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The Agricultural Settlement Succession in the Prairies of Southwest Louisiana.

James William Taylor
Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College

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THE AGRICULTURAL SETTLEMENT SUCCESSION
IN THE PRAIRIES OF SOUTHWEST LOUISIANA

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Geography
and Anthropology

by

James William Taylor
B. A., Northwestern State College, 1946
M. A., Louisiana State University, 1948
June, 1956
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ABSTRACT

This study of agricultural settlement succession in the prairies of southwest Louisiana—4,000 square miles of almost-level land formed as a Pleistocene Delta of the Mississippi River—is directed toward an analysis of the modern landscape and the assignment of its elements to the proper cultural segments.

A broader study of the cultural geography of Louisiana revealed elements and associations in the landscape of the prairies which contrasted sharply with those in other parts of the state. Data gleaned from family photograph albums, negative files of commercial photographers, and interviews with early settlers were corroborated and augmented by newspaper files and other library materials. These details permitted a theoretical reconstruction of the original landscape produced by each culture segment, thus providing a plane of reference from which to measure cultural change. Hence, the study is organized on the basis of the cultural groups and the landscape is developed through an analysis of changes in form and function of the various cultural elements.

About 1765, Acadian farmers settled on long narrow landholdings along the eastern prairie streams. Utilizing the
better-drained land of the natural levees, their crops and farmsteads formed a linear pattern of settlement along the roads following the levee crests. A small horizontal-log barn behind the mud-daubed dwelling of half-timber construction was enclosed by a pieux fence to form their simple farmsteads.

About 1900 the medium of commercial lumber replaced mud-daub, though the original house form was retained and occurs today with a frequency of forty to fifty per cent. One of two new house types appearing after 1915 occurs with a frequency of forty to sixty per cent. At about the same time three new barn types replaced the older form, and the pieux fence gave way to barbed wire.

In the 1880's grain farmers from Germany and midwestern United States established a secondary cultural nucleus in the western prairies. They converted the grasslands into irrigated rice fields, built large two-story houses and numerous sprawling barns, and developed roads along the section lines. Two smaller one-story house types were introduced about 1915 and a third in the late 1920's as the old types fell from favor. With the mechanization of agriculture and the growth of the beef cattle industry, large barns decreased in number, though four or more barns per farm is still common. The adaptation of the combine to rice added the rice dryer to the towns but reduced the number of rice-straw stacks in the fields.
In the conservatism displayed by the Acadian descendants and the expansion of their small-farm complex into the western prairies lies the cultural uniqueness of the prairies of southwest Louisiana.
THE AGRICULTURAL SETTLEMENT SUCCESSION
IN THE PRAIRIES OF SOUTHWEST LOUISIANA

INTRODUCTION

Concepts. The state of Louisiana has felt the cultural influence of four national groups, and each has left an imprint on the landscape in the form of its material culture. Thus the character of the cultural landscape is as varied as were the cultural backgrounds from which it came. The areal variations in the landscape are in part due to physiographic differences, but are by no means restricted to those natural elements. The natural landscape is of fundamental importance, for it supplies material out of which the cultural landscape is formed, but the molding force is culture itself. Man's contributions to the landscape as material manifestations of his culture, itself changing through time, differ in both appearance and function from one culture to another. With the introduction of a new or different culture, the cultural landscape changes by amalgamation of the two or a new landscape is superimposed on remnants of the older one. The cultural landscape then is subject to change
either by the development of the culture, the fusion of alien cultures, or the replacement of cultures.

The idea of landscape cannot be grasped except in terms of its time relations as well as its space relations. Under the influence of man, the landscape is in a continuous process of development, change, or dissolution. Simple description of areally associated phenomena is not geography in its true sense and lacks the depth of meaning which may be gained only through analysis of the landscape's historical development.

In Louisiana, distinct areal associations have long been recognized and described; but little attempt has been made to demonstrate quantitatively the reality of such areal associations, nor has much effort been made to relate the present landscape to its predecessors and to develop it therefrom step by step. Without such treatment, much that is of prime significance is lost. By way of illustration, it may be pointed out that in the prairies of Louisiana there are several distinct house types with somewhat similar distributions. A description of these house types and their distributions would completely miss the fact that some are basic indigenous forms and some intrusive elements, while others represent phases of cultural development or perhaps adjustments to changing economic conditions. Such historical analysis is not restricted to house types, but may be advantageously applied to other individual forms in the cultural
landscape as well as to more-complex associations such as the farmstead and even the pattern of settlement itself.

