirkland are

widely respected for their products. Older ladies control the market, but other people make their own primarily for family consumption. Mickey Moran and his sons now dry sassafras in their abandoned school bus and are making *filé*. They are the only younger males involved at this point although Mrs. Clara Jones's son helps her. Both men and women gathered and prepared *filé*, and the Moran boys, both pre- and high school age, are following that Creole tradition. Michael Moran's *filé* won a blue ribbon at the 1995 Natchitoches Parish Fair for local foods.

Onions, shallots, and garlic are the other popular ingredients in Creole cuisine. Creoles often point out the popular statement by Chef John Folse, a Louisiana television personality, that Cajun food is cooked "with love." However, they object to this statement, adding that "Creole food is cooked with herbs and spices." Creoles are quick to point out that Cajun cuisine, now enjoying national popularity, is, in the main, Creole cookery. The Acadians, they point out, either learned foodways like the use of okra, cayenne and *filé* in Louisiana or during their stay in the West Indies. Certainly Creole cuisine was the earlier colonial precedent, a point Creole cooks hasten to make! So one finds tomatoes, okra, onions, and garlic in garden after garden on Isle Brevelle and elsewhere on Cane River. One or another of these plants is likely to grace most daily meals.

Other vegetable foods, *les légumes*, are also part of the Creole repertoire. Squashes - Crooked Neck, *Merlitons*, and others - are particularly popular. The late Mrs. Zeline Roque, famous for her conservatism, strung long ropes of pumpkin for drying, hanging them near her hearth. A local home economics teacher recalled seeing them hanging there in the 1920s. This practice, echoed in pepper and in *tasso*, of drying foods to preserve them clearly has Native American roots. Probably nowhere in Creole life is this influence as well preserved as in their

foodways. Certainly these traditions were added early in the colonial period.

While fried pies - meat or fruit - echo the *empanadas* of their Hispanic roots and *gumbo* the famous mixture of Native American (*filé*), African (okra) and French-Spanish (cayenne and *roux*), the Creoles see the combination as more important than the ingredients. Still, they are well aware of how their cultural roots connect them to their preferences for the table.

Desserts are also linked to a wide range of such influences. Cakes, "tea cakes," *galets*, and pies are connections to a wide range of possibilities, and show up at every big meal. The pecan tree has long been grown at homes on Isle Brevelle. Long before commercial pecan groves or plantations were planted, families planted the trees. People gather pecans for their own use in cakes, pies, and the sugary pralines. Often sugar or cane syrup is another ingredient mixed with pecans one way or another - the colonial interface of West Indian-African sugar production and the native pecan.

Tea cakes, served with rich, thick coffee, are another old-time food. Again, numbers of people remember Zeline Roque baking them before her hearth and always having "tea cakes" for children who visited her home. Essentially a cake cookie, they are still popular in Creole homes. Similar to tea cakes are *galets*, a sweet cake as popular as tea cakes.

Coffee - with just about anything - is still traditional. Creole etiquette clearly calls for offering a guest food or drink. Coffee, parched from commercially available green beans, has always been the traditional drink. It was kept ready on the stove or hearth all day. People drank early morning coffee, mid-morning coffee and, again, mid-afternoon coffee. It was dripped and strong. Children took it as *café au lait*, and adults usually added lots of sugar and, often, cream. It was, and is, offered regularly to anyone who visits. The coffee grinder was a regular part of the

Creole household everywhere on Cane River, and coffee was ground fresh, sometimes daily.

Teas were popular, but most of the time, as in much of the South, iced tea was served with meals. Teas made of herbs - mint or sassafras root - were sometimes considered home remedies and given medicinally. Still, they were also consumed as simple beverages as well. Mint was often added to iced tea.

Lemonade, according to Mrs. Lily Delphin and others, was the popular cooling drink that Creoles were famous for. It is still popular in Creole homes.

Zis-Zis fruit, or *jujubes,* is gathered in the Fall; it is eaten as a fruit or, Mrs. Rosalie Metoyer recalls, made into brandy. This tree, introduced from China, may echo the other Creole cultural ingredient on Cane River, the mixture of antebellum Chinese families into the community. Brandy, usually made from plums in late summer or fall, is still produced by some families for home consumption. Figs, eaten uncooked or made into preserves or jams, are classic Creole food. Virtually every older home has fig trees associated with it.

Still more exotic, but widespread, were pomegranates. This plant, likely dating to the Spanish colonial period, was a popular fruit on Cane River. A grove of these trees is found at the Marie Thérèze Coin-Coin House still. Arabic in origin, no other tree is so often connected with Spanish, or Islamic-influenced African culture, than the pomegranate.

Wild grapes, pecans, and other wild plant foods - including the *patate sauvage* - or Indian Potato - actually a fungus, recalled by Andy Bynog as a medicine or a dessert (sliced, fried, and sugared) - often rounded out the foodways. These wild foods, like *filé*, are resoundingly Native American. They are part of a complex of hunting and gathering that once existed all across the region.



Figure 36: Fishing in Cane River, once a necessity, is now a pastime.



Figure 37: A rabbit hunter with his bounty

Today only recreational fishing for crappie, white perch (*sac au lait)*, and catfish remains popular year round (Figure 36). Harpooning garfish, once popular among Creoles, is now considered illegal and only rarely occurs. Gar provides a popular meat with African Americans, but is "creolized" into the *boulet* form for consumption. Ground gar meat is browned in a skillet and then smothered in a thick gravy and served over rice.

Frequencies of wild meats vary by season, but duck, quail, geese, and other bird hunting seem less popular with Creoles than with their neighbors, although dove hunting is still popular among some of the Creoles. Deer, rabbit, and squirrel hunting are less frequent than in the past, victims to widespread land clearing in the valley and the lack of access to lumber company or federal forest land in the hills. Still, deer hunting - without dogs - is common with Creoles on the river (Figure 37).

Various types of fowl, particularly chickens, geese, ducks, guineas, and pigeons, have always been popular foods on the island and along Cane River. Pigeons were raised, and people recall closing the exits of the *pigeonniers* so they could take the pigeons inside the building, on the nests. Chickens were raised and sometimes ranged about the yards freely, but often there was a chicken house in the backyard. Eggs were gathered daily, and chickens were cooked in *gumbos*, fried, smothered in gravy, baked with cornbread dressing, and stewed with flour dumplings. The gizzards and livers became part of a mixture of sausage and rice, called "dirty rice," which could be used as stuffing or eaten as a separate dish on its own.

Ducks and geese were usually baked, often with a dressing, and duck *gumbo*, like chicken, was another favorite. Guineas were eaten as *gumbo*, and some families ate guinea *gumbo* as a breakfast food. Some people raised geese and the guinea fowl as "watchdogs," noting they would

make a noise when someone approached; however, everyone knew their food value.

Grains, rice and corn, are also part of the diet. Both were once pounded on the *pilon*, to husk the rice and make meal of the corn. Rice, of course, has an African or Arabic antecedent and is widespread in French- and African-Louisiana cuisine. It is most often eaten as part of another dish with a *roux* or gravy, or as the "dirty" rice discussed earlier. *Jambalaya*, a direct descendant of Spanish *paella*, is rice and tomato-pepper sauce with sausage (either *andouille* or *zandouille* is used) sliced and added. *Gumbo* is almost always eaten over rice. Most Creole cooks prefer long-grained rice, today bought at any local grocery.

Corn is eaten fried, boiled, stewed or on the cob. Corn was once ground at local mills; one was at the Roger plantation and is remembered by lots of people. Corn was grown for animal feed, but "sweet corn" or "roasting ears" were Creole favorites. Cornbread was once baked on the open hearth - a cornbread pan was found still in the hearth at the Badin-Roque House. Long-handled iron skillets were used for open-hearth cooking. Blackened iron skillets antedated "Teflon" by generations. Small iron kettles with tall legs to sit above the bed of coals were once preferred. Such "French" kettles were gradually replaced by round-bottomed "American" forms. Parched corn was used - some recall - as a coffee substitute during hard times.

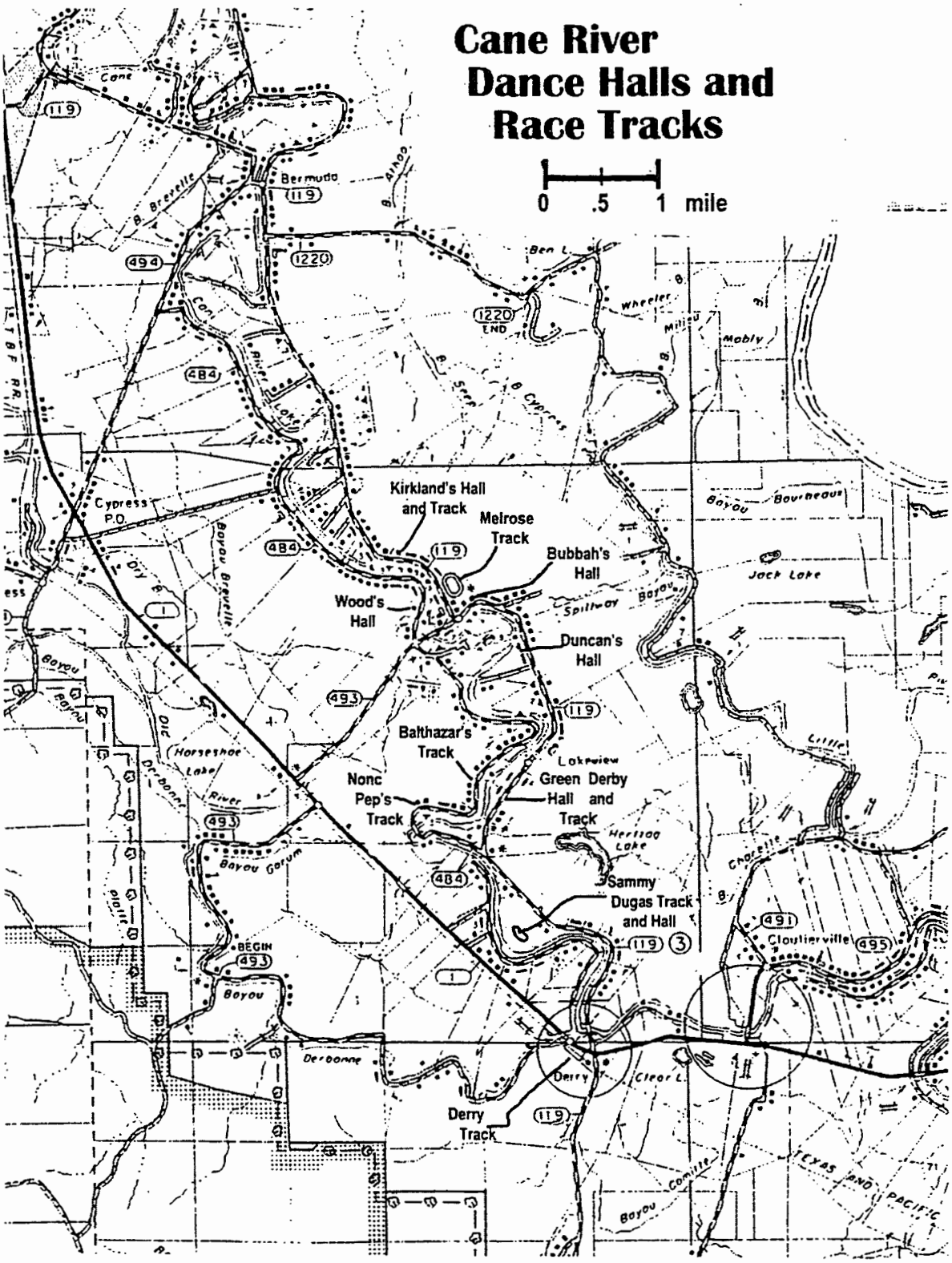
Some of the corn was "lyed," soaked in water dripped through oak ashes, to remove the husks. This corn was then ground into the dough for *tamales*. Some families at Cloutierville and Gorum had ancient *metates*, brought from Mexico in colonial times, which they used to grind the corn. Corn shucks were carefully selected, washed and trimmed for use in *tamale*-making. The filling was hot seasoned pork or beef - often the "head meat" of a hog. The shuck was greased, the dough smeared on, the meat added, and it was then rolled and tied into a neat bundle.

