



## 2.1 Cultural Geography of Lafayette Parish

Lafayette is situated near the boundary of several ecological niches. To the east is the Atchafalaya Basin with a complex series of bayous and swamps. The basin historically has separated Lafayette from Baton Rouge and New Orleans, making travel to these cities difficult. The railroads helped to bridge the divide in the late 1800's. But, it was the construction of U. S. Highways 90 and 190 in the 1930's by Governor Huey Long linking these two cities to Lafayette that made travel more accessible. To the west of the City of Lafayette, the last portions of the Great Plains connect southwestern Louisiana to Texas and thence to the rest of the American continent. To the north of Lafayette Parish lies the last rolling hills created by the Pleistocene. It is on these gently rolling slopes that pine forest begin as they stretch northward up the Mississippi River Valley. To the south, there is a rich farm belt gently sloping towards the Gulf of Mexico and tidal marshes. This southern area approximates the topography found in Canada, from which many Louisiana settlers (Acadians) migrated.

The southern ecological area is divided by the Bayou Vermilion. On the eastern side of this tidal stream, a rich farm area unfolds from Lafayette to New Orleans that is devoted chiefly to sugar cane agriculture. On the western side of the Bayou Vermilion, the ecological area was traditionally used for cotton and corn agriculture. Today, this western area is typically used for rice and soybean agriculture as well as cattle pasturage. The rolling hills north of the City of Lafayette are separated from the Atchafalaya Basin by the Bayou Vermilion and its interlocking drainage connections with the Bayou Teche.

Native Americans depended on these diverse resources before the arrival of the first Europeans and Africans. The Attakapas Indians were the original inhabitants of Lafayette during European and African contact in the early 18th Century. This Native American region was probably connected by a trade route that linked the eastern and western United States. The Spanish utilized this existing trade route and named it the Spanish Trail, connecting their settlements in Mexico and Texas with the Louisiana Territory.

The intersection of the Bayou Vermilion and the Spanish Trail is a significant point along the trade and transportation routes during the colonial period. At the intersection of these trade routes lies the original European settlement of Lafayette Parish near the present day Pinhook Bridge. The first Europeans were trappers, traders and ranchers who settled in a community identified as Petit Manchac. Petit Manchac was occasionally known as Pin Hook, a name retained by the arterial roadway, which crosses the Vermilion at the original bridge. A census conducted in 1769 by Spanish Governor O'Reilly indicated a population of 409.

These two trade routes, being the Vermilion Bayou and the Spanish Trail, were to significantly influence land use within Lafayette Parish. The French and then the Spanish deeded royal land grants to early European settlers along the Vermilion Bayou. Typical settlement grants were 200 acres of land with an additional 50 acres for each newborn child and 20 more acres for each African slave. These land grants evolved and were integrated into the Township and Range grid-like system used by the United States. Unlike the square grid sections laid out by American surveyors, French and Spanish land grants tended to be long rectangles with their shortest side being along the stre-



ambed. These rectangles allowed many points of access to the water transportation route. Most, if not all of the sections laid out along the Vermilion Bayou, were irregular. Sections surveyed and settled after the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 tended to be one mile square, as found in the western portions of the parish, particularly north and south of the Town of Duson and the City of Scott.

These two trade routes defined the location of early roadways and the structure of subsequent land use. The original roads were laid out parallel to the Vermilion Bayou, allowing settlers to have roadway access on the rear of their land grant and waterway access along river frontage. Johnston Street (US 167) on the western side of the Vermilion is parallel to the Vermilion. Similarly, transportation facilities were laid out in relation to the Spanish Trail. The Southern Pacific Railroad in the 1880's first connected New Orleans to San Antonio and Los Angeles, two major cities along the Spanish Trail. In the post World War II construction of the US highway system, US 90 was laid out parallel to the Southern Pacific Railroad. Likewise with the construction of the interstate system in the 1960's and 1970's in Louisiana, Interstate 10 was laid generally parallel the Old Spanish Trail, the Southern Pacific Railroad and the US highway system. Significantly, Interstate 10 did not connect Lafayette with New Orleans as the previous trade routes. Rather, Interstate 10 connected Lafayette directly with Baton Rouge, a connection long denied by the previously intractable Atchafalaya Basin.

Contemporary land use was significantly influenced by the land tenure systems of the first large group of European settlers, the Acadians.