These basic concepts then are the principles under which this work was done: 1) There is a reality of areally associated landscape phenomena; 2) this reality may be quantitatively demonstrated; 3) the present landscape is a product of changes resulting from cultural development, cultural fusion, or cultural replacement; 4) analysis of the modern landscape in the light of its historical development permits a theoretical reconstruction of the landscape for any period in the past, as well as the determination of a cultural segment and the assignment to it of the proper cultural forms.

Methodology. Two separate periods of field work provided the data for this project. The first, in the summer of 1950, consisted of an inventory of the material culture of Louisiana. This was termed the "survey," and provided the basis for the division of the state into several areas of distinctively associated landscape phenomena. The second period, in the summer of 1951, was devoted to an analysis of the historical development of the landscape in the various areas, and facilitated an understanding of the present landscape.

The inventory was made by a field party of three who traversed the state by automobile. The state was arbitrarily divided into six sections designated alphabetically for convenience in recording and summarizing data. Within each
section, traverses were plotted and given numerical designation in sequence. The location of the traverses was determined with the aid of overlay maps constructed from the parish maps of the State Highway Department. These maps show all roads in the state as well as the location of all rural dwellings and business houses, and enabled the plotting of traverses through the greatest density of rural settlement. Traverses were divided into segments of twenty houses or farmsteads each, to facilitate the plotting and summarization of the field data. The field sheets for recording data were designed so that each represented a segment or twenty farmsteads.

The desired data, symbolically recorded on the field sheets, included all aspects of the rural settlements which might have significance. Each item was classified and symbolic designations assigned to its various types. The recognition of house types was made possible by Kniffen's work on Louisiana house types.¹ Other buildings were divided into morphologic types within functional groupings. Fences were recorded as to type of construction and function.

All field data were numerically coded and punched on cards for mechanical summarization on International Business Machines. These machines provided a tally sheet which enabled

the construction of isarithmic maps showing the frequency of occurrence of the various elements of the settlement pattern. In constructing the isarithmic maps showing the distribution and frequency of occurrence of the various items inventoried on the survey, a base map was made showing each segment of the traverses. The tally sheets provided the frequency of occurrence of each item in each segment. These figures were plotted on the base maps adjacent to the appropriate segment, and equal figures were connected by isarithms. In the case of houses, the frequency of occurrence was converted to a percentage of the total number of houses in the segment, all of which contained twenty houses. Those maps showing such distribution, therefore, show the percentage of those houses inventoried which were of a particular type, rather than a percentage of the total number of houses in Louisiana. While it would be much better to show the percentage of all houses in Louisiana which have particular characteristics, it is thought that the more than 40,000 houses included in this survey provide a more than adequate sample of all areas of the state. In the case of barns and other items which occurred in varying numbers with each house, the maps show the number of such items occurring in association with each twenty rural houses.

With the aid of these maps, it was possible to recognize areas of peculiar areal associations. Each of the areas of distinctive characteristics was assigned to one member of...
the research group on the basis of that individual's previous experience and familiarity with the area.

In this manner, the prairies of southwest Louisiana were isolated for an individual study of the development of the area's material culture. The material sought included all aspects of the various cultural forms, elements, and complexes. Each item was studied as to its form. This included analysis as to size, shape, materials, and techniques of construction, as well as the time, reason, and nature of any change which might have occurred in the form. Information as to size, shape, materials of construction, and even the approximate date of changes were readily available and reasonably easy to check, but the cause of such changes often varied in direct relation to the source of information. However, it frequently was possible to correlate a change in some cultural form with technological developments such as the shift to all-wood construction at about the time sawmills, hence sawed lumber, became somewhat common. In a similar manner, changes were correlated with major economic readjustments such as that accompanying World War I, and cultural intrusions brought about by the influx of settlers from an alien culture group.

In addition to information concerning the morphology of elements, details were sought as to the approximate date and reason for any change in function. In this case, the shift from the old function was in fairly uniform coincidence with technological or economic changes or cultural readjustments.
However, in the case of the farmstead structures the new function seemed to follow no general pattern but varied with the individual. A case in point would be the general abandonment of the smoke-house by the prairie farmers as home freezers became available; yet the new function of the smoke-house varies widely -- some house the freezer, some serve as small-tool storage, and still others house chicken feed or a wide assortment of other items.