Tamales are a special occasion, almost holiday, food and like *gumbo* and meat pies, they are considered a Creole specialty.

Sweet potatoes are, with Creoles as other Louisianians, a favorite food. The late Mrs. Blanche Sers was famous for her sweet potato pies, sold at the Church fair. Her granddaughter-in-law, Mrs. Lita Jones, has the responsibility for the pie-making now. Sweet potatoes are made into bread, fried, and baked as well as made into pies.

All this rich diet was most often served with wine, beer or tea. Wine was popular for home consumption. Beer and whiskey are "party" drinks seen at dances, in the bars, stores and pool halls. Drinking was polite, and men gathered at the stores, sometimes after Sunday Mass, to visit and to have a few drinks. Beer is popular at such gatherings today and until recently was sold at church functions, usually by members of the Knights of St. Peter Claver or the Holy Name Society. Drinking is not frowned upon, and people will often offer a visitor a beer or a glass of wine. Drunkenness is not, however, considered polite, and most gatherings are remarkably free of drunken behavior. Hard drinking seems to have been relegated to the various "halls" and outside during dances.

Creole traditions of sharing food and drink with family and friends is as strong today as it was two centuries ago. No Creole gathering would be complete without that. *Gumbos*, barbecues, picnics, homecomings, church functions, the annual Heritage Day - all celebrate food and drink.


Cane River
Dance Halls and
Race Tracks
0 .5 1 mile
Kirkland's Hall
and Track
Melrose
Track
Bubbah's
Hall
Wood's
Hall
Duncan's
Hall
Balthazar's
Track
Nonc
Pep's
Track
Green Derby
Hall and
Track
Sammy
Dugas Track
and Hall
Derry
Track
Cypress
P.O.
Bermuda
Cloutierville
Lakeview
Horseshoe
Lake
Jack Lake
Spillway
Bayou
Derry
Clear L.
Comite
Texas and Pacific
BEGIN

Music

Music and dance have always been important parts of life on Cane River. Creole elders, from a centenarian to people in their seventies and eighties, always talk about dances. The oldest remember "house dances" held at the homes of friends and relatives. People would come; they would move the furniture out and dance to whatever music was available. Music was provided by a single guitar player, a fiddler, or a combination of fiddles, guitars, and "stand-up" bass. One octogenarian remembered a "full band" with a bass drum that played at a "hall" on Isle Brevelle - sometimes parading from the hall to St. Augustine Church. Songs accompanied the instrumentation, and early on, until the 1930s at least, much of the local music accompanied French songs. French language, banned at school and ridiculed outside the Creole community, became an increasingly familiar language used only with friends and relatives. Still, the late Mrs. Winnie Conant, the last "squeeze box" accordionist in the area, remembered French songs as did Ti' Cont Chevalier, the singer people sought for weddings.

A man on horseback went from house to house, announcing the dance - mail delivery and telephones were not always available. Young people would sometimes ride to the dance in a wagon full of loose hay. Ultra-conservative Creole families sometimes forbade their daughters from going to dances, feeling they might not be well chaperoned. Most of the time, they were chaperoned strictly by the elders.

By the 1930s, dance "halls" had developed on the island and across the river at Melrose and near Lakeview Plantation. These replaced the house dances and the older "hall" on Isle Brevelle, although people continued to dance at the church. Dances at camps maintained by affluent whites - doctors, planters and politicians - were held periodically and gave the Creole



Figure 38: Wood Antee at the bar of his "Friendly Place" (Wood Hall)

musicians places to play. Younger Creoles sometimes moved from working as waiters to working as musicians after some of these gatherings. Still, community focus gradually settled on the "halls." The two most popular were George Kirkland's *The Friendly Escape*, better known as "Kirk Hall" [*sic*], and Wood Antee's *Friendly Place*, also called "Wood Hall" [*sic*] (Figure 38). The two dance halls sat across the river from each other, and both had Creole clientele. Dances tended to be "for Creoles only." Still, when national bands played - like Fats Domino, who played at Kirk's - other people did attend. The other popular place was *The Green Derby* and was located near Magnolia Plantation and Lakeview Plantation. It had a race track, as did Kirk's, but *The Green Derby* also had a reputation as a "tough place"; its competitors did not. Today only Wood Antee's *Friendly Place* survives architecturally. Kirk's Hall collapsed in 1995 and has been razed. *The Green Derby* seems to have disappeared by the 1960s. Even the *Friendly Place* has only sporadic use now. People can rent it and use it, but it is no long used weekly and daily as it once was.

Traditionally, Creoles point out that dances were held at Isle Brevelle on Sunday nights. Several people have remembered they did not know why this was the case since they had to work all day on Monday.

John Colson, a retired mailman/musician, recalled working at Wood's Hall as a ticket taker when he was a youngster. The place would be packed, and people would buy a ticket, the cover charge. John Colson still marvels at how everyone could get in and on the dance floor. Drinking, in moderation (sometimes not so moderate), accompanied these gatherings. Whiskey, wine and beer were sold at all the halls.

People came from the "hills," from Sieper, to Wood's and Kirk's Halls, spread picnic



Figure 39: Youk and Duma, playing music. (Dr. Ambrose Hertzog, Photo; courtesy of St. Augustine Historical Society)

lunches and spent the day until the dance. These gatherings welded the communities tightly together. Somehow these dancing traditions, except at the churches, declined in the 1950s and 1960s. Dancing is still popular with young people, but the patterned community-family dancing seems to have declined. Gone are the announcer, the bouncers, and the owners of the clubs. The fierce competition between the clubs has subsided as well.

That does not mean the music tradition is dead. Everyone points to the LaCour brothers - Youk, Duma, Sheck and Eveck - as the premier band on Cane River (Figure 39). These brothers (Neville or Duma and Alex or Youk) were not musically trained. Felix LaCour, another brother, recalled in an interview with the late Mildred McCoy, a local historian, that the words just "came to Duma." He also recalled their first dance performance, an old-fashioned house dance near Cloutierville. In 1996, Neville (Duma) sent a photograph of the band being rowed across Cane River to play at the Hertzog camp on an island in the river. It was dated December 7, 1941. Duma has always traditionally played "Over the Waves" on his fiddle at most dances and was playing in the photograph.

Planter families frequently hired Youk and Duma's band to play for family holiday parties or for the "labor" as a celebration of a real bumper cotton crop. The band was very popular and played basically the "country music" of the day. They were all acoustic, all string, and are remembered as not ever playing the blues. In spite of black bands playing at Kirk's Hall, the major influence on Cane River music seems to be country and western "white" music. The LaCours played and sang in French, but, as their great niece Theresa Clifton Sarpy recalls, they only did that at home. Over the years, other Creoles played with the band. Allen Metoyer, once married to Duma's daughter, played with them in Louisiana as a youngster, but he also played



Figure 40: Contemporary bands continue the Creole musical tradition.

with Duma in Chicago. John Colson also played guitar with the band, and a locally famous saxophonist, Preston Conant, recalled that Duma pushed him into playing saxophone and recalls that Duma played a sax well. In 1996, the Natchitoches-Northwestern Folk Festival and the St. Augustine Historical Society honored Neville "Duma" LaCour and his brother and half-brothers at the festival. Unfortunately, Duma, the sole survivor of the original group, was not able to attend. His granddaughter and a niece received his awards for him. He wrote a public acknowledgment which was published in the *Natchitoches Times*, the parish newspaper. Allen Metoyer's band, Big Al and the 'Gators, played a memorial set for the LaCour band. Allen Metoyer, Preston Conant, Patrick Dupree and "Doc" Couty - all Creoles - make up that band (Figure 40). They played the Leadbelly (Huddie Ledbetter) song "Corrina, Corrina," which became widespread country repertoire instead of blues, for Duma. Big Al and the 'Gators are all local, all work as something other than musicians, and all share in the Cane River and, in two cases, the Chicago Creole experiences. Allen Metoyer, who plays keyboard and sings, is the Isle Brevelle barber; Tony Arceneaux, the drummer, is retired and serves as the St. Augustine sexton; Patrick Dupree is a welder; "Doc" Couty is an expert furniture maker, and Preston Conant, the eldest of the group, is a retired bank employee, now an upholsterer. This band is most comfortable with the "oldies and goodies" from the 1950s. Although Zydeco is the Creole sound heard in the clubs of south Louisiana, the instrumentation most closely connected to Zydeco - accordion, *'ti fer*, or triangle, and the *frottoir*, or "rub board" - are not part of Cane River repertoire. Still, the accordion, in the hands of the late Mrs. Winnie Conant - Preston Conant's mother - was there, and her songs were resoundingly French. At least one Zydeco element was present in the past. Big Al's band breaks into "Don't Mess With My Toot-Toot," now classic

Zydeco in southern Louisiana and southeast Texas, and younger Creoles fill the dance floor or the street, wherever. Still, the driving sounds of Zydeco must vie with the "easier" sounds of both country and French waltzes and two-steps in the Cane River country.

Katrice LaCour, a university-trained musician, has begun an effort to introduce jazz and progressive jazz into the area. His guitar and bass, and his brother Rainey's drums, add a modern dimension to the development of Creole music. One is reminded of the Creole roots of New Orleans jazz.

Still other Creole sounds are around. The "Wild Flower," Otis LaCour, is a favorite Creole performer. He plays at trail ride dances, family reunions, church dances, and weddings. These newer "hard rock" and "R and B" sounds seem to be as popular as earlier sounds.

The older waltzes and two-steps have gone, along with uniquely Creole genres like the wedding songs of the late Ti' Cont Chevalier: "Sad songs for the family of the bride and a happy song for the family of the groom." Still, Creoles dance and make their own music. Younger Creoles, like their elders, attend the dances in Opelousas, Lafayette, Frilot Cove, New Roads - not to mention Beaumont and Port Arthur in Texas. French influences remain and most often come through Zydeco - the new Creole music! Reinforcement from south Louisiana Creole communities is, and has always been, an important part of Isle Brevelle life. Improved transportation has seen that intensify. The St. Augustine Historical Society anticipates more interaction for the younger people in south Louisiana and the Cane River youth. A sponsored program for Creole young people is planned with traditional music, both song and dance, crafts and foodways. It is hoped this will increase Creole cultural awareness, and Zydeco is likely to be a local impact of that.

The Roman Catholic Church has always had an impact on music at Isle Brevelle. St. Augustine has long had a choir, and older people remember walking to church to practice. The bell rang the Angelus, and the choir sang at Mass, at weddings and funerals, and for Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. It still does. The impact of Vatican II with its Christocentric liturgy, in the vernacular, has impacted liturgical music worldwide. At St. Augustine, the Church has introduced the guitar and the piano to its liturgical music. The violin, at the request of the family, is played at funerals. Hymns are sometimes a mixture of traditional Roman Catholic hymns and non-Catholic church music. Edward Ward, neither a Roman Catholic nor a Creole, but a university-trained musician and Catholic-educated African American, frequently plays the organ or piano at St. Augustine. Spirituals and Protestant hymns, like "Precious Lord" and "If I Have Helped Anybody," are often heard often at St. Augustine. No songs have ever been sung in French at St. Augustine, not during the lifetime of any living member of that congregation. Some Creoles remind people that the nuns have often been Anglo-Irish and not fluent in French. Still, the original priests and nuns who served the parish were French, and there are still people who say their prayers in that language. The loss of the Latin Mass and corresponding hymns is still lamented by the elders, but they serve unflinchingly in the choir. In fact, so many elderly ladies sing that the choir loft has been abandoned and the choir now sits in a group at the right-hand side of the altar.

