

CAJUNS, CREOLES, PIRATES AND PLANTERS

Your New Louisiana Ancestors Format

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GENEALOGICAL LIBRARY: There are over 13,000 titles in the Alexandria Genealogical Library located on Washington Street in Alexandria, Louisiana. They also have microfilm readers and copiers to assist researchers. The town's central square was set aside for public use in the original town plat commissioned by Alexander Fulton in 1805.

The building where the collection is located was constructed solely for the advancement of culture and learning in 1907 by Caldwell Brothers, Contractors, and Crosby & Hinkel of New Orleans, Architects. The structure replaced the earlier one that was burned by General Nathaniel Banks' federal troops on May 13, 1864.

S. S. Bryan, an area businessman matched a \$10,000 grant from Pittsburg philanthropist Andrew Carnegie, and the funds were given for a free public library with the stipulation that the city provide the site and maintenance of the facility. This was adopted as an ordinance in 1907, and in 1971, a resolution was adopted designating the building as the Alexandria Historical and Genealogical Library and Museum. It was restored as a Bicentennial project.

It was placed on the National Register of Historic Places on January 19, 1989 and offers genealogical researchers an excellent place for furthering their family journeys into the past. Many records in Rapides Parish were destroyed during the earlier period of Alexandria's history, and this research center has taken on more importance during the years.

The library contains resources for Louisiana, Arkansas, Texas, and states east of the Mississippi River from 1620 to the present time. Here is a list of important materials that can be found in the collection:

- Published archives of all 13 colonies
- Materials on all states east of the Mississippi River
- Census of the southern states through 1870
- Extensive Louisiana collection including available census records
- Complete Colonial Archives of France
- French Superior Council Records 1714-1769
- Papeles Procedentes de Cuba from Seville, Spain
- Judicial records of the Spanish Cabildo 1769-1803
- Confederate Magazine 1892-1932 with index
- Hale and Barbour Collections (vital records of Connecticut)
- New England Historical and Genealogical Register 1847 to present
- The Draper manuscripts with index
- Domesday Survey (Great Britain)
- Materials on many foreign countries

If you have the chance to do research here, you can do so from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Tuesday through Saturday. It is closed on Sunday and Monday. The location is 503 Washington Street in Alexandria.

At this same location (downstairs) is the Louisiana History Museum that is depicted in 29 large exhibits. This is free to the public and contains a great collection of materials of interest to researchers or just for anyone interested in the history of the state of Louisiana.

The displays include the following: why Louisiana didn't have dinosaurs; early and contemporary Native American Culture; French and Spanish influence in Louisiana; Jim Bowie and the frontier; area men in the Civil War; local muster rolls; construction of Bailey's Dam; Camp Beauregard in WWI; the Great Louisiana Maneuvers; Alexandrians landing on D-Day; Japan and the atom bomb; and the atom bomb and surrender.

A partial listing of the displays explains even more interest for those visiting this museum. These categories are: Louisiana paleontology; Louisiana genealogy and principal industries; early Native American tribes; French and Spanish rule; Galvez in the American Revolution; Louisiana Purchase; life on the frontier; Louisiana as an independent nation; Rapides Parish governors; Alexandria history; plantation life; Civil War; tale of Solomon Northrup; World War I; World War II; later years; Rapides Parish medicine; fireplace cookery; vintage kitchens; homesteader's handmade tools; and antique bottles.

The only difference in the two facilities is that the museum hours are 10 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

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HISTORICAL WINNFIELD: The Louisiana Political Museum & Hall of Fame is located in Winnfield, Louisiana, and this is another interesting place for researchers or anyone interested in the state's history. It's located at 499 East Main Street and is open Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., and by appointment on Saturday. It is interesting to note that as of 2009, there have been 121 individuals inducted into this famous political hall of fame.

The museum is located in the old Louisiana and Arkansas Depot (circa 1908), and it was moved to its present location in 1988 and renovated at that time. The museum was opened in August of 1993 on the anniversary of Huey P. Long's 100th birthday.

The primary display area of the museum is housed in the baggage and freight area of the old depot. Over 30,000 artifacts and memorabilia have been accumulated and all relating to politicians and politics in the state. There are life-sized mannequins of the two famous brothers, Huey P. and Earl K. Long. You can even hear recordings

of the speeches made by both men being played as visitors look back on the political past.

There are three governors who have been inducted here, the Long brothers and Oscar K. Allen. Allen was born in 1882 and was elected governor in 1923. It was Allen who loaned Huey P. Long \$500 to finance his first political campaign in 1921. Allen served as Chairman of the Louisiana Highway Commission and was elected to the State Senate in 1928. He was elected to the United States Senate after the death of Huey P. Long but died before taking office.

Huey P. Long was born in 1803 and was first elected Railroad Commissioner in 1918. He served as governor from 1928 until 1932 when he became a U. S. Senator. He was actually governor and senator at the same time, and he is credited as being the originator of the populist movement. He was assassinated in 1935 at the State Capitol that he is credited with building.

Earl K. Long was Huey's brother. He was born in 1805 and was credited with the distinction of holding more state jobs than any other Louisianian. He was elected governor in 1939, 1948, and again in 1958. He was elected to the U.S. Congress in 1960 but died ten days after his victory.

This museum is important for more than just the political history connected with these three men. It is a fascinating look at all the politicians up to the present period of time. It should be of interest to all genealogical historians, and much of genealogical interest can be gleaned here.

