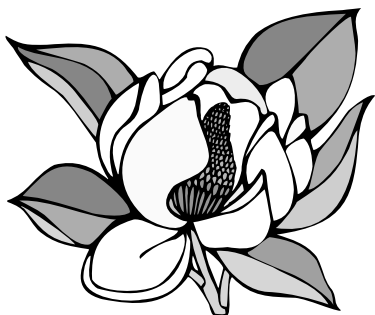


# **LOUISIANA**

**The First 300 Years**



Magnolia, the State Flower  
1900



The State Seal  
1902



The State Flag of Louisiana  
1912

# **LOUISIANA**

## **THE FIRST 300 YEARS**

By  
**Joan B. Garvey**  
and  
**Mary Lou Widmer**  
*Authors of Beautiful Crescent,  
A History of New Orleans*

GARMER PRESS, INC.  
NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA

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By Joan B. Garvey  
and  
Mary Lou Widmer

Authors of *Beautiful Crescent, A History of New Orleans*

First Edition 2001

Second Edition 2007

Published by

Garmer Press, Inc.  
320 New Orleans Hammond Way  
New Orleans, LA 70124

ISBN # -9612960-4-6

*Louisiana was created by the meandering of the Mississippi River over the centuries. Three thousand years ago its main channel was the present Bayou Teche on whose ancient levees stand the Cajun towns of Breaux Bridge, Jeanerette, Broussard, and Olivier. In the second century A.D. the Mississippi was taken south by Bayou Lafourche in a region that would be known as Plaquemines. When the first white explorers arrived in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, the river was levee-bound in its present path, passing Baton Rouge and New Orleans on its way to the Gulf of Mexico. In the 1950s, another shift seemed imminent as the river, seeking a shorter route to the Gulf, courted the Atchafalaya as a fitting carrier. In 1963, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers dammed Old River, the former confluence of the Mississippi, the Red, and the Atchafalaya Rivers to keep all three in their present courses. Thus the Control of Nature began.*

## PREFACE

Settlers were drawn to the shores of the Louisiana colony because of the Mississippi River and its access to the Gulf of Mexico and beyond. To the river ports came French traders, hoping to do business with the world. The Spanish took over the colony hoping, with the control of the major waterways, to keep intruders from their lucrative holdings, south, east and west of Louisiana. Germans and Acadians came to the area seeking land to farm in the prairies of the southwest, taking advantage of the rich alluvial soil of the floodplains. Islenos from the Canary Islands settled in the lower Mississippi area to farm and fish and hunt. Africans, Caribbeans, Filipinos, French and Spanish came to the coastal marsh areas of the state attracted by the long growing season, 270 days. Here they realized the great agricultural potential of the mucks and clays and layers of peat in the soil. The Red River and the Cane River areas became the home of a special community of people of mixed heritage, including Spanish and Mexican settlers from Texas.

After Louisiana became a United States Territory and then a state in 1812, Anglo and Scotch-Irish immigrants came to the north and west central parts of the state, the hill parishes. Here they planted cotton and corn, grew peaches and other fruits and vegetables, and further developed the lumber business, enjoying the wealth of our vast forest areas.

Pre and Post-Civil War black farmers migrated to the northeastern part of the state to farm the Ouachita, Tensas, and Mississippi River basins. English settlers from the thirteen original colonies moved into the slightly rolling plains of the Felicianas to grow cotton and harvest lumber from the forest. Dalmatians came to the area of the passes and Deltaic Plains to farm the seas where salt and fresh water mixed to produce oysters of great size and excellent taste. Many nationalities settled in the lower Mississippi Valley to plant citrus trees in the Mississippi River soil.

The variety of cultures represented in the development of Louisiana make the state unique. From a small French colony in the Louisiana Territory it has grown into a state representative of the many ethnic groups present in our country.

The Parish names give us keys as to the migrations of people and the time they came.

Indian names like Natchitoches and Avoyelles mark the places where these tribes lived. Saints' names and other religious names were given by the French to places where they settled, such as St. Mary, St. John, St. James, Ascension, and Assumption. Spanish names like Iberia and the Felicianas tell us where the Spanish lived. American names indicate the places to which Americans migrated after 1803, names like Washington, Grant, Madison, Jefferson, Monroe, Lee, and Jefferson Davis.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century Louisiana became home to Cubans, Vietnamese, and many other people seeking freedom and the opportunities our state and country offered. All remain faithful to their customs and traditions, and all add flavor and spice to the gumbo and jambalaya that is Louisiana. The story of Louisiana contains violence, sex, and political intrigue: violence in its wars, sex in its brothels, and intrigue in its political government.

As Louisiana begins a new century, it is ready, as it was three hundred years ago, to welcome new people, new ideas, and new challenges.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

OUR HEARTFELT THANKS TO THE PEOPLE AND  
FACILITIES WHO ASSISTED US IN THE  
TREMENDOUS TASK OF TELLING THE 300-YEAR  
HISTORY OF LOUISIANA IN WORDS AND PICTURES

Carol and Dr. Norman Zaffater for research and photos of the Northwestern part of Louisiana; Eric J. Brock, author/historian, for the loan of his wonderful photos; Sally Stassi, Pamela Arceneaux, and John Magill/Historic New Orleans Collection; Merle M. Groce/Morgan City Archives; Ghislain Malette/National Archives of Canada; Courtney Wright/Special Collections/Howard Tilton Memorial Library; Louisiana State Library Staff/Baton Rouge; Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation, and Tourism; Laura Street/Noel Memorial Library/LSU in Shreveport; Dorothy L. Benge/Los Islenos Heritage and Cultural Society; Mary Curry/Jefferson Parish Historical Society; Margaret Varnell/medical historian; Cary B. McNamara and Morris J. Oubre, lockmaster at the Old River Lock/U.S. Corps of Engineers/New Orleans District; Nancy Hawkin/Division of Archaeology, Baton Rouge; Capt. Leo T. Profilet, U.S. Navy, Ret., for historic quotations; Roseanne Sneddon for proofreading; C.C. Lockwood for the cover photo.

We thank our husbands Walter Garvey and Al Widmer for help and support during the five years we spent writing this book.

*The Authors*



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