A recent Mardi Gras ball (1995) was held at the St. Augustine Church Hall, and church dances there, at St. John the Baptist in Cloutierville, St. Anthony's in Natchitoches, and St. James in Alexandria, all provide a venue for secular music at the churches. So, like most other things at Isle Brevelle, things change while remaining the same. The music, one way or another, goes on.

The Creole Movement

Virginia Dominguez (1986:148) has noted that economically and socially affluent white families of French and Spanish descent actively fought the publication of any book or article that referred to, or even implied, that there were people of color in Louisiana who called themselves Creole. Her book was published by Rutger's University Press, and, as she points out, Rohrer and Edmundsen's *The Eighth Generation* was published by Harper and Row. She further listed six theses on Creole communities which were written between 1950 and 1965 which were never published. Somehow she missed Alvin Bertrand and Calvin Beale's *The French and Non-French in Louisiana* (1965: 28) and Jones and Parenton's work on Frilot Cove (1951), as well as Sister Jerome Woods's classic study on Cane River, both published by Louisiana State University Press in 1972 - nearly a full decade ahead of Dominguez's work (1986). Moreover, she failed to mention Gary Mills's work (1977), which is in her own bibliography.

Still, there is a tendency for Creoles who are non-white Creoles to be better represented in fiction than in academic studies. Only recently have Carl Brasseaux and others written about the south Louisiana Creole communities (1995), but between all these technical works and fictional accounts (Gaines 1983, Saxon 1948), Creole socio-cultural identity is not some secret repressed by local political interests. The "word" was, outside some social circles in Louisiana, always connected to the people of mixed race, mixed culture, of Louisiana. Terrel Delphin's definition (Appendix I) is widely known and used today.

For generations, these Creoles have sought out other Creoles. Gary Mills's historical account (1977) of Cane River Creole origins notes New Orleans and West Indian connections. Subsequent to those earliest interchanges, there have been connections to every other colonial

Creole population in Louisiana: Opelousas, St. Martinville, Pointe Coupee (New Roads), Avoyelles (Marksville), Attakapas (Franklin), and Natchitoches all produced related Creole communities. Today Creoles point out the major population centers: Rougon-Palmetto (Pointe Coupee), Isle Brevelle-Campti (Natchitoches), Pin Claire (Rapides-Opelousas), Grand Marais (Franklin-Lafayette), Frilot Cove (Opelousas), and Lake Charles, St. Martinville (Attakapas), Marksville (Avoyelles), Plaisance (Lafayette) and others. A total of some eighteen such communities exist in Louisiana.

Cane River, Isle Brevelle particularly, has long been a key community. Terrel Delphin (Personal communication 1994) suggests Cane River is the place where Creole culture is not surrounded, and thereby confused with, Cajun culture - the French-speaking population that developed later on. Certainly, Creole elders on Cane River recall dances - going by buggy or horseback, as far as Opelousas. Others note having been sent away to school in New Orleans, Grand Coteau, or to other south Louisiana towns. One younger woman remembers being sent from Alexandria to Clifton (Siepers) and to Cloutierville to visit all her relatives in the summers. Visits to St. Martinville, Frilot Cove, Lafayette, etc. are frequent and reciprocal.

Recreation, dances, and "trail rides" or horse races seem to have pulled the communities together. The recent efforts to group Creole youth are a logical extension of an older pattern.

By the 1950s, Creoles had well established national "colonies." Sister Jerome Woods (1972:7) estimated that in the 1970s there were 8901 direct descendants from Claude Pierre Metoyer and Marie Thérèze Coin-Coin (although she does not name them). This growing population extended across Louisiana and then outside the state. Houston, Los Angeles, and Chicago seem to have received the most people. Even New York City had a colony by the 1920s.

Sister Jerome Woods's models of urban settlement pattern (1972: figs. 10-12) clearly tied these colonies to the Catholic churches in the cities. As pointed out in the section on Creole identity, these were sometimes "colored" Catholic parishes. The Holy Ghost Fathers who ministered to St. Augustine and other churches on Cane River may have accounted for some of that, but generally Creoles moved to the vicinity of "brokers" - friends or relatives who helped them adjust to their new environs. Creoles all speak about these connections, and even the families in far away New York sent their children "home" to visit relatives on Cane River.

By the 1980s, the west coast families had begun their newspaper, *Bayou Talk*, and Louis Metoyer had begun attempting a nationwide Creole identity. His efforts were bent towards establishing a national ethnic identity in the census but, moreover, towards creating a nationwide community. In 1996, *Bayou Talk* carried appeals to Creoles to write the U.S. Congress, news about Creole Heritage Day and, eventually, began a "cause" for the nomination to sainthood of Nicholas Augustin Metoyer.

Further north, in Chicago and New York, Creole people were exchanging genealogical data and "stories" from Cane River. Kathleen Balthazar-Heitzman's (1994) efforts are most notable. In Louisiana, Theresa Demery began working on history and genealogy from Isle Brevelle, and Janet Colson began integrating data from Isle Brevelle and Marksville. All these efforts, aided now by computer access and e-mail, have organized the "Creole Network" which extends nationwide. Kathleen Balthazar-Heitzman's *Cane River Trading Company*, a newsletter, has a mailing list that lists Creoles in 18 states (Personal communication 1996).

These media efforts keep people in touch with one another and facilitate the maintenance of community, albeit nationwide.



Figure 41: Terrel Delphin and the Creole Flag.

In 1994, the first annual National Creole Heritage Day was held on Augustin Metoyer's birthday at St. Augustine Church at Isle Brevelle. Families from all over the country as well as all the south Louisiana Creole communities were in attendance. Several Isle Brevelle people give Father Nicky Hussein, a Filipino priest then pastor of St. Augustine, with the idea of celebrating their cultural identity. A solemn High Mass, a food-tasting, and a memorial to the recently deceased community leader, Lewis "Sonny" Jones marked the event. Guests included the superintendent of Jean Lafitte Park and his wife as well as a number of state and local leaders. Terrel Delphin, president of the St. Augustine Historical Society, organized the event (Figure 41). Church organizations, both men's and women's groups, helped with the celebration. It was designated the National Creole Heritage Day by the U.S. Congress.

Part of the motivation for the celebration was to communicate Creole identity to other Creoles, but also to the National Park Service, state and local politicians and community leaders. Terrel Delphin, the newly elected head of the conservative St. Augustine Historical Society, saw Creole unity as necessary in the face of plans to develop the Cane River Park and National Heritage Area. Moreover, his south Louisiana relations from Frilot Cove, his friends from Grand Mery and Pin Claire near Oakdale were already organizing a statewide organization of Creoles. The St. Augustine group commissioned a Creole flag and logo and assumed a major role in the statewide, and nationwide, organization.

Local efforts to preserve the Badin-Roque House and to found a national Creole interpretive center were stimulated by two events. First, the Creoles were invited by Jean Lafitte Park to visit the Prairie Cajun Interpretive Center at Eunice, Louisiana and, secondly, by the sale and sub-division of a portion of Melrose Plantation on Isle Brevelle, adjacent to St. Augustine

Church. While the group appreciated and enjoyed the Eunice visit, several remarked at the small mention of Creoles on the southwest Louisiana prairies. The Isle Brevelle contingency certainly knew how many Creoles were out there and know full well their contributions to the Acadians who joined them there. Their earlier discussions about a Creole Culture Center jelled right there!

The loss of the Melrose tract came as a shock, and through the leadership of Joseph Moran, the Creoles voiced strong opposition to the subdivision. The Natchitoches Parish Planning Commission had no representatives from lower Cane River, and local realtors on the commission had vested interests in the project. Only a concerted public effort resulted in community reaction. It did not stop the project, but greatly enhanced the need for community action and planning. Isle Brevelle and the St. Augustine Historical Society immediately began a lobby to change that. Joseph Moran is now their representative on the parish planning commission, and Terrel Delphin and Emory Jones sit on the newly established National Heritage Commission.

Creoles see themselves as an extended community, now a national ethnic minority, of at least the magnitude of other ethnic enclaves. The Cane River Creoles are planning and working to take their place as leaders in that national community.

Recommendations for Future Work

The most urgent need among the Creole population, not just of Cane River but for all of Louisiana, is field collection of the Creole French (LC - Louisiana Creole) language. Only two or three studies (Dorman 1996) exist, and these are for the Pointe Coupee and Breaux Bridge areas. Southwest Louisiana and Cane River, already linked culturally in other ways, offer the possibility for Creole studies. Certainly on Cane River, Creole is a vanishing linguistic element as most speakers are over sixty years old. It may be that the next few years will see its almost total demise. Linguistic fieldwork is a must at this point.

With a grant from the National Center for Preservation Technology and Training, the St. Augustine Historical Society has begun an inventory of Creole material cultural items and patrimony. A nationwide search, using the computer to establish a guide to collections and/or artifacts, has begun under the direction of Janet Colson and her advisory board. More detailed inventories of properties, collections, and households on Isle Brevelle seem in order as additional support for this effort. Such inventories would facilitate interpretive planning at the Badin-Roque House, the new National Park and across the state.

With the help of the French architect, Jerôme Francou, and in connection with the National Center for Preservation Technology and Training, the Isle Brevelle community has begun preparation of an application as an historic district. Additional fieldwork on eligibility of structures, landscape, and/or viewshed is desperately needed to shore up the application. An historic district with some developmental control and guidelines seems requisite now with "urban creep" causing widespread developments along the river.

Ethnographic photography, especially processural recordation, i.e., *filé* preparation,

pepper stringing, cemetery renewal, etc., is underway but needs expansion. The work of local professional photographers and videographers offers a unique opportunity in the area. The recent grant to Joseph Moran from the Louisiana Office of Folklife is a good example of what can be done in this area. Photographers need not only field time, but also supplies, etc. The way of life on Cane River may well be lost before we can get enough recordation in hand.

These are all projects of vital importance to the Creole community; this current effort only touches the tip of these problems and, certainly, work will continue. Still, cooperative efforts with the new park can be a powerful support for that. Hopefully, long-term agreements will facilitate such local interests as they develop their cultural resources.

Conclusions

Cane River, particularly Isle Brevelle and Melrose on it, is of great symbolic significance to the national Creole community. First, it is still *home* to most of the families on it and from it. Second, it is a culturally intact set of tradition, well preserved as a source of revitalization for Creole life. Third, it offers people - particularly children and older people - a respite from the stress and pressure of urban life. Last, but not least, the region has more documentation as an historic Creole community and landscape than any other part of Louisiana - a point important to the Creoles of the state and the nation.

So, long before there was cultural preservation as an official action or even a popular action, the Creoles on Cane River were already at work doing it. Family, church and cultural traditions all draw people from near and far. Homecomings, religious rituals: weddings, funerals, First Communions, Confirmations, all attract Creoles from across the state and nation. Isle Brevelle, then, is a Creole heritage area where everything - landscape, architecture, artifacts, and activities - is metaphorically recognized as "Creole culture." It is a functional whole. Although people from "outside" Creole culture have not recognized the significance of the place, Creoles always have.