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BETHLEHEM, LOUISIANA: I always think of this quaint little area of Claiborne Parish at this time of the year. Several years ago, I did research on how this all came about. My relatives owned property in this parish, and I was always checking out the local genealogical collections in Homer, and even over in Minden (Webster Parish). When I ran across the mention of this place that is no longer on maps, I decided to see what I could learn about it.

It's peaceful there, out in the country, very little traffic, not too far from where some of my family members lived. The problem is you have to know what to look for. I actually discovered this unique little place several years ago while out looking for old cemeteries to index. That was when I was actively collecting new and previously unpublished materials for my columns. I often roamed the back roads searching for these sites. This is the kind of place that depends on interested researchers or descendants to preserve. It is worth remembering — a place that is filled with loving memories.

Claiborne Parish is located in the north Louisiana hill country, and the wind whistles through the pine trees on cold winter days, much like it did at my old home

place in DeSoto Parish. It makes you wonder sometimes why certain areas were settled, but that is a part of the history of our ancestors that we constantly research.

Bethlehem in Claiborne Parish (named for W.C.C. Claiborne, Louisiana's first governor) has almost disappeared. What used to be a settlement of some 400 pioneers who moved there from the Carolinas, Virginia, Georgia and Tennessee is now no more than a church and a cemetery. A few houses are scattered about but not within sight of the church which was probably located near the center of the community.

It was on one of my research trips that I took a step back in time and visited Bethlehem, and I'm glad I had the experience. That's when I discovered the historic old Bethlehem Methodist Church and Bethlehem Cemetery. From Homer, take La. 2 west and turn south on La. 543. Go five miles. Turn east onto Bethlehem Road. The cemetery is on the left about .2 miles from the highway. The church is on the right.

I was surprised at all the history I uncovered, and I was even more astounded when I actually found old buildings hidden away along the road. The one that I recall in addition to the church (which is well cared for) was the old post office, now in ruins. I recall a couple of burials in the cemetery for people killed in the New London school explosion. It was unsettling for me because my mother had told me so many times about my brother attending that school when my dad worked in the oil fields there. They had just moved when the explosion occurred that killed so many students.

Bethlehem Methodist Church is a neat, painted structure, and the grounds are immaculate. The grass was dormant when I was last there, but I'm sure spring rains bring everything back to life for another beautiful growing season. This rural church was at one time both a school and a church. The 400 residents were not clustered around the church but scattered throughout the area and serviced by a post office established on Oct. 30, 1891, long after many of the residents settled the area.

The land for the church and cemetery was donated by James Curry after the Civil War. The first structure, a rude, one-room log hut was the beginning of the structure that now houses the Methodist congregation. In the beginning, and being a union church, any denomination that wanted to worship there could do so. David Wade, with help from Joe Maddry, Jim Miller and others, erected the first structure.

The names of the early preachers and settlers are emblazoned on the pages of silent history — Hollenshead, Maddry, Harris, Wade, Curry, Wingfield, Jackson, Warwick, Harp, Stoneciper, Cox, Lowdermilk, Owens, Sherman, Nesbit and Moreland.

Somewhere in my files I have pictures of everything I discovered in Bethlehem, and I even did extensive research on a basketball player buried in the cemetery. I don't even recall how I learned about him, but it prompted me to learn more.

Jack Wade "Jackie" Moreland was born March 11, 1938, and died Dec. 19, 1971. He was one of the outstanding high school players, and this was his final resting place. Moreland played for the Detroit Pistons and the former New Orleans Buccaneers. He was originally from Minden in Webster Parish, adjacent to Claiborne Parish, and he played for the Minden High School Crimson Tide under Coach Cleveland S. Strong in 1955 and 1956. He was the school's first player to be named All American. After leaving Minden, he played for a semester at North Carolina State University. He then excelled on the court at Ruston's Louisiana Tech University (which was called Louisiana Polytechnic Institute at the time).

He was the only Minden High School graduate to have played with the National Basketball Association. He was selected by the Pistons in the first round in the 1960 NBA Draft. He was the fourth selection in the 1960 draft behind only Wilt Chamberlain, Oscar Robertson and Jerry West, and he played for the Buccaneers from 1967 to 1970. He scored 5,030 points in his career and had an average of 21.3 per game. His 1,419 collegiate points was the fourth highest in the history of Louisiana basketball, and he played three instead of the customary four years for the Bulldogs. Basketball wasn't the only thing that Moreland excelled in. At Minden High School, he garnered many awards, including annual honors in U.S. history. He graduated salutatorian in 1956. At Tech, he got his Bachelor of Science degree in civil engineering. After retiring from basketball, he was a project engineer on the Louisiana Superdome, having been employed for the preceding year by Shilstone Laboratory.

Genealogical research and my freelance writings have taken me to many places, and I've discovered lots of interesting people along the way. Sometimes I return either for research or take detours just to see how things change as they have in my home parish of DeSoto. Whether I'm doing research or just relaxing, I find joy in experiencing these fascinating little adventures.

With all my travels, I always enjoy returning to Bethlehem.

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FREE SERVICE: Correspondence to this column should be directed to Damon Veach, Cajuns, Creoles, Pirates and Planters, 709 Bungalow Lane, Baton Rouge, LA 70802-5337. The e-mail address is ancestorslaveach@cox.net. Queries and book reviews are printed as space permits, and you are encouraged to take advantage of this free service. Claitor's Publishing can serve as a distributor for self-published genealogy titles. Go to their homepage for details on how you can obtain this excellent service.