Most of the information concerning the last fifty years was gathered through personal interviews with farmers, local officials, and businessmen. However, much valuable material concerning recent changes as well as those occurring beyond the memory of living residents was found in the files of local newspapers, the old glass-plate negatives of photographers, family albums, and the offices of governmental agencies such as the Soil Conservation Service, the Production and Marketing Administration, and the County Agent.
CHAPTER I
THE PRAIRIES OF SOUTHWEST LOUISIANA

Physiography. The prairies of southwest Louisiana are developed on the youngest of the Mississippi River Pleistocene terraces, appropriately named Prairie Terrace. To the east the terrace is bounded by a sharp erosional escarpment, which rises abruptly from the present floodplain of the Mississippi system along a line marginal to Bayous Cocodrie and Teche. From a maximum north-south width of some sixty miles along the eastern blufflands, the prairies narrow westward to terminate in a fifteen-mile-wide neck along the Sabine River. To the south the prairies merge gradually with the coastal marsh some twenty to thirty miles from the coast, while northwestward the grassland gives way to a pine forest. (Figure 1)

The roughly triangular prairie area contains about 4,000 square miles of almost-level land, with a slope to the southwest of only a foot per mile. Maximum elevations of about seventy-five feet are found in northeastern Evangeline Parish, but the greater part of the prairies is less than fifty feet above sea level. The gentle gradient of the streams, coupled with a relatively short period of erosion,
Figure 1. -- Location Map of the Prairies of Southwest Louisiana. The roughly triangular prairie area contains about 4,000 square miles of almost-level land.
has resulted in limited dissection. The interfluvial areas are generally so poorly drained that the term "prairie marsh" is in common use locally. Aerial photographs of the area show unmistakable meanders of a Pleistocene Mississippi and its distributaries as far west as the Calcasieu River. Though the present drainage is not confined to the Pleistocene courses, the nature of the old delta surfaces seems to have determined the southwestward trend of all major streams crossing the prairies.

Flanking the stream courses, natural levees, formed by deposition during periods of flood, provide the highest and best-drained land in the prairies. Sediment-laden floodwaters deposited the coarser materials nearest the stream banks, consequently natural levees are highest adjacent to the streams and slope gently away. The higher, coarser-textured lands are known as the frontlands while the lower, finer-textured, stiffer soils are known as the backlands. These aggradational features, varying in width and height in direct relation to the size of the stream by which they were formed, are generally less than fifteen feet high at the crest and may attain a width of one mile or more. (Figure 2)

Minor surface features of common occurrence on the prairies are the pimple mounds, low, rounded hillocks ranging in diameter from ten to a hundred feet, and from a few inches
Figure 2. -- Highly Idealized Diagram of Natural Levees showing (a) the higher, coarser-textured, better-drained land; (b) the gentle backslope; (c) the lower, poorer-drained, stiff lands.
to several feet in height. (Figure 3) Similar mounds have been reported in Texas, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Missouri, and along the west coast of the United States as well as other parts of the world. Apparently restricted to no single physical environment, these physiographic phenomena have been ascribed to many and varied origins.

For almost a century pimple mounds of the Gulf coast area have been discussed in the literature, being first mentioned by Owen, who believed them to be the result of differential weathering.¹ There followed, during a period of a decade and a half, a series of papers devoted to mounds in Louisiana, California, and Washington. Origin of these mounds was credited to such instruments as uprooted trees, gas, mud lumps, whirlwinds, wild cucumber vines, and fish. In 1874, Le Conte discussed the mounds of Washington and recognized that because of their widespread occurrence, mounds must be a result of some widespread agent. He explained the conditions involved in their formation as follows:

...These conditions are a treeless country and a drift soil, consisting of two layers, a finer and more moveable one and a coarser and less moveable one below. Surface-erosion cuts through the fine superficial layer into the pebble-layer beneath, leaving, however, portions of the superficial layer

Figure 3. -- Pimple Mounds on the Prairie Five Miles Southeast of Crowley in Acadia Parish, Louisiana. Though these mounds have been leveled preparatory to rice cultivation, different light-reflecting characteristics of their soil causes them to appear as light dots on the photograph. Other notable items are the contour levees in the rice fields and the faint diagonal lines running from the corners of the field toward the center. These marks were made by a disc harrow turning the corners as the field was plowed.
as mounds. The size of the mounds depends upon the thickness of the superficial layer; the shape of the mounds depends much upon the slope of the surfaces. The process once started, small shrubs and weeds take possession of the mounds as the better soil, and hold them by their roots, and thus increase their size by preventing or retarding erosion in these spots.

During the following half-century at least a dozen different explanations were offered for mound formation. These theories attribute mounds to such widely varying agents as ants, soil creep and pressure, burrowing squirrels, and sand brought to the surface by gas and water. Le Conte's ideas were not again brought forth until 1929, when Walters and Flagler, in a work on the Columbia Plateau, came to the conclusion that mounds were the result of water erosion. The same year Melton stated that erosion by small rivulets in a weak, sandy soil was responsible for mound formation. Rich agreed but added that some clump-type vegetation was an important factor in mound formation.