This brief ethnographic fieldwork has served to pull together some overview of Creole culture on Cane River, past and present, *vis à vis* the land and its broader cultural perspective. It reiterates, at every turn, the strength and conservation of Creole cultural traditions. In short, in Creole words, "It is a place where people can be comfortable being themselves." Hopefully, this overview will allow people outside that tradition to recognize the significance of Isle Brevelle to Creoles everywhere, not just in Louisiana.

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Appendix I

The Creole Struggle and Resurrection

"Our Story"

As Told By Creoles

Terrel A. Delphin, Jr.
Author

Lillie Delphin and Daphne Delphin
Contributors

For Publication as an Educational Tool
to be included in a
Cultural Curriculum in Secondary Schools
and Institutions of Higher Learning

Natchitoches, Louisiana 71457

September 1995

©1995

Dedicated to Our Parents

Terrel Alphonse Delphin, Sr. (+)
and
Mary Bernadine Conant Delphin

And

Paul Louviere (+)
and
Irene Josephine Auzenne Louviere

Special Dedication

To

The Memory and Living Legacy
Of My Grandparents
Of Eight Generations

Claude Thomas Pierre Metoyer (+)
and
Marie Thereze Conch-Conch (+)

*

Who Provided Our Roots and Wings
By Establishing
A Dynamic Culture Known to the World
As
The Creoles of Cane River

*

"The Truth Shall Set You Free"

Merci Beaucoup

Un grand merci beaucoup to my wife, Lillie, and my daughter, Daphne, for all of the hours we spent together in compiling this information. This study has caused us to understand ourselves better and the time spent was rewarding because at this point in our lives, we needed to share historical events which lead to where we are in history and how and why we arrived at this point. The experience of researching has given us a feeling of our cultural achievements and something to be proud of.

Special Note: My wife is from the Frilot Cove Colony, and her father was from the Grand Maris Colony. Therefore, our daughter has relatives and is a part of three colonies. This is one example of how inter-woven the Creole Culture is.

Lillie's mastery of the Creole language and Daphne's ability to communicate in French was of great value in putting things in their proper prospective from an interpretative standpoint.

Merci beaucoup special to my mother, Mary Bernadine, my sisters Mary and Theresa, Mickey Moran, and all members of the St. Augustine Historical Society, along with all church organization members who helped in this endeavor.

Un grand merci beaucoup special to James C. Billeaudeau, Jr. (Tee Boy), from the Frilot Cove Colony, for all of his help.

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Merci beaucoup sincere to Mr. Gilbert Martin, author and historian, for his personal contributions and guidance in understanding the Creole culture.

P.S. "There is nothing about Creoles that's Cajun."

The Spirit of Creolis

"La Donneuse de la Vie Vive"
(The Giver of the Living Truth)

Creolis is a Spirit of the wind that surfaced over twenty-three hundred years ago when the Celtic and Iberian people made their way across the Strait of Gibraltar and settled in North Africa, along the Mediterranean Sea. Also coming to North Africa from the East and traveling along the Mediterranean, was a mixture of Ethiopians, Egyptians, Arabs, and Jews. All lived together and interbred. The Spirit of Creolis guided these mixtures of people to peace and happiness through the world even though she remained dormant for many centuries.

It was the intention of Creolis to one day appear and give hope and meaning to a race of people that would be competitive, intelligent, educated, dignified, and have a sense of strong family values, with the Catholic church as the center of their community.

In 1590, Father J. de Acosta decided that individuals of mixed parentage born in America were neither French, Spanish, Indian, or African, but various mixtures of all four. Thus, a newly created race arose. He identified them as Criollos. Creolis then stepped out of her spirit and became Creole and for the next 250 years was referred to as a person born in the New World . . .

The Creole Struggle and Their Resurrection

There has been so much misunderstanding and confusion about the Louisiana Creoles until the dilemma became unbearable. It was my decision to take on the task to clear the confusion once and for all. I want to tell you the story, as a Creole author who lives the story each day, as it is, not as some would like to have it told. This story will have no ending only a continuous beginning.

Sometimes I feel that this task was forced upon me because of developments which started occurring around 1989, the year that the National Park Service began conducting a study of the Cane River area for possible inclusion in the National Park System to preserve the Creole culture.

The involvement of the National Park Service in this area was of great concern to me and I saw the need for someone from Cane River to become knowledgeable of the project which was going to take place, with or without the blessings of the Creole community. I didn't see any one making an effort to get involved to the point of documenting our history so as to eliminate further distortions from the truth.

What to do? Where do I start? I knew there was an entire Creole population out there, just like the Cane River Creoles, not recognized by our government, not represented in our government, and not part of our government. I decided to identify the Creole colonies in Louisiana because, wherever they were, they were identical to the Cane River colony: secluded, close-knit and without outside involvement. They too would be property owners and have a church and a cemetery. They too would have experienced the same labeling as the Cane River colony did. They too would have been the subject of books written by white authors with the same distortions from the actual story.

History can be a very dry subject. However, Creole history is a record of a very interesting past, and because it is a review of the past, few people take the time to research their history for understanding purposes. For this reason, I spent the past three years compiling this document.

In order to prevent others from having to spend years researching their history, I am producing this document for a twofold purpose:

(1) To serve as a training tool for parents to utilize in introducing their children to the Creole chronology. (It has been said that parents must give their children roots and wings. If you fail to give children roots, you clip their wings before they learn to fly.)

(2) As an aid for educational institutions to better understand the Creole struggle and the contributions made to society by Creoles.

There have been many books and papers written and published about Creoles and the Cane River colony. Thus far, nothing published has been totally correct. Some publications have brushed upon the truth; however, the "fill in the blanks" syndrome has prevailed. Where the story comes to a halt, due to lack of documented information, the author then fabricates the missing links. This process can also be termed the "selling syndrome." Sometimes the answer is so simple, yet the recounting is made so complicated, that the underlying truth is lost and the story becomes fiction. To tell the story you have to really know it, live it, and spend a lifetime pondering over it to understand it. That's why I am telling the story . . . I am telling the story about Creoles as a Creole who lives it!

To understand Creole chronology you must understand the meaning of culture. Culture is a gift passed from one generation to another. It is the totality of socially transmitted behavior patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions, and all other products of human works and thought characteristic of a community. It is an enrichment which required over 250 years of cultivation by sweat, tears, hardships, prayers, trial and error to develop an eminent society known as the "Creoles of Cane River."

The Creole culture is over 2,300 years old. Its embryo lies within the journey made by Celtic and Iberian people across the Strait of Gibraltar who settled in North Africa along the Mediterranean Sea. Also coming to North Africa from the east and traveling along the Mediterranean Sea were the Ethiopians, Egyptians, Arabs, and Jews. These people co-mingled and interbred. In time, their complexions were described as white, black and every shade in between. The first children of those mixtures were the forerunners of the Creole race.

The term Creole is a Latin or Spanish work that means "to create." In 1590, the term Creole was first introduced in Hispaniola by a Catholic priest, Father J. de Acosta, who came to realize that the babies born in Hispaniola were neither Spanish, Indian or African, but a mixture of the three, thus creating a new race of people. The term Creole became a racial connotation denoting those born in the New World with at least one parent being from the old world. However, since there were no white women around until 75 years after the work was introduced, pure white Creoles could not have existed (Martin, 1992).

For the purpose of keeping the contributing historical factors in sequence, as they relate to the development of the Creole race, the following listing will serve as a chronological guide (Martin, 1992):

Year	Historical Factor
Unknown	Indians inhabited the world
1492	Christopher Columbus landed at Hispaniola

1502	Christianized African slaves arrived at Hispaniola
1590	The term "Creole" was introduced in Hispaniola by Father J. de Acosta
1630	The French began to establish Tortuga, an island northwest of Hispaniola, and from there they plundered the Spanish colony
1664	Street women from Paris brought to Hispaniola to serve as wives for the gold diggers
1682	LaSalle claimed Louisiana for France
1685	King of France proclaimed all populations in French colonies as free citizens of France
1697	Spain seceded the west third of Hispaniola to France now known as Haiti
1702-1762	French Rule
1714	Natchitoches founded as French outpost
1718	New Orleans founded as French outpost
1719	First cargo shipment of West African slaves brought to Mobile, Louisiana capital city, and routed to New Orleans
1720	Opelousas founded as French outpost
1724	Le Code Noir (Black Code) - Creoles in earliest New Orleans records show that not only were they free but held professional positions, had access to the justice of the court and owned property. These rights were spelled out in the Code Noir. The French code had long been in effect in the West Indies.

1724	Creoles in French Hispaniola suffer debasing due to the fact that they had grown to such a degree of education, wealth, and power that the envy of the poor Whites could no longer be hidden. The first discriminatory law went into effect
1728	Because of racial cohabitation, White women and girls from the streets of Paris were brought to secure wives for White settlers of New Orleans
1769-1803	Spanish Rule
1776	United States established
1791-1804	Haitian Revolution - This is a very important era in our history because Hispaniola or Haiti has much influence on our history - Augustine Metoyer and Toussaint L'Ouverture were political proteges.
1803	The Louisiana Purchase - France sold Louisiana to the American government.
1815	The use of the term "Creole" by Whites, to describe themselves, did not become common until this year.

In 1492 Christopher Columbus initiated the development of the New World. The voyage to the New World consisted of three ships and 88 men. At the time of their arrival, an estimated three million Indians inhabited the island of Hispaniola, presently known as Haiti and the Dominican Republic. The invasion of the island by the Spaniards led to commingling with the inhabitants. As a result of the commingling, Indian mothers produced the first Creole babies in the New World. However, it would be another 100 years before the term Creole would come into use.

The Spaniards were in search of gold. The Indians were not accustomed to laboring work and could not produce the individual quotas of gold as set by the Spaniards. They began to slaughter the Indians. In 1502, christianized African slaves were sent from Seville, Spain, to Hispaniola to assist in the mining of gold. As a result, Spaniards, Indians and Africans interbred.

In order to better understand the resulting factor of racial commingling, definitions and terminology must be understood as follows:

Creole, as defined by a Creole, is a multi-cultural race of people, born in America prior to 1803,

and their descendants. Their lineage can be traced to Native Americans, France, Spain, South America, Haiti, Africa or any other country, and they refuse to be classified as anything other than Creole. Keep in mind that there are many definitions of Creole; however, the most popular comes from the Portuguese "Crioulo," meaning "Native to a Region." The reason for the popularity of this definition is because it is all inclusive and lends to confusion. If Whites and Blacks are Creole because they are native to a region, that's fine; however, we are the multi-cultural Creoles.

Creolism - A distinct and complete culture. The culture has everything to set it apart from any other culture, including but not limited to the following:

1. A land of origin.
2. A recognized cuisine.
3. A recognized language.
4. Recognized music and arts.
5. Recognized beliefs and practices.
6. Catholicism - the spiritual center of the culture.
   (Note: Not all Creoles are Catholic)

The use of the word Creole in reference to possessions has been widely used and must be clarified. Ownership is not the determining factor in plants and animals being referred to as Creole - with the offspring of genetically different parents or stock, especially the offspring produced by breeding plants and animals of different varieties, species or races. The hybrid or mixture is responsible for the Creole reference, i.e., the cross-breeding of thoroughbred and quarter horses produces a Creole horse.

The Cane River Creole colony was started by my grandparents (8 times removed), a Frenchman by the name of Claude Thomas Pierre Metoyer and a slave woman by the name of Marie Thereze Coin-Coin. The origin of Marie Thereze is somewhat cloudy. She is a victim of the "fill in the blanks" syndrome. Many authors have given her a direct African connection, while Créole legend tells us that her parents were from Hispaniola, and were established Creoles in that country.