## 2.2 Acadian Immigration

France, England and Spain, through a series of global wars, fought for colonial domination of the Americas and India. France consistently sought to preserve its ownership of sugar producing islands in the Caribbean at the expense of its North American colonies, both as a strategy during actual wars as well as during protracted peace negotiations. This strategy was particularly true of one of the earliest settlements in the Americas, Acadie, now known as Nova Scotia. The colony was founded prior to 1600 near the coastal estuaries and fishing banks of Newfoundland. In 1713, as a result of peace negotiations with England and seeking to maintain other parts of its global empire, the French ceded Acadie and its French-speaking Catholic inhabitants to England as part of the protestant English North Atlantic Seaboard colonies.

By the start of the Seven Years War in Europe and the French-Indian War in the Americas in 1755, France controlled what is now generally known as the Quebec Province and Louisiana Territory. At the beginning of the French-Indian War, the English forcibly removed and expelled the inhabitants of Acadie (now known as Nova Scotia in English and La Nouvelle Ecosse in French). The Acadians were dispersed throughout the North and South Atlantic both in Europe and the Americas. With additional heavy loses in North America, France lost control of Quebec to the English when French General Montcalm was defeated by General Wolf on the Plains of Abraham, near the City of Quebec. During the peace treaty negotiations in 1762, the Louisiana Territory was placed under the control of Spain. France retained control over its profitable sugar islands. In order to repay the huge cost of the War, the English crown sought to impose taxes on its American colonies during the years follow-



ing the Seven Years War. One significant result of increased taxes was the American Revolution in 1776. The American colonists successfully sought the French Crown's aid in defeating their English common enemy. At the conclusive American Revolution Battle of Yorktown in 1783, there were more French soldiers and sailors than American colonists who defeated the English Crown, winning the independence of the United States. Six years later in 1789, the French crown was rocked by the French Revolution, leading to the founding of the French Republic and then to the French Empire under Napoleon.

During the series of wars that crossed Europe, Napoleon regained control of Louisiana briefly from Spain, only to sell the territory to the United States in 1803 in order to finance his European adventures. Most of the other parts of the French global empire eventually were to be ruled by the English, Spanish or would seek their independence as did Haiti, the first and only successful slave revolt leading to the establishment of the freed slaves' government. Eventually, Napoleon was defeated by the English and their allies who sought to restore Europe's pre-war monarchies in 1815 with the Peace of Vienna.

The Acadians were caught in this series of wars lasting nearly 100 years, from 1713 to 1815. From 1713 to 1755, the Acadians were harassed by the English seeking to force them to change their catholic religion to protestant. During their subsequent sudden and forced expulsion in 1755 with nothing more than what they had on and could carry (known as "le grand derangement" in French), the Acadians were divided and dispersed to foreign destinations over distances that were forbidding, covering the entire North and South Atlantic as well as the Caribbean. To the Acadians in the 18th Century, with wind driven ships, the distances were enormous. Some of the way stations in which the Acadians traveled on a nearly 40-year odyssey (searching for a new homeland) were: New England, Virginia, the Carolinas, Georgia, the Guineas near the mouth of the Amazon River, the island of Hispaniola, the Windward Islands, such as Guadeloupe, St Lucia and Martinique, as well as the Falkland Islands in the extreme South Atlantic. Some Acadians were transported to England and others to France.

The names recounted bring amazement not only that a remnant survived, but that they were to thrive in Louisiana. Here in south Louisiana, they developed their own distinct language, architecture, cuisine, music, extended kin system, and religious practices as they added cultural elements from their travels, other settlers and inhabitants from West Africa, Spain, England, Ireland, the Levant, Gypsies Rom and Native Americans. Their relationship with metropolitan France was severed and never fully re-established until the 20th Century during World War I and II when soldiers from Louisiana fought in France.

During the Acadian diaspora, families were split by the English into separate groups so that husbands, wives, mothers, fathers, sons and daughters, as well as ascending and descending generations were separated. Estimates of the death rate were large, perhaps half died during "le grand derangement." With no clear knowledge on the survival of their close kin, the Acadians searched for families for a period of two generations. These extended families had been created by the Acadians who had traditionally settled in rural hamlets, in which kinship and geography joined together to define one's personal identity within a kinship group of several generations. They were to find a permanent haven in Louisiana where they sought to recreate these hamlets.



