



## **Louisiana/Mississippi Interlude**

While on a recent tour/trip to Louisiana and Mississippi, my wife, Sharon, and I were taken to some very interesting sites. It seems that all had been prepared for us to see the sights of the areas we visited.

New Orleans, as all visitors know, is home to the largest Mardi Gras in Louisiana. There we were treated to a wonderful meal prepared by one of the chefs at the New Orleans School of Cooking. The meal consisted of corn and crab bisque, Andouille sausage and chicken gumbo over rice, with Bananas Foster and Pecan Pralines as dessert. While there we also saw the second restaurant opened by famed cooking chef, Emeril Lagasse, called Nola in the French Quarter.

We found out later that the most interesting Mardi Gras celebrations are performed in the smaller counties, known as parishes. Whereas the New Orleans Mardi Gras is more racy in tone, the smaller ones are more family oriented with local Krewe (clubs) providing the festivities. The entire Mardi Gras in Louisiana is paid for by these private clubs, even paying for the police protection and the building of the floats.



### **Floats of Houma Louisiana**

As we toured New Orleans we found out that only the very rich are buried underground. Due to the wet nature of the area, only a small amount of land is above sea level. When flooding occurs, the bodies of deceased inductees of the 'poor cemetery' may be the ones floating about. Our tour guide also pointed out the local seminary as being the "Home of the unwed Fathers".

Avery Island is home to Tabasco Pepper Sauce and a wonderful array of wildlife and art. We saw alligators, water moccasin snakes and an array of flowers of all kinds.



### **Buddah and bird sanctuary at Avery Island**

The tour guide at the Vicksburg, Mississippi battleground pointed out that both Confederates and the Union army lost many men at this pivotal battle for control of shipping up and down the Mississippi River during the War Between the States. Trenches used by the Union Army, to gain access to Vicksburg, can still be seen in the now Federal park. Future General Ulysses S. Grant won his stars at this famous battle.

Natchez, Mississippi is probably the largest area in the modern south where antebellum houses may be bought for discount prices. Most of them require a great amount of restoration due to the inclement weather in the area. After 6 p.m., the downtown area seemed like a ghost town. We could not even find a drugstore open after that time. Possibly this changes as the warmer weather pervades the area.

One wonderful highlight of the trip was to visit the Frogmore Cotton Plantation in Frogmore, La. Run by George “Buddy” and Lynette Tanner. This plantation has been in operation since the early 1800’s. Of course, the modern operation is in complete contrast to when things were run with slave labor.

A warm, misty rain fell as we entered the plantation. We were directed to a small country church, The St. James Baptist Church, by Lynette Tanner who met us at the motor coach. Upon entering the church one is taken back to the beginnings of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when worship was simple and God was foremost.

As we waited the little service, from the rear of the church walked an old country parson, long, black frock parson’s coat, with a white rim of hair portrayed by Willie E. Minor. As He walked slowly to the a’capella singing of “Old Man River”, all heads turned to greet him.



### **Performers at Frogmore Plantation**

Afterwards, a young lady, portrayed by Bethani Goodman, dressed in vintage clothing, came singing “Amazing Grace”.

Both Minor and Goodman are quite well known in the Natchez/Frogmore areas. Willie performs at several venues as singer and actor. Bethani performs, as well as works, at the plantation as she works her way through college.

As Lynette tactfully narrates the story of the time of slavery, songs such as “Wade in the Water” was sung to carry the story along. The audience was provided with tambourines to keep time to the more upbeat hymns. This was a great beginning to a historical encounter.



**Lynette Tanner**



**Dress of mother (Cotton Muslin)**

As we left the church we all sang “Down by the Riverside” while marching behind Willie Minor. We were led to a cotton patch, somehow put together to simulate the real, where we were able to pick a cotton boll for the experience. We were shown the slave quarters, the cookhouse, the slaughtering house for animals, and eventually led to a company store where the later sharecroppers could buy their needs without having to go to the local town. Surprisingly! This is now the museum and gift shop.

Our next stop, accompanied by Lynette Tanner, was the Louisiana Delta Music Museum in Ferriday, La. This is the home of Jerry Lee Lewis, Mickey Gilley, and Evangelist, Jimmy Swaggart, all first cousins taught piano in the same style. It is said that if someone heard piano music from the rear of a building, it would be very hard to distinguish which of the three cousins was doing the playing. Their styles were assuredly influenced by local gospel and blues musicians of the Ferriday area. Some of the more popular musicians from the area include, Conway Twitty, Irma Thomas, Fats Domino, Clarence ‘Frogman’ Henry, Aaron Neville, and a host of lesser known performers. Ferriday is said to produce more musicians per capita than any other city in the U.S.A.

Our final days were spent in the bayous and swamps of the Acadian (Cajun) people of Louisiana who make their living frogging, shrimp boating, netting crabs, and digging oysters. These are the fun-loving, hard-working, gentle folk who were displaced in the 1800’s from Nova Scotia in Canada by the British and were dispersed to wherever another government would allow them in. Lots settled along the bayous and swamps of Louisiana, especially in the Houma area. An interesting highlight of the trip was to visit

a professor of Geology who has made his home in the bayou country for many years. He was truly a Renaissance man. He treated us to a lunch of Jambalaya, soft drinks, and music. He has mastered all the Cajun instruments including banjo and accordion, as well as being able to sing in the native dialect. He has erected on his property exact replicas of Cajun cabins from the time of their displacement and forcefully shoved out into the swamplands of Houma. We are still not sure what the meat was in the Jambalaya. Some say it might have been alligator. It sufficed!



**The Old Geology Professor who hosted us in the Bayou.**

Among the Cypress trees, laden with Spanish moss, we were taken on a flatboat into the interior of a swamp. Our host was a young Cajun who was very familiar with the surrounding area and all the folklore. We were able to spot several alligators, men holding up their prize catches of crappie fish, and told of all the legends that have arisen in the swamps, such as the Swamp Thing!



**Sharon with Spanish Moss**



**Restaurant in bayou. Boy with lizard.**

**Alligator eyeing us from swamp.**



**Giant turtles in Bayou.**

**12 foot mama alligator.**

**Alligator on log.**

After all the wondrous things we saw, I, for one, am happy to be back in California where we are at least a few miles above sea level. I am happy to leave the alligators, cotton-mouthed moccasins, mosquitos and swampland to the citizens of Louisiana. They are used to such things!