Marie Thereze's father, a Conch-Conch, in Hispaniola, brought with him a gift passed on to him by an Indian relative, which was the art of healing, known as "having a Conjah." Healers with a "Conjah" were known as Conch-Conchs in the Creole culture. A Conjah can only be transferred from one opposing gender to another, i.e., from male to female or female to male.

Marie Thereze's parents, François and Françoise, produced ten children, according to baptismal

records at the Natchitoches Catholic Church. Creole legend has it that the names of her parents are incorrect. The names shown were only christian names and not birth names. Their first daughter was given the christian name of Marie Gertrude and was baptized on November 18, 1736. The second daughter was baptized on August 24, 1742 and given the christian name of Marie Thereze. Creole legend tells us that on the day of Marie Thereze's birth, her father selected her as the daughter to receive his powers of healing, and thus, he nicknamed her Conch-Conch. Because the priest could not understand that the nickname was separate and apart from the christian name, and being on missionary status, he failed to separate the nickname from the christian name, and conveniently wrote the name of the child as Marie Thereze Coin-Coin, eliminating all the confusion as far as he was concerned. This was not an uncommon practice within the Catholic church in developing America when no written evidence of the name was available, and when priests of different nationalities came to service the community. The simplest thing to do was to change the name to something more familiar - another "fill in the blanks" situation.

Marie Thereze Conch-Conch received her Conjah from her father in his old age. He taught her the art of herbal mixtures and, once convinced that she had mastered that art, through spiritual powers and ceremonial ritual, transferred his power to her. She became a practitioner at an early age.

The Metoyer and Conch-Conch cohabitation resulted in the birth of 10 children. This was the beginning of the three-tiered society in colonial Louisiana . . . White, Black and Creole. Their siblings were the first multi-ethnic group in America.

The development of the three-tiered society must be explained. It is simple: Whites and Blacks took pride in their pure blood and placed Creoles in another caste system. According to our ancestors, however, racism did not exist in colonial Louisiana. According to many accounts, colonial Louisiana was described as a paradise where people lived, shared, and survived together.

Over the years the Metoyer family acquired a large quantity of land through land grants and purchases. According to records belonging to my mother, Mary Bernadine Conant Delphin, they owned 18,000 acres of land. The Metoyer family established nine (9) plantations in Natchitoches Parish to include the famed Melrose Plantation, which is the only remaining intact plantation and which serves as a reminder of their achievements.

The Metoyer family owned more slaves than any free family of color in the nation. The reason for their large slaveholdings was instilled in the children by Marie Theresa, who was once a slave herself. She instructed her children to buy as many slaves as possible and give them the best life that they could have under the conditions.

Transit authors would have you believe that all of the land which was acquired by the Metoyer empire was lost during the great depression of the 1840s and during and after the Civil War. Another "fill in the blanks" part of the story. In 1995, there are still over 12,000 acres of the

original Metoyer empire land in the hands of descendants.

My great grandfather, Jean Conant, was the historian of the Cane River Creole colony. My mother still possesses some of the original documents recorded by him. Many of his records were displaced via lending to other historians and never returned. However, what is not intact at this time physically was orally transferred from one generation to another; therefore, my mother was the recipient of volumes of oral history which she has documented. As a result, the history still lives on. Many books have been published that mention historical documentation in the possession of John Conant, my grandfather. In addition, this documentation contained property acquired through land grants and purchases, as well as furniture purchases, genealogical records, births, deaths, weddings, baptisms, and property maps that pre-date official record keeping in Natchitoches Parish.

When you position place, time, and wealth in their proper place in history, you find that the Creoles of Louisiana were part of a colonial aristocracy.

Creoles feel that Marie Thereze Conch-Conch was a brilliant woman. She not only was the Mother of the Cane River colony, but was also the Mother of Louisiana agriculture, Creole architecture, and the developer of the famed Creole cuisine, an herbal doctor and Louisiana's first civil rights activist. However, too much credit has been given to her and her ability to achieve, when, in fact, the real truth reveals that Claude Thomas Pierre was only taking care of his common-law wife and his children. Claude Pierre did not deny nor was he ashamed of his children. His first children were a set of twins, a boy and a girl. He gave his son his father's name - Nicholas Augustine, and his daughter the name Marie Suzanne (Marie after his mother and Suzanne after his stepmother). This gesture proved his love for his family and the honor paid to his parents in France by including their names in the names of his first born.

Claude Pierre arranged the marriages of his children. He arranged the marriage of his daughter, Suzanne, to Dr. Joseph Conant, and sold them a plantation nine miles south of Natchitoches. The sale of the property was strictly for legal purposes because he actually gave them the plantation.

I am a descendant of the Suzanne Metoyer and Dr. John Conant line. The property where my mother, Mary Bernadine Conant Delphin, lives has been in her family since the land grant. Some of the furniture in her house belonged to Suzanne and was purchased by Claude Pierre in France for his daughter. An outstanding piece is a grandfather clock that still operates today.

Claude Pierre took several of his children to France to visit his parents and sent others to visit in order to be exposed to French culture and customs. It was on a visit to France with his father that Augustine got the idea of building a church which would serve as the central focus of the community he planned to establish for his people. It was in Paris that the idea of St. Augustine Catholic Church was conceived.

As testimony to this fact, I quote a letter, in the possession of my family as follows (Delphin,

1959):

Cane River
State of Louisiana
Isle Brevelle
10 June 1803

Mr. Jerome Sarpy

My dear friend and nephew,

I have just returned from New Orleans, and I suspect that you are anxious to have the news. I'll recount it all. Since you are kept to your bed, and I myself am tired after my trip, I send you my faithful servant John Baptist with this message for you. As you know we lived first under our own French government, then under that of Spain, and now we are under the authority of these new people who speak English and travel in wagons covered in white. As we all know these are unquiet times without repose. We shall all pray to our Creator for his blessings. As you know we have already spoken of building a church, and I am sure that with my brother Louis and his knowledge of building, we shall succeed. I shall give the land to the North of my house for the church and for the cemetery. That is what I have always wished to do since I visited the native land of my father in France; Paris, Marseilles, Lyons, in each one of these cities there are churches in every quarter. In one way or another I am sure that having a house of the good God in our midst, our people will live a better life, will love one another, and will live in harmony. I have heard it said that Father LaSalle admired the place that I have chose for the church. Yes, I have also heard that there have been troubles in Haiti. It seems that up to the present time, Toussaint L'Ouverture is unbeaten. I ask myself for how long. He has come up a long way, from coachman to the position he now holds. He has such love for his people and his land. To lose now would break his heart, both his and that of his beloved country.

I am sure that within a week I shall be able to visit you, when we shall have one of our long discussions. I am certain that the church will be finished by the first of August, and I am very grateful to you personally and to James Dupre for offering the main alter. With the aid of all, I know that we shall succeed. Jerome, I beg you to take good care of yourself, and bridle your impetuous temperament.

May Our Father in Heaven bless you

I remain

Augustin Metoyer
Yucca Plantation

St. Augustine's role in Natchitoches Parish history must be understood for many reasons. The church is a classic example of how the total society was woven and how racism and social status did not play into the lives of the people. St. Augustine Catholic Church became the parent church in the Parish, with all races worshiping and holding membership in the church. Later, three missions were added, St. Charles - at Bermuda, St. Joseph - at Bayou Derbanne, and St. Ann - at Old River. All three missions were located in white communities; however, on special occasions, such as first communion, confirmation, and other celebrations, all attended St. Augustine as one

big family.

The idea of racial deterioration between Creoles of Cane River and old Natchitoches Parish families, as told by outside authors, is far removed from the truth. Outside authors failed to include industrial and urban developments in the cultural landscape. They failed to realize the existence of congenial respect. In colonial Natchitoches Parish, agriculture and land development was the primary focus. However, the industrial revolution of the later 18th century cannot be overlooked. The revolution brought social and economical changes that influenced the interest of people which brought new contacts and eliminated some of the old, which had nothing to do with race or influence. The relationship, throughout history, has been honorable. Classic examples are celebrations and community projects - we are invited to and attend their celebrations and they are invited to and attend our celebrations. In other words, we still share, care, and lend support to each other.

Augustine, because of his many contributions to the development of the area, became the patriarch of the Cane River colony and protected the three-tiered society by arranging the marriages of the children of his brothers and sisters, just as his father, Claude Thomas Pierre, had previously done.

While the Cane River colony was being developed other Creole colonies were being developed in other areas such as Frilot Cove, Mamou, Grand Maris, Lydia, Patoutville, Rougon, Lake Charles, New Orleans, Mallet, Leonville, Wible Bridge, and other such places within proximity of the colony.

The New Orleans Creole culture began to thrive because of imports and exports. Augustine established business and social relationships with New Orleans. He invited other Creoles to visit Cane River. He brought carpenters, tailors, teachers, etc., and selected some of them to marry into his family. Please keep in mind that all of this occurred prior to 1803.

France sold Louisiana to the American government in 1803, now known as "The Louisiana Purchase." With the purchase there was an agreement made between France and the American government called the Treaty of 1803 which guaranteed protection to the citizens of France.

The Americans came and didn't like what they saw. They had problems with racial cohabitation. White supremacy showed its ugly head for the first time when the agreement of the treaty was ignored by requiring Creoles to deny their French, Spanish and Indian lineage and accept the "One Drop Rule." Creoles never accepted this rule, even to this day. They will never accept it. The American government titled or labeled Creoles as Blacks through the legal system. This action by the American government constituted an act of genocide against Creoles.

For 125 years before the Americans took possession of Louisiana, all inhabitants were citizens of France and enjoyed the liberties assured by the French government. Creoles were the inhibitors and flourished in their prominence and ingenuity. The sale of Louisiana to the American

government brought great devastation to the Creoles of Louisiana. Such greed for power by the government only caused Creole colonies to cluster more and become tighter knit.

While we do not deny any part of our lineage - white, black, brown or red - we want the right, in contemporary terms, to be recognized as Creoles, descendants of the first multi-cultural group of people in America. In this light, we resent being called Black, gens de couleur libre, Mulatto, Quadroon, Octoroon, Griffe, and other names or being accused of desiring to be white. We take issue with and suffer great discomfort with such labels. No other race of people were forced to deny their heritage, only the Creoles.

There was no tug-of-war over Creoles. Whites and Blacks referred to the mixed breeds as Creole. Therefore, the Creole nation won title to their racial identity by popular acquiescence.

We have relatives in many cultural directions. We are not confused about who we are, but the American government is. They choose to ignore, look over and legally declare us invisible. The government is guilty of the act of genocide by viewing us as non-existent.

Even with the difficulties that the government has caused, Creoles have never refused to serve the government with honor when called upon. We have carried our load in time of war and peace. We do not believe in handouts; however, we do believe in freedom. We believe in accepting the expectations of citizenship, with dignity and honor.

We now live in an integrated society and to be denied our heritage is un-American and unconstitutional. We have come of age in 1995 - in an integrated society. We are demanding respect for our cultural contributions to the advancement of this civilization.

We are the only people whom are yet to be freed.

When humans are denied their cultural existence, they live in slavery. We are expecting the cooperation of the State of Louisiana and the American government to free us and allow us to be comfortable with whom we are, Creole. Our sole mission in this effort is to be comfortable with ourselves. Is this too much to ask?

Robert DeBlieux, one of Louisiana's leading historians and Natchitoches native who knows much about Natchitoches history and the Creole culture, has admitted that the development of the Cane River colony is a complicated story to him. However, we say that when facts are distorted in history they lend to complications, especially when the truth is removed from the story.

