

An aerial photograph of an alligator in a swampy wetland. The alligator is positioned vertically, with its head at the bottom and its tail at the top. The water is dark, and the surrounding vegetation is a dense, bright green. The alligator's scales are dark and textured, contrasting with the smooth water and the vibrant green of the plants.

# Chez Nous

EN LOUISIANE  
SPRING 2018

WALKING  
THE  
*Wetlands*





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# Chez Nous

EN LOUISIANE

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# The Gathering Place

By Brandy Dunbar

The history and people that make up one of the oldest stores in Louisiana



Graphic by Jessica Mouton

*St. Gabriel Grocery & Deli, located in St. Gabriel, La., has been serving a variety of sandwiches, salads, hamburgers and hotdogs to locals since it first opened on Monticello Plantation in the 1820s.*

St. Gabriel Grocery & Deli has served the locals of St. Gabriel, La., since the 1820s as one of the oldest stores in the state.

The store offers a full deli with sandwiches, po-boys, hot boudin, salads, hamburgers, barbeque roast beef, hot sausage, cracklins and groceries. It also has a variety of snacks, old-fashioned Coca-Cola bottles, beer and homemade pecan candy. The deli started offering home-cooked lunches every Thursday.

The store was originally owned by the Monticello Plantation. Being that the store was located near the levee, it had to relocate twice due to high water levels. The store was eventually moved to River Road in Iberville Parish, where it still remains with its original front doors. Antiques and Louisiana State University football schedules dating

back to 1958 line the store's walls. The store is also known as the "Gathering Place" because it serves as a location in St. Gabriel where everyone can come together.

"I have been going to this store since I could remember, and I'm 73 now, so that tells you a lot. The customer service stays the same throughout the years. This place is home," customer Andestine Williams said.

The store was owned by Aubrey J. LaPlace & Co. from the LeBlanc Estate. In 1987, Wayne and Theresa Roy became the store owners. A 16-year-old Wayne started working at the old store in 1973 before and after school. Wayne said he came to love the old store so much that when his dad's work took him back to Abbeville in 1975, Wayne decided not to move back with him. Thus, Wayne



Submitted photograph

*The original St. Gabriel Grocery & Deli as it stood on Monticello Plantation in the 1820s.*

figuratively became part of a second family, and the tradition of passing down the local store had the opportunity to continue.

Aubrey LaPlace acted as Wayne's adopted mother so he could stay in St. Gabriel, where he could graduate and continue to work at the store.

"My father's job moved around constantly, and I felt the store was home, so I couldn't leave," Wayne said.

In 1986, LaPlace asked Wayne to take over the store, and should he make a profit within a year, LaPlace would sell the store to Wayne. She followed through with the challenge, and Wayne became the store's next owner. When they took over the store, Wayne and Theresa had two children, so the family set up a room in the back of the store for all their children.

Wayne was elected to the Iberville Par-

ish Council in 1999 due to the popularity of his store in St. Gabriel.

The community store has had moments on the big screen. The 2007 movie "The Riches" and the 2013 miniseries "Bonnie & Clyde: Dead and Alive" were filmed at the store. The series aired on History Channel and Lifetime Movie Network. "The Riches" aired on FX.

"They said they would like to use the store for filming, and I was fine with it," Wayne said.

The small town store serves a big role in its city. It is not only a place of business but a place of laughter and love. The store is a tradition to the town and will continue to stay around for years, as Wayne and Theresa's youngest daughter, Lindsey, said she plans on running the store one day. The store will forever be passed down as a gathering place for the people of St. Gabriel.



Photo by Collin Brazan

The current St. Gabriel Grocery & Deli still upholds many of the traditions as the original once did.



Photo by Collin Brazan

St. Gabriel Grocery & Deli's counter is the dominant visual element inside the store. Fresh lunch meats sit behind its

glass, homemade jellies sit upon the top and scores of canned goods and other products line its back wall.



# Walking the Wetlands

Preserve gives visitors a firsthand look at Louisiana's wetlands *By: Akadya Thompson*



*Photo by: Cullen Diebold*  
*A dragonfly sits atop a stick.*

Part of the Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve, the Barataria Preserve in Marrero, La., is a place full of waterways, personality and culture.

The preserve gives its visitors a taste of what life is like in the wetlands. It contains 23,000 acres of bayous, swamps, marshes and forests. A visit to the Barataria Preserve can be an amazing experience for people who enjoy spending time outdoors or want to see authentic Louisiana wetlands up close.