### 2.3 Incorporation of Municipalities and Parishes

In 1821, early Acadian settler Jean Mouton donated over five arpents of land to trustees of the Catholic congregation. On May 15, 1822, Bishop Duborg created the church parish of St. John the Evangelist. The first church parishes, in what is now the Diocese of Lafayette, were St. Martinville in 1756, Washington in 1776, Opelousas in 1798 and Grand Coteau in 1819. These ecclesiastical districts became the foundation of the civil (county) districts named parishes in Louisiana. On January 17, 1823, the Louisiana Legislature created Lafayette Parish from the western portion of what was St. Martin Parish. Later Vermilion Parish was to be created from the southern portion of Lafayette Parish in 1844. Monsieur Mouton made a second land donation to the new community for a courthouse when the town of Vermilionville became the new parish's seat. The settlement grew and the town of Vermilionville was renamed Lafayette in 1883 in honor of the French Marquis de Lafayette, the French general who participated in the French and American Revolutions.

### 2.4 A Historical Explanation for Contemporary Land Use

Monsieur Mouton developed a street grid for Vermilionville with rectangular parcels of property and streets traversing north/south named after U.S. Presidents. Vermilionville was originally incorporated in 1836 and reincorporated in 1869. The first election for mayor was also held in 1869.

The original rectangular street grid laid out by Mouton did not set a standard by which other streets were laid out. If one studies the current map of Lafayette Parish, the intersection of the Evangeline Thruway and Cameron Street forms a pivot point. From this point, there are a series of grids whose axis are neither parallel nor perpendicular, but rather form angles as the grids interlock. From this point, each additional area that was added to the city laid down its own grid as it expanded outward. The critical change came with the railroad and the need to have parallel and perpendicular streets with the tracks. Existing streets were officially curved to realign. Additionally, the lack of integration of these grids lies in the land tenure system introduced by the Acadians.

The significance of the Acadian migration and subsequent land use in Louisiana is that the Acadians created rural enclaves from which they rarely migrated. Subsequent generations of the same family, once reassembled on a large French and Spanish land grant, tended to cleave the property into smaller and smaller adjoining parcels. As pointed out above, these land grants were irregularly shaped and tended to be long irregular rectangles and polygons with their longest side perpendicular to the waterways. Subsequent roadways tended to follow older boundaries between individual land grants because their boundaries existed between separate kin groups.

By the early 20th Century, the result is a land tenure system that created small parcels accessible by roadways that were spaced irregularly. Drainage systems tended to be fragmented. Historically, Acadians had settled coastal areas and had the cultural tools and knowledge to drain vast swamps and marshes. However, there was no overall system of drainage, as well as roadways mandated by local or state governments or other body. The systematic result, like roadways, was drainage-ways without an overall system, but rather a patchwork of ditches, canals and natural streams and coulees. The drainage systems worked well, indeed excelled until the 20th Century, at managing the subtropi-



cal climate with an annual average rainfall of 60 inches per year. The benign neglect of roadway construction by federal, state and local governments created few roadways, which the prodigious rainfall made impassable typically during the winter months.

It was not until the 1930's and 1940's when Governor Huey Long's administration and its political successors constructed roads and bridges in any quantity. After World War II in the 1950's and 1960's, the Federal Highway Administration built major national highway routes, which would be regionally connected. Examples are U.S. 90 running alongside the existing Southern Pacific Railroad and the associated colonial Spanish Trail, Highway 167 (Johnston Street), which is laid out somewhat parallel to the Vermilion Bayou, and Interstate 10, which connected Lafayette with Baton Rouge and to a national transportation grid. Significantly, these state and federal roadways were constructed after the introduction of the automobile. These roadways were typically planned to run straight and true, segmenting many of the small land holdings of the Acadians (who by the 20th Century called themselves Cajuns).

A second older transportation system underlies this highway system. The older roadways are spaced irregularly and tend to be narrow. Some rural roadways still do not meet modern geometrical standards lacking a regular system of tangents, points of tangency and curvature with characteristically narrow rights of way and shoulders. The general structure of these roadways effected land use in varying degrees. Local streets were laid out perpendicular to the Bayou Vermilion, generally along irregular section lines, making a traditional street grid system difficult to develop and maintain as residential subdivision development spread south in the 1950's and 1960's. Moreover, many of the local residential streets in this area were purposely laid out to discourage vehicle through traffic, creating segmented neighborhoods without street, as well as social integration. The Bayou Vermilion continues to segment the City and Parish of Lafayette into east and west portions being traversed by seven bridges. Interstate 10/U.S. 90/Northern Pacific Railroad crosses the parish and divides it into north and south portions. The southern portion was settled first and is now more populous than the northern portion.