Let me talk about facts . . . especially Creole cuisine. Our Creole cuisine has been claimed by the Cajuns. They claim to be the originators and developers of this style of cooking, which is far from the truth. The Cane River area is far removed from South Louisiana and the confusion of that story. The style of cooking on Cane River has been the same for over 250 years. It is the same in all other Creole colonies of Louisiana, and that's all I will say about that. Draw your own

conclusions.

Dr. Barry Ancelet, from USL, addressed the LSU Cajun Student Association in Baton Rouge during the first week of April. His subject was "The Misconceptions of Cajuns in the Media." He told them that many people have told the story, yet no one has ever gotten it right. Dr. Ancelet said, "To tell the story, you have to really know it, that's why we need to tell the story ourselves." We are taking his advice by telling the Creole story ourselves.

Causes and Effects of Displacement
(The Last Fifty Years and the Creole Experience - How It Influenced My Life)

The setting for this story is the end of the second World War.

I am the son of Terrel Delphin, Sr., DOB October 19, 1903, and Mary Bernadine Conant Delphin, DOB December 24, 1911. My DOB is March 17, 1938.

Life in the Cane River Colony existed as it had for the past seven generations. However, the elements that made the colony unique still prevailed, cotton was king, and hard work was no stranger. Creole cooking was as good as always and the Catholic church was still the center of the community.

I chose to select this period in history to tell about because it is the period that challenged the existence of the Creole culture the most, and some of the reasons will be identified.

My father, Terrel, was born across the Cane River from my mother, Mary Bernadine Conant Delphin. They had seven children, Cornelius John, Terrel Alphonse, Jr., Mary Antoinette, Walter Martin, Thomas Augustine, Phillip, and Marie Theresa. Two of the children bore the names of her parentage.

My father was an adventurous young man, having been educated at Straight University in New Orleans. After leaving school in New Orleans he traveled to Detroit and joined other Creole friends from Cane River and went to work as a porter, traveling between Detroit and Canada. After several years working, he decided to join the US Navy and see the rest of the world; however, he had a problem. The Navy was restricted to members of the Caucasian race only.

Having a very fair complexion, with straight black hair, which came from his mother's side of the family (she belonging to the Choctaw Indian tribe). Until this time in my father's life he considered himself Creole, just as all other members of the Cane River Colony, not White or Black, just Creole.

My father made the decision to lie about his race in order to join the US Navy. He spent four years in the Navy and traveled to 24 foreign countries, which provided him with many experiences and introduced him to a vast number of different cultures. This experience made him a slave unto himself because he had to hide his true identity from his sailor friends. One of his best friends was a young sailor by the name of Bridges from Natchitoches. However, Bridges didn't know he was from Cane River because he told his friends that he was from New Orleans. To add to the complications, when he returned from his tour of duty, he married my mother, and after a short stay in New Orleans, returned to Cane River to take care of my mother's farm. My mother was an only child and her parents were aging and in ill health. By this time, Bridges had returned to Natchitoches and became Chief of Police. When shopping in Natchitoches, my father avoided Bridges, and this added to his frustrations.

I can remember when I was approximately 6 years old, we were in the cotton field picking cotton, when I heard my father tell me and my older brother that he never wanted any of his children passing for White. As we grew up, my father frequently related his Navy experience to us and related the Bridges story to us.

My mother and father believed in strong family values, hard work, respect, prayer, along with responsibilities. I always give my father credit for teaching us to work and credited my mother with teaching us to pray and about life in general.

We attended church at St. Augustine. When we became of school age, we attended St. Joseph Elementary School, which was located next to the church. The church priest and nuns were all of the White race. The children were all Creole and race was of no moment because we were all family.

After graduating from St. Joseph, I attended St. Matthew High School, which was a public school just up the river from where we lived. This was the beginning of my understanding that color and culture did make a difference. Prior to going to public school, we understood the three-tiered society . . . Black, White and Creole - and we all played together during the day. After we went our separate ways, we each took our respective place in society. This does not mean that racial prejudice existed among the people on Cane River.

The St. Matthew High School enrollment was approximately 50-50 Creole and Black. The American government and the "One Drop Rule" had classified Creoles as "Colored," which meant Black. Therefore, we attended the Black public school. At St. Matthew High School, the Black kids accused us of thinking that we were White. This, of course, was not the case at all. We did not consider ourselves White nor Black, but Creole.

My father, on a daily basis, talked about the injustices in the world and how he would see society integrated, a man on the moon and his children free and first class citizens in America. He saw the Creole society slipping away into an integrated society and that was of concern to him. He said that one day he would be able to vote and that voting would free his children. He told us daily of how our ancestors lived in a free society until the Americans came. He was a great supporter of the rights of an individual.

Within a twenty year period, between 1930 and 1950, Creoles had prospered to the point of putting their lives back on track to where they were prior to the great depression of 1929 and 1930. However, all was not well in America. The federal government had passed "Jim-Crow" laws promoting segregation against Blacks. Blacks were being lynched, churches were being burned and the country was in a turmoil.

A.P. Touro and Thurgood Marshall, two Creoles from New Orleans, took leadership in the Civil Rights Movement. They targeted the Louisiana Creole colonies to introduce the Civil Rights Movement because they were the most independent people. Most were business or land owners

and didn't depend on politicians or plantation owners for their livelihood. They visited Frilot Cove, Grand Maris, Jeanerette, Lafayette, Mamou, Cane River and other Creole colonies. Creoles and Blacks joined forces in the movement.

I made mention of the above to inform younger people and to remind older persons with short memories of how all these situations came into play.

I am, at this time, reminded of a story read while researching our history. During the Civil War, the Creoles of Louisiana were not drafted into the regular Confederate army or even accepted as volunteers. However, the men of Cane River organized two miliary units and served loyally. The Creole volunteers received a twenty-five dollar bonus, which was only half the bonus given to White volunteers. One hundred years later, I was employed by the Natchitoches Parish Sheriff as a Field Deputy. My salary was one hundred dollars less than the White Field Deputy starting on the same day with the same qualifications. The parable in this injustice is that we have never allowed hard times and injustices to prevent us from achieving. In sixteen years with the Natchitoches Parish Sheriff's Department, I served as Chief of Detectives for ten years. After leaving the Sheriff's Department, I went to work with the Louisiana Department of Agriculture, with the Livestock Brand Commission, which is the law enforcement division of the Louisiana Department of Agriculture. At present, I am the Director of the Program for the State of Louisiana, and the only minority in America to hold such a position. This achievement required that I be a notch above the rest and the reward is pleasing.

Current Accomplishments in the Effort to Restore the Culture

January 22 (Annual) - The birthday of Nicholas Augustine Metoyer (DOB January 22, 1768) has been designated as "National Creole Heritage Day" because he was one of the first Creoles born in America. This date in American history also marks the introduction of the Creole colony of Isle Brevelle, at Cane River, located in Natchitoches Parish, Louisiana. Recognition is also given to Nicholas Augustine Metoyer as the founder of St. Augustine Catholic Church, which is the first Catholic church founded in America by a non-White.

1989 - The National Park Service began conducting a study of Cane River at Natchitoches Parish, Louisiana, for possible inclusion in the National Park Service to preserve the Creole culture.

January 21, 1991 - Governor Buddy Roemer proclaimed January 22, 1991 as Creole Heritage Day in the State of Louisiana. This is the first time in the history of Louisiana that the government has officially recognized the Creole culture.

October 19, 1993 - Senator J. Bennett Johnston, Roger Kennedy, Director of the National Park Service, along with Congressman Bruce Vento, toured the Cane River area and advised us that legislation would be submitted to Congress to create a new unit of the National Park Service to preserve the Creole culture. Senator Johnston also said that he planned to have the legislation through Congress by October, 1994.

January 12, 1994 - Governor Edwin W. Edwards proclaimed January 22, 1994 as Creole Heritage Day in the State of Louisiana.

January 17, 1994 - The City of Natchitoches proclaimed January 22, 1994 as Creole Heritage Day in the City of Natchitoches.

January 22, 1994 - The first Creole Heritage Day Celebration was held at St. Augustine Catholic Church on Cane River with more than 350 persons attending.

November 2, 1994 - President Bill Clinton signed Public Law 102-449, Title III, creating "The Cane River Creole National Park and Heritage Area" to preserve the Creole culture on Cane River.

November 17, 1994 - Governor Edwin W. Edwards proclaimed January 22, 1995 as Creole Heritage Day in the State of Louisiana.

January 6, 1995 - President Bill Clinton presented a Creole acknowledgment to America.

January 18, 1995 - A group of Creoles from throughout Louisiana met at the Louisiana State Mansion for a Creole Proclamation photo session with Governor Edwin W. Edwards.

January 21, 1995 - The second Creole Heritage Day Celebration was held at St. Augustine Catholic Church on Cane River with over 1,000 persons in attendance. The Creole flag was raised for the first time in the history of America.

The St. Augustine Historical Society commissioned Curtis and Mary Bordenave to design a flag symbolic of the Creole culture to be flown in memory of our ancestors. The colors of the flag were selected from the different world flags that represent the diverse backgrounds of the American Creole people. The rainbow of colors forms the shape of the alphabet "C" to serve as a symbol of the flag with a balanced scale symbolizing justice and equality.

The flag, in totality, re-emphasizes the motto by which Creoles live, "Dignity of labor, whether with hand or head, that the world owes no person a living but it owes every person an opportunity."

A Creole Prayer was also written by Mary Delphin Bordenave and given as souvenirs at the celebration.

Fifteen states proclaimed Creole Heritage Day in 1995.

1995 - Legislation:

Senator Don Kelly, of Natchitoches, has filed a Concurrent Resolution in the regular session of the Louisiana Legislature to request the Senate Committee on Commerce and the House Committee on Municipal, Parochial and Cultural Affairs to study the need for infrastructural designs to preserve and restore the Creole culture.

Senator Don Cravins has submitted a bill in the Louisiana Senate requiring the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education to require a one-semester multi-cultural course to be taught in Louisiana schools. The bill will require all Louisiana cultures to be recognized and exposed to young people of Louisiana.

Conclusions

This presentation has been a chronological overview of where we have been and where we are today.

This document was presented to members of the Cane River colony at a public meeting held May 8, 1995, at the St. Augustine Catholic Hall, at Isle Brevelle, Louisiana. On a motion by Mrs. Marie Roque and seconded by Mrs. Maxine Rachal, this document was unanimously approved by the community to be the "Creole Story" for presentation to the Park Service and/or any other inquiries.

PARENTHETICAL REFERENCES

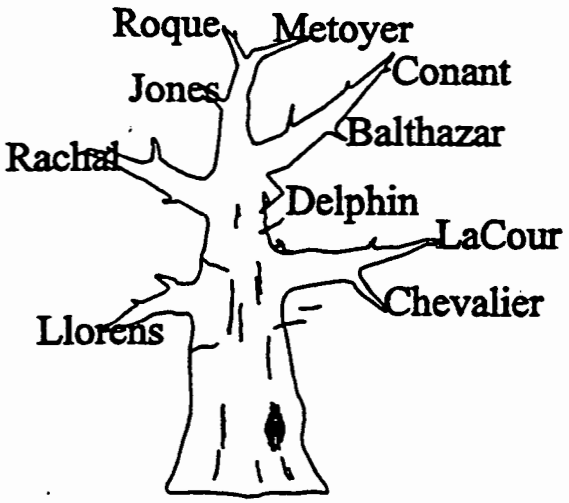
Parenthetical References

Martin, Gilbert E. *Creole Chronology*. Castro Valley, CA: The Mandingo Press, 1992.

Delphin, Bernadine Conant. Personal Historical Documents. Unpublished.

. . . Creolis has been a guardian angel for the Creole culture for centuries and has protected her members against destructive efforts of governments and other races of people. However, through her wisdom and perseverance she has inspired a total culture to withstand all that the powers of the world could give and yet stand tall among all men and remain **CREOLE**.