Over 200 species of animals and plants can be found along the Barataria Preserve's dirt trails. Guests strolling through may see snakes, turtles and alligators swimming through the waterways. Those who want a more in-depth look can choose to enjoy a guided tour

or explore the preserve via a cellphone tour.

The preserve includes a visitor's center, as well as a museum that highlights the Mississippi River's impact on Louisiana's wetlands and the important purpose the area serves. Those unfamiliar with the wildlife in the preserve can check out the eBird kiosk in the visitor's center. The visitor's center also includes a store that carries books, music, insect repellent and field guides.

The preserve contains a variety of activities for people of all ages to enjoy.

Evan White, an 8-year-old visitor, said he enjoys visiting the Barataria Preserve with his grandparents.

"I really like going on the swamp tours



*Photo by: Cullen Diebold*  
*A young alligator sits below the Visitor's Center Trail with its mouth open.*



*Photo by: Cullen Diebold*  
*A trail winds through the preserve.*

to see the alligators,” White said.

Delores Magee, 80, enjoys helping out at the preserve every weekend. She makes sure there is no trash along the trail, since trash can cause major harm to the animals.

“I’ve been coming here for years... [This place] brings back a lot of memories for me,” Magee said.

John Leblanc, also known as the Alligator Man, has worked at the Barataria Preserve for more than four decades.

“Without the swamp, I don’t know where I would be. I couldn’t have chosen a better life than to live, eat and breathe these bayous,” Leblanc said.

The Barataria Preserve offers more than just a firsthand experience of Louisiana culture and personality. It offers lifetime memories to its visitors.



*Photo by: Cullen Diebold*

*A bayou that runs along the Bayou Coquille Trail at the Barataria Preserve.*



*Photo by: Cullen Diebold*

*Ranger Kali Bunn explains boxes the Audubon Society put in for the migratory Prothonotary Warbler bird to nest in the spring.*



# Blessing of the Boats

A Mass for fishermen in South Louisiana

By: Victor Billiot

This historic tradition of the blessing of the fleet across fishing towns around the world still thrives strongly in South Louisiana.

All blessings begin with the largest boats parking outside of the church as the local priest delivers a quick mass and blesses the boats.

The priest then boards the lead boat

and heads down the bayou toward the gulf and blesses everyone watching and partying from the bayou's bank.

“The nearly 90-year-old tradition has continued with one main factor: the extraordinary decorating of all the boats,” Betsy Gordon from [louisianafolklife.org](http://louisianafolklife.org) said.

When his family would sometimes ride

along in the convoy, local Avery Dupre said he would love to see the crowds of his community along the shore as he traveled down the bayou. One decoration theme he said stuck out to him was the “Real Housewives of Cocodrie,” on which women rode the boat in sparkling dresses and fishing poles. Their husbands dressed up like cruise ship captains.



Photo Credit: Victor Billiot

The boat blessings, mostly led by Catholic churches in the area, are held in fishing communities throughout South Louisiana.



Dupre said his family held seafood boils that relatives would rush to after the parade of boats passed by every year.

“Eating seafood with the family is a must,” Dupre said.

About 55 miles to the West in Morgan City, the Shrimp and Petroleum Festival takes place on Labor Day weekend. The weekend celebrates the blessing of the fleet for those in commercial fishing and those working in the oil field.

According to its website, the festival began in 1936 in a park as a gathering of the seafood industry. It soon accepted oil workers and evolved to what it is today.

A life-long participant of the festival, Chase Landry said he always looks forward to soaking in the weekend. He said he sees it as a great time to reunite with high school friends, old band members and family. Throughout the festival, Landry has participated by performing with his high school band and riding along with the fleet.

Landry said he remembered being part of the blessing when Sammy Kershaw was running for lieutenant governor of Louisiana. Taking the opportunity to ride with the fleet, Landry said he and his younger brother shared a great time together. He said that his little brother’s face “lit up the whole ride,” as he was so amused with all the boats traveling in the huge line. Because of their position in the convoy, Landry and his brother witnessed one of the most sought-after events of the weekend: the meeting of the king’s boat and the queen’s boat. They experienced the careful lining up of the two boats’ bows for the king and queen to toast to the blessing.

Landry said he always looks back to this as one of his favorite moments of the Shrimp and Petroleum Festival. Dupre and Landry said their biggest blessing is being able to see the community get together to celebrate.



*Photo Credit: Victor Billiot*

*Fishermen get their boats ready for annual shrimp fleet blessings along the bayous of Terrebonne and Lafourche parishes.*



*Photo Credit: Victor Billiot*

*Families and friends ride on boats while fishing and having a good time at the fleet blessing.*





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