The resulting transportation system and associated land use does not have the efficiency commonly found in contemporary American cities. Many local residential streets have few points of access to connecting principal roadways. The secondary street system is irregularly impaired, forcing traffic to use major arterials.

## 2.5 Johnston Street and Holden Heights Subdivision

An example of few access points to the arterial system is illustrated in Holden Heights Subdivision with access only at Dugas Street, Holden Avenue and the Old Maurice Road. These streets connect only indirectly with Johnston Street, the quintessential Lafayette arterial. A similar system is found at other points along Johnston Street where there are perpendicular streets leading to residential areas. Developed in the 1960's and 1970's, subdivisions were laid out within the remaining portion of undeveloped land grants using irregularly spaced perpendicular streets. Local traffic cannot travel a significant distance along parallel streets to Johnston Street, due to the lack of secondary roads connecting adjoining neighborhoods. In some cases, these parallel secondary streets were not created because of previous land tenure systems. There are many examples where the subdivision developer sought to limit secondary street traffic by creating independent islands of residences with



few points of access to adjoining parcels. Thus, much traffic is forced onto Johnston Street along which are innumerable curb cuts from adjacent businesses. The result is often congestion.

## 2.6 Dulles Drive and Congress Street

Additionally, some arterials are no more than local streets, which have evolved into minor arterials. Dulles Drive is a prime example. The street was cobbled together from a series of local streets and parish roadways. Because its pathway was not planned, the street is characterized by many different cross sections and right-of-way widths. Beginning at its point of origin at Bertrand Drive, Dulles Drive has a right-of-way similar to surrounding streets, all of which fall within an area that was originally part of an irregularly shaped land grant. These right of ways are appropriate for narrow residential streets with sidewalks, as well as curb and gutter drainage. Near its point of beginning, Dulles Drive runs nearly parallel to Congress Street, which in turn runs somewhat parallel to Johnston Street in a meandering route. However, once Dulles Drive crosses Ambassador Caffery Parkway, the roadway leaves the irregular shaped land grants and enters into areas where mile square sections were created after Louisiana became a territory of the United States in 1803. In this area, the road runs straight and true on a western bearing paralleling the east/west trade route of the Northern Pacific Railroad, U.S. 90 and Interstate 10. The street then connects with another roadway, Landry Road, with a nearly true and straight bearing heading west. At this point, the land use is becoming more and more rural and agricultural. This straight pathway is interrupted only where it nears the Bayou Queue de Tortue and enters again into Spanish and French land grants. Upon fording the Bayou Queue de Tortue, Landry Road then again heads west along a parallel route to the railroad and federal highway systems. Its name changes again in Acadia Parish, becoming Standard Mill Road into Crowley, the adjoining parish seat.

Dulles Drive, as mentioned above parallels Congress Street. Congress Street was part of the original network of streets laid out by Jean Mouton in the Vermilionville era of the 1840's. Over time, the roadway was extended to reach Riceland Road near the Acadia Parish boundary. Unlike the narrow two lanes of Dulles Drive, the original two lanes of Congress were expanded into a major arterial with four and five lanes. Like Dulles Drive, the roadway changes direction over its course until it crosses Ambassador Caffery Parkway. At that point, the roadway travels along a regular shaped section headed nearly due west.

## 2.7 Land Use Patterns

The land use of Lafayette Parish has been influenced by two historical trade routes and by the land tenure system introduced by European settlers. The east/west route was originally the Spanish Trail, which was paralleled by the Northern Pacific Railroad, U.S. 90 and Interstate 10. The north/south route was the Bayou Vermilion, which was paralleled by Johnston Street. Along the Bayou Vermilion, French and Spanish land grants were configured to be long narrow portions with narrow frontage on the Vermilion. After the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, Americans who created land division squares, which were typically one mile on each side, created township and range systems. The original settlers in this area were the Acadians, who recreated enclaves in which land was typically subdivided into smaller family owned parcels to create their former hamlets in Acadie (Nova Scotia). Over time, roadways tended to be built along the boundaries of these irregularly shaped land grants



creating a patchwork of roads. Not until the Huey Long Administrations of the 1930's did a concerted road building effort occur in south Louisiana, which created a second more regional system of roadways, constructed primarily along straight pathways. Later in the post World War II era, the US highway interstate system was created, which connected these regional and state roadways into a national grid. Because land use is affected strongly by transportation systems, the early water borne system laid down the base from which the later roadway transportation system was to be created. Out of these historical trends emerged the present land use in Lafayette Parish.