Appendix II



CREOLE GENEALOGY

FOCUS: Cane River Community of Natchitoches Parish

All Part of One Family

"Well, we're all related" is a common phrase among Creoles and although said many times in jest, it is more likely to be true than not. In-group marriage has long been been the preferred pattern among Creoles. Cousin marriage in the third and fourth generations is quite common. When impending marriage is being considered, even though a lineage is suspected, it is not normally researched because it's probably "too far back to count". It has been stated, in part, "There is a tangle-you know how a spool of thread gets tangled. That's the way we are."[1]

Credit:
Janet Ravarre Colson
NCPTT Workshop - N.S.U.

CREOLE GENEALOGY

Names

Genealogy research of the Creole can present unique problems. The carrying forward of the same given (first) name through many generations can cause confusion. This confusion is compounded when there is no reference date to use as confirmation. There is also the instance of using the same given name among different family groups containing the same surname. Another example would be the use of naming girls "Marie" or "Theresa" up to five or six times in one family. [2] One of the biggest problems is the use of nicknames. Many individuals given nicknames virtually "lost" their given names. When questioned, the older generation usually can't remember what a persons' given name was, "they were just known as Coco or Red" is the usual response. Between the use of nicknames, the taking on of the title "Piran" and "Miran" when becoming a godparent, along with the duplication of names, a researcher of Creole genealogy has to check, double-check and go back and check again.

Classification by Others

Census records also present a different problem, race. Many individuals classified as a particular race during the 1850 census, may be classified as belonging to a *different* race during the 1860 or 1870 census. One instance, as an example, involved the classification of the wife of Chinese man (living in the Cane River community) classified as black in the 1870 census although she was really Indian. This woman's classification as black in the 1870 census was not unusual in Louisiana. "Because of the ambiguity of Indian's position in colonial Louisiana, and because of the forced emancipation of Indian slaves in the 1780's, some confusion has existed as to whether certain individuals were of Indian or Negro descent."[3] It was found that persons classified in civil records in one racial category such as "mulatress" and in church records in another such as an Indian of a specific tribal group.

CREOLE GENEALOGY

Major Family Names

Many surnames known for their "Cane River Connection" would include, but are not limited to Metoyer, Conant, Roque, Delphin, Gallien, Chevalier, Balthazar, Jones, Rachal, etc. can be found in all regions of early Louisiana. Then again in a lot of instances names common to other Creole communities can be traced back to the Cane River area and vice versa. Creoles will seek out one another and colonized among themselves within new areas.

CREOLE GENEALOGY

General Information

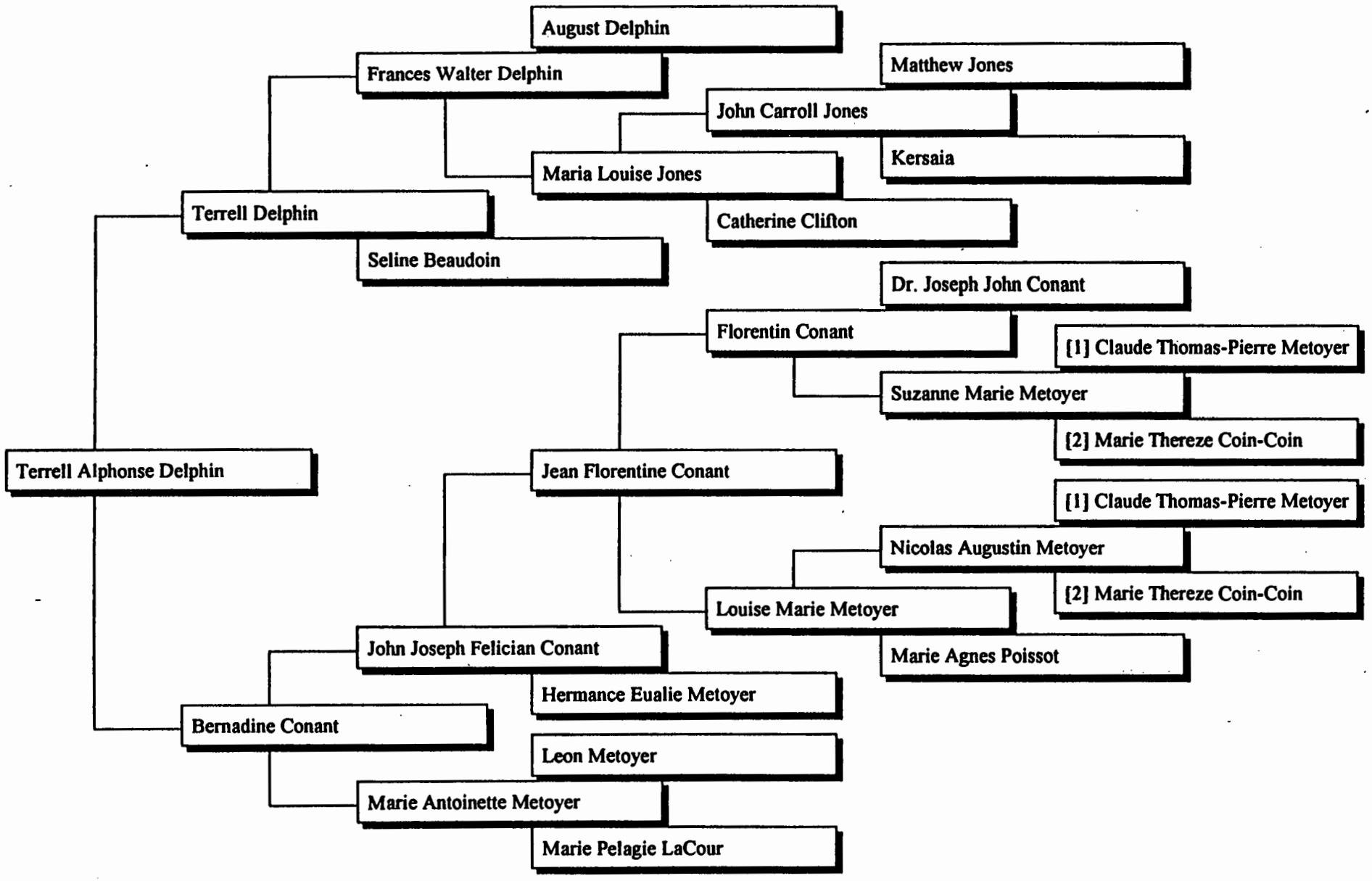
This project has required me to assimilate great volumes of data regarding the beginning era of the Creole. Through this informational gathering, it has not gone unnoticed that the Creole people are a very special and unique group. One demonstration of this statement is the number of authors that have tried to capture the true meaning of Creole. Although many of books published shows a definite thoroughness in research and adaptation, none of the works viewed can be considered an absolutely accurate record. When used by a genealogist, these publications should be treated only as a guide.

Reference Sources:

A few of the reference sources available are shown below. Other possible avenues available are the Natchitoches Genealogy Library, Cammie Henry Research Center, Watson Library, and the Catholic Dioceses of Alexandria, Louisiana.

1. *Marginality and Identity,* Sister Frances Jerome Woods, C.D.P., copyright 1972
2. *Natchitoches 1719-1803 Translated Abstracts of the Catholic Church Registers,* Elizabeth Shown Mills
3. Gary B. Mills, *The Forgotten People: Cane River's Creoles of Color* (Baton Rouge, 1977) 86-87
4. *Natchitoches Church Marriages, 1818-1850 Translated Abstracts from Registers 8, 11 and 12.* Elizabeth Shown Mills
5. *History of St. Augustine's Parish,* J. J. Callahin, C.S. Sp., Copyright 1954

Ancestors of Terrell Alphonse Delphin



First Generation

---

1. Claude Thomas-Pierre METOYER. Born About 1744. Died About 1815.

He married Marie Thereze COIN-COIN. Born About 1742. Died About 1816. They had the following children:

2	i.	Suzanne Marie METOYER
3	ii.	Nicolas Augustin METOYER
4	iii.	Louis METOYER
5	iv.	Pierre METOYER
6	v.	Dominique METOYER
7	vi.	Antoine Joseph METOYER
8	vii.	Eulalie METOYER
9	viii.	Mary Francoise Roselie METOYER
10	ix.	Pierre Toussaint METOYER

1 Suzanne Marie Metoyer 1768 - 1838 Age at first marriage: 26 est.
.. +Jean Baptiste Anty m: ABT 1798 Age at first marriage: ?
.... 2 Marie Susanne (Suzette) Anty 1799 - Age at first marriage:
..... 2 Aspasis Marie Anty Age at first marriage:
..... 2 Thereze Marie Carmelite Anty Age at first marriage:
..... 2 Male Infant Anty Age at first marriage:
..... 2 Arsene Marie Anty Age at first marriage:
..... +Manuel Llorens Age at first marriage:
*2nd spouse of Suzanne Marie Metoyer:
.. +Dr. Joseph John Conant m: ABT 1795 Age at first marriage: ?
..... 2 Florentin Conant 1794 - AFTER 1840 Age at first marriage:
..... +Louise Marie Metoyer 1799 - Age at first marriage:
..... 3 Charles Darcourt Conant 1825 - Age at first marriage:
..... 3 Jean Florentine Conant 1820 - Age at first marriage:
..... +Hermance Eualie Metoyer 1832 - 1890 Age at first marriage:
..... 4 John Joseph Felician Conant 1874 - 1960 Age at first marriage: -31 est.
..... +Marie Antoinette Metoyer m: February 1843 Age at first marriage: ?
..... 5 Bernadine Conant 1911 - Age at first marriage: 20
..... +Terrell Delphin m: February 08, 1932 Age at first marriage: ?
..... 6 Cornelius Delphin 1932 - Age at first marriage: 25
..... +Shirley LaCaze 1931 - m: August 23, 1958 Age at first marriage: 27
..... 6 Mary Antoinette Delphin 1934 - Age at first marriage: 38
..... +Curtis Theodore Jr. Bordenave m: December 30, 1972 Age at first marriage: ?
..... 6 Terrell Alphonse Delphin 1938 - Age at first marriage:
..... +Lillie Louviere Age at first marriage:
..... 6 Walter Martin Delphin 1946 - Age at first marriage: 31
..... +Edna Marie Gallien m: July 07, 1977 Age at first marriage: ?
..... 6 Thomas August Delphin Age at first marriage:
..... +Shirley Louise Metoyer 1947 - Age at first marriage:
..... 6 Phillip Delphin Age at first marriage:
..... 6 Mary Teresa Delphin Age at first marriage:
..... 3 Florentine Conant Age at first marriage:
..... 4 Anna Marie Metoyer Age at first marriage:
..... +David Llorens Age at first marriage:

Appendix III

Cane River Creole Families

1. Antee/Anty
2. Arceneaux
3. Balthazar
4. Bayonne
5. Beaudoin/Beaudion
6. Bernard
7. Chelette
8. Chevalier
9. Christophe
10. Clifton
11. Cloutier
12. Colson
13. Conant
14. Conday/Conde/Coindet
15. Delphin
16. Dubreuil
17. Dupart
18. Dupre/Dupree
19. Friedman
20. Gonzaque
21. Jones
22. Kirkland
23. Kochinsky
24. LaCour
25. Lemelle/Lamelle
26. Llorance/Llorens
27. Metoyer
28. Mezieres
29. Monet/Monette
30. Moran/Morin
31. Mullone/Mulon
32. Neal
33. Rachal
34. Raggio
35. Rocque/Roque
36. Sarpy
37. Sers
38. Severine/Severin
39. Smith (Austin)
40. St. Ville
41. Sylvia/Sylvie
42. Terrel

Sources on Kinship

Mrs. Kathleen Balthazar-Heitzman

Mrs. John Colson

Mrs. Bernadine Delphin

Mr. Terrel Delphin

Mrs. Theresa Demery

Mrs. Sonny Jones

Mr. Allen Metoyer

Mr. Joseph Moran

Mrs. Judith Moran

Mr. Mickey Moran

Mrs. Theresa Morgan

Mrs. Blanche Sers (deceased)

Appendix IV

A Partial List of Contemporary Craftspeople

Herman Christophe -	Carpenter/Cross Maker
Sam Christophe -	Carpenter/Cross Maker
Janet Colson -	Flowers, Contemporary Crafts
Preston Conant -	Upholsterer
Betty Coutee -	Quilter
"Doc" Couty -	Furniture Repair/Restoration
Terrel Delphin -	Jewelry Making
Isaac Dupree -	Saddlery Repair
Patrick Dupree -	Welder/Branding Irons
Gean Kochinsky -	Furniture Repair
Earvin LaCour -	Folk Artist/Painter/Farrier
Lair LaCour -	Doll Maker/Quilter/ *Brame* Maker
Lottie Metoyer -	Quilter
Rosalie Chevalier Metoyer -	Quilter
Cecile Monet -	Sunbonnet Maker
Bernadine Moran -	Seamstress
Joseph Moran -	Artist/Cross Maker/Carpenter/Basket maker
Mary Rachal -	Quilter
Debra Roque -	Quilter/Seamstress
Adam Sarpy -	Farrier
Marie Roque -	Quilter

Appendix V

Foodways

Meat Pies

Tamales

Gumbos/Jambalaya

Boucherie: Beef/Pork

- *Tasso*
- *Graton*
- *Andouille*
- *Zandouille*
- *Boudin*
- *Chorize*
- *Boulets*
- *Grillades*
- Ham/Bacon
- Hoof Tea
- Tripe
- *Ponce* (Stomach)
- Intestines
- Liver
- Brains
- Blood *(Boudin)*
- Tongue
- Hoofs
- Head Meat
- Skin (Pork) *Gratons*

Wild Meats:

- Venison
- Squirrel
- Racoon
- Fish
- Possum
- Turtle
- Crawfish
- Ducks
- Geese
- Wild Birds:
  - Doves,
  - Robins, Egrets

Birds:

Chickens Goose

Guineas Pigeons

Duck

***Légumes*:**

Okra

Green Onions/Shallots

Garlic

Red Pepper

Corn - - - - - - - -Meal
Lyed Cornmeal (*Masa)*
Hominy/Grits
Whole Corn
Shucks
Whiskey

Rice

Beans

Peas

Squash/Pumpkins/Merlitons

Les Douceurs:

Sugar Cane - Syrup

Cakes - Jam Cake *Galets*

Nut Cake

Tea Cakes

Pies

Cobbler/Stews Pralines

Fruits:

Zis-Zis

Plums

Figs

Pears

Peaches

Pomegranates

Grapes

***Les Boissons*:**

Brandy

Wine

Lemonade

Sassafras Tea

Wild Plants Used by Creoles

Sassafras - roots and leaves

Devil's Shoestring

Grapes

Zis-Zis

Muscadines

Plums

Maypops

Elderberry

Mayhaw

Patates Sauvages (Indian Potatoes)

Consultants	Foods	Consultants	Foods	Foods
Wood Antee Myra Friedman	*Tasso*		Rice	Wild Foods:
Lair LaCour	*Boudin* *Grillades*	F.J. Delphin		Coon
Tee Boy Lily Delphin	*Gratons* *Étouffe*	Allen Metoyer		Squirrel Duck
Lily Delphin	Barbeque *Boulets* (Beef or Fish) *Pounce*	F.J. Delphin		Geese Fish: Buffalo Gar Catfish
Lily Delphin	Chicken (Traditional for Gumbo) Duck/Goose (Traditional for Weddings)			Venison Crawfish Frog Legs
Terrel/Lily Delphin	Guinea (Traditional for Gumbo) Pigeons *Gumbo*			
	Okra: Gumbo Fried Boiled Dried?	Mrs. Blanche Sers		Pies: Sweet Potato Cakes: Jelly Cakes Nut Cakes (Walnut/Pecans)
Maxine	Cornbread: Fried Baked Grits	Cecilia Dupree Lily Delphin		Tea Cakes
Marie Roque	Green Onions		*Tamales*	Pralines Cobblers
Lily Delphin	Garlic			

Clara Jones Mrs. Severine Metoyer Kirkland	*Filé* (Used in lieu of okra)	Mrs. Rosalie Metoyer		Fruits: *Zis-Zis* Plums Figs Pomegranates Peaches Grapes Pears
Marie Roque	Squash: Fried Boiled			
Zeline Badin-Roque	Pumpkin: cut into strips and dried			
Clara Jones Mrs. Severine Metoyer Kirkland	Cayenne Pepper			
	Merliton			
Rosalie Metoyer Mary Sarpy	*Zis-Zis*: Made into brandy Grapes Made into wine		Mustard Greens *Gumbo Z'herbes* Meat Pies	
Harvey Kocinsky	Peaches (2 kinds, dried)			
	Coffee (Parched fresh from green beans) Lemonade (*Limonade)*			
Lair LaCour	Sausage: *Chorize* *Andouille* *Zandouille*			

Appendix VI

Musicians and Vocalists

Tony Arceneaux

Josephine Balthazar

Keith Balthazar

Ti' Cont Chevalier *

John Colson

Preston Conant

Winnie Conant*

"Doc" Couty

Bruce Dupree

Patrick Dupree

Harvey Kochinsky*

Alex "Youk" LaCour *

Frank "Eveck" LaCour *

Katrice LaCour

Neuville "Duma" LaCour

Otis LaCour

Rainey LaCour

Shakespeare "Sheck" LaCour *

Allen Metoyer

Carmine Sarpy

*Deceased

Appendix VII

Consultants

Wood Antee - Badin-Roque House, Crafts, Identity

Mrs. Isabel Delphin Arceneaux -

Tony Arceneaux - Cemetery, Dancing

Kathleen Balthazar-Heitzman - Genealogy, Story-Telling, New York Creoles

Tillman Chelette - Ferries, Roads, Change in River

John Colson - Music, Chicago, Pepper and *Filé*

Preston Conant - Music

Bernadine Delphin - History & Genealogy, Suzanne Metoyer

Daphne Delphin - Youth/Identity, Life History

F.J. Delphin - Hunting, Fishing

Mark Delphin - Creole Identity

Terrel Delphin - History, Life History

Marie Dupre - Creole Culture, New Orleans, Creole Language

Freed Dupree - Chicago Connection, Life History

Isaac Dupree - Cattle Raising

Myra Friedman - Education, Schools, Creole Culture

Mrs. Ambrose Hertzog, Sr. - Racing, Other Events

Ambrose Hertzog, II - Creoles Remembered at Magnolia

Emory Jones - Contemporary Farming

Gloria Jones - Modern Plantation Life

Daisy Kochinsky - Foodways, Town Connections

Doris Kochinsky - Furniture, Kinfolks

Harvey Kochinsky - Foodways, Farming, Settlement

Lair LaCour - Crafts, Foodways, History, Landscape

Allen Metoyer - Music, Chicago, Creole Culture in General, Language and Music

Lottie Metoyer - Quilting

Pete Metoyer - Town/River Connections

Rosalie Metoyer - Quilting, Foodways, Life on Isle Brevelle

Melton Metoyer - Hunting, Fishing, Work

Joseph Moran - People, Places, Changes, Transect

Judith Jones Moran - Carroll Jones, Marriage Patterns

Mickey Moran - Transect, History, Recent Culture

Theresa Morgan - Genealogy, History

Mary Rachal - Quilting, Foodways

Collins Roque - Stores

Marie Roque - Landscape, Crafts, Church, Foodways

Tommy Roque - Schools, Education

Teresa Sarpy - Music, Dance, Fairs, Clifton Connections

Blanche Sers - Plantation Life (Bells), Changes, Music and Dance

Chris Sylvia, Jr. - Creole Identity

Laney Sylvia - Creoles in General

Appendix VIII

St. Augustine Historical Society
Board Members

Terrel Delphin, President

Marie Roque, Vice President

Lillie Delphin, Secretary

Lair LaCour, Treasurer

Mickey Moran

Francis Balthazar

Maxine Rachal

Tommy Roque

Myra Friedman

Gloria Jones

Elizabeth Metoyer

Mike Roque

Louise Roque

Appendix IX

9th YEAR

BAYOU TALK

A Taste of the South in your community.

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PRAYER

Almighty God, may the witness of Nicolas Augustin Metoyer and his loyalty to Christ inspire countless men and women to live the Christian faith. If it be your holy will may a miracle be granted through his intercession, so he may be numbered among your Saints.

Appendix X

Glossary of Terms

Architecture

Bousillage - mud/ moss/hair in-filling for half-timbered walls

Briquette entre poteau - brick in-filling in half-timbered walls

Citerne - cistern or well

Maison - house

Pigeonnier - pigeon coop

Poteau sur Selles - post-on-sill construction

Poteau en Terre - post-in-the-ground construction

Kinship

Mama - mother or an honorific title for older ladies

Marraine - godmother

Mezier - extended family dominated by the grandfather in rural France

Nainaine - a synonym for *Tante* or *Marraine*

Nonc' - uncle

Parrain - godfather

Tante - aunt

Ti' Nom - nickname

Foodways

Andouille - stuffed, spicy sausages

Boucherie - hog/beef killing

Boudin - "blood" pudding (red *boudin*) or rice/meat (white *boudin*) pork dish

Boulet - meat balls, made of highly seasoned ground beef or fish

Chorize - hot sausage

Filé - pounded sassafras or soup with *filé* in it

Galets - sweet cakes

Graton - Cracklins

Grillades - veal cutlets, often served with grits as a breakfast food

Gumbo - okra or viscous soup

Patate Sauvage - an edible fungus also called "Indian Potato"

Pile et Pilon - log mortar and pestle

Tasso - dried smoked meats

Zandouille - hard, smoked sausages

Zis-Zis - fruit, also called *jujube*, from a tree of the genus *Ziziphus*; eaten raw or made into brandy

Music

Halls - dance halls or bars

House Dance - informal parties held in the homes

"Jump" Dance - fiddle/accordion tunes popular in the early 20th century

Zydeco - French-Creole musical style

Geography

Arpent - French land division - about 0.85 acre; sometimes used to mean acre

"Back" - swamps behind the natural levees

Bayou - slow-moving stream which drains the backswamp

Cut-bank - area of natural levee most impacted by current of streams

"Front" - natural levees adjacent to major streams

Hills - Tertiary or Quaternary uplands

Lane - road leading from "front" to "back" land

Point - point of a bend in the river

Turn Row - uncultivated areas for turning equipment in a cultivated field

Crafts

Armoire - chest used in place of closets

Brame - a suspended, or hanging, cradle

Tarabi - spinner used to spin moss or rope

Laborers

Choppers - workers who chopped grass out of the cotton

Half-Hands - workers who worked for a share of the crop produced

Hoe-Hands - synonym for cotton choppers

Overseer - person who manages labor for plantations

Pickers - workers who picked the crops

Sawyer - workers who direct crews at sawmills; run equipment

Stackers - workers who stack lumber at sawmills

Expressions

Bête or "Bat" *Noire* - black bug; a nickname

Fly-Away Track - informal race track

"Mo lame pas li" - Creole for "I don't like him"

Sainte Vierge - Holy Virgin Mary

Toussaint - All Saints' Day