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Holland reviewed the literature concerning pimple mounds, listing twenty-seven theories which had been offered in explanation of their origin between the years 1843 and 1942.6 By way of observation, Holland states:

It is apparent from the foregoing synopsis of the literature on pimple mounds that no single hypothesis can explain the origin of all of these small hillocks. Doubtless, the growth of some of the mounds in California was aided by wind; some of the mounds in Arkansas were probably the result of differential weathering; some mounds are definitely Indian mounds; and some mounds are the result of the deposition of material around the outlets for underground water. On the other hand, the mounds of the Gulf Coast area, particularly those mounds in Beauregard and Allen Parishes, must be assigned to still another cause.7

The different origin ascribed to the mounds of the Gulf Coast area of Louisiana is well summarized in the following statement by Holland:

Thus, according to the hypothesis presented in this paper (which is not new but was presented in its essential form as far back as 1874 by LeConte), the following combination of factors is responsible for the formation of pimple mounds: (1) a sandy or silty soil with a low percentage of colloidal clay, (2) an initial surface of very low relief, (3) sufficient rainfall to cause erosion, and (4) some type of vegetation peculiar to pimple mound areas.8

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7 Loc. cit.

8 Ibid., p. 60.
Aerial photographic evidence lends considerable support to these observations and at least makes it difficult to refute the thesis that pimple mounds are the result of erosion. Considered in relation to the slope of the land and the well-integrated drainage pattern, mounds certainly appear to be residual. In areas of little or no slope the erosive action appears to have been insufficient for their formation, while areas of greater slope are characterized by elongate ridges formed, perhaps, as transverse streams failed to erode as rapidly as those flowing parallel to the slope. However, point four of Holland's requirements remains to be adequately explained. Vegetation of a type sufficiently large to protect an area the size of these pimple mounds from erosion would seem to require something other than grass. Holland does not designate the type of vegetation responsible for the protection of some areas while others were subjected to erosion, but he does suggest that "...larger trees could have protected the areas beneath them from the direct impact of rain drops and thus caused initial differences in relief which later became pimple mounds." However, he further states that the "...type of vegetation responsible for the starting of differential erosion is not known. It must have been limited east-

\[9\]Ibid., p. 60.
ward by the Mississippi River because no pimple mounds occur east of this line.\textsuperscript{10}

Numerous almost-circular, shallow depressions dot the prairies. (Figure 4) They have been called variously po­ck­marks, buffalo wallows, bagols, marais, platins, and many other names. With a diameter of from fifty to a hundred yards, these depressions are seldom less than one nor more than two feet in depth. Their sides are so steep as to be almost vertical, while the bottom is essentially level. These depressions usually contain water after rains but typically dry up during drier periods.

Post was of the opinion that cattle had been instru­mental in excavating these depressions. He states:

\begin{quote}
These ponds often had no inlets or outlets, but depended upon precipitation for their water supply and upon the claypan to hold it. The best developed ponds, those having the above mentioned features, were generally found on high land which was usually the frontlands of the coulees, suggesting that during flood time either buffalo -- if there were any in the country -- or cattle milled and tracked them out of what may have been the slightest de­pressions capable of holding water.\textsuperscript{11}
\end{quote}

That cattle made use of these wet places to coat themselves with mud as a protection against insects cannot be denied;

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{10} Loc. cit.
\end{itemize}
Figure 4. -- Large Shallow Depressions on the Prairie. Located in St. Martin Parish about one and one-half miles northeast of the Lafayette and Iberia parish boundary. Note the arrangement of these depressions in relation to old channel scars. Those which are most obviously in old scars are somewhat elliptical in shape, while those that are round show least coincidence with the old scar.
however, evidence that they were causative factors seems to be insufficient. If, as Post states, these ponds are typically floored by a claypan, the occurrence of this claypan suggests that poor drainage of the dark brown silts and clays of the prairies has resulted in eluviation of the upper layers and the accumulation of colloidal materials one or two feet below the surface. This is in keeping with the explanation of the occurrence of a claypan over most of the prairie area. Also, such a development seems to be consistent with the explanation of similar features reported from the forest-steppe region of Russia. These features and their formation are described as follows:

A characteristic feature of the forest-steppe relief is the great number of hollows, or "saucers" — shallow, round depressions of different size, sometimes occupied by small ponds, bogs, or temporary pools of water. They are predominantly in flat interstream areas. In some parts of Poltava raion there are so many that the distance between them is only 2 to 60 m. The depth of the depressions is usually from 0.75 to 1.5 m., occasionally 2 m.; the diameter, 10 to 50 m. In the forest steppe between the Don and the Volga, the depressions overgrown with birch are known as kolki. As for the origin of these saucer-like depressions, they are due in part to the mechanical effect of water which at one time covered the present-day steppe, and in part to the sinking of the ground as a result of the leaching out of salts.12

Fisk described similar "pockmarks or pocks" in Avoyelles Parish, considering them to be incompletely alluviated channel scars.\(^3\) Holland, in his work on Beauregard and Allen parishes, arrived at the same conclusion and suggested that the term bagol\(^4\) be applied to these features.\(^5\) It seems highly probable that this last-mentioned method of formation is at least partially, if not completely, correct. Aerial photographic study reveals an arrangement of these depressions in relation to old channel scars, which strongly suggests a connection.

**Climate.** Climatically, southwest Louisiana fits the definition of humid sub-tropical, being principally influenced by a sub-tropical latitude and proximity to the Gulf of Mexico. In summer, when atmospheric pressure decreases toward the continental interior, prevailing


\(^{14}\)The term bagol developed in the area to the north of the prairies where these marais contained clusters of trees, one of which was called locally the Bay Gall. This term has degenerated into bagol and, according to Holland, is widely used in Allen and Beauregard parishes. In the prairies, the only marais which support trees are those which have been fenced with willow posts. These posts frequently develop new growth and multiply until the depression is encircled with willow trees.

\(^{15}\)Holland, *op. cit.*, p. 67.
southerly winds bring moist tropical air over the area to produce conditions well suited to the formation of afternoon thundershowers. With the pressure distribution so altered as to bring westerly to northerly winds, air from the continental interior brings higher temperatures and drier weather. At least three stations: Rayne, Ville Platte, and Grand Coteau have recorded maximum temperatures of 107 degrees, and all other stations in the prairies have recorded maxima of 103 degrees or above. Ville Platte, in eastern Evangeline Parish, leads all other stations with an average temperature of 82.8 degrees for the month of July, while Cameron, in southern Cameron Parish, has the lowest warm-month average, with a temperature of 81.1 degrees for July. The entire prairie area has a mean temperature of about 82 degrees for the month of July.

During winter, the area is alternately covered by tropical air and cold continental air. January temperature averages range from 54.2 degrees at Crowley to 51.3 degrees at Opelousas, giving a mean of 53.1 degrees for the month. Though considerably warmed before reaching southwest Louisiana, the continental air often brings temperatures well below freezing, with minima of 2 degrees having been recorded at both Opelousas and Grand Coteau. All stations in the prairies have recorded minimum temperatures only
<table>
<thead>
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<th>Station</th>
<th>Temperature in degrees F.</th>
<th>Precipitation, Annual</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
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<td>54.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rayne*</td>
<td>82.3</td>
<td>53.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lake Charles</td>
<td>82.2</td>
<td>52.6</td>
</tr>
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<td>Cameron*</td>
<td>81.1</td>
<td>51.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lake Arthur</td>
<td>82.5</td>
<td>53.9</td>
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<td>Ville Platte</td>
<td>82.8</td>
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<td>Jennings</td>
<td>82.1</td>
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<td>Grand Coteau</td>
<td>81.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Opelousas*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abbeville</td>
<td>81.8</td>
<td>53.2</td>
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</tbody>
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slightly above this figure, with 15 degrees recorded at Ville Platte being the highest.

The average dates of the first killing frost in fall range from November 12, at Opelousas, to December 2, at Cameron and Lake Arthur. The average dates of the last killing frost range from February 7, at Lake Arthur, to March 9, at Opelousas. Growing seasons average between 298 days, at Lake Arthur, and 248 days, at Opelousas.

Average annual precipitation ranges from 52.91 inches, at Cameron, to 59.58 inches, at Lake Arthur, and is well distributed through the year with a slight summer maximum and a slight fall minimum. Practically all precipitation comes as rain, with a dominance of convectional, or thermal, type in summer and a maximum occurrence of cyclonic, or frontal, type in winter.

A monthly rainfall of over 20 inches at any station in the prairies is quite rare, and twenty-four-hour falls of more than 10 inches are exceptional but not unknown. Lake Charles recorded a total of 17.90 inches of rain during June, 1947. Though this is not a record rainfall for a month, the six-hour total of 15.38 inches recorded from 6:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon on June 19, 1947, exceeds any six-hour amount recorded in an automatic gauge in the United States. On this date, the twenty-four-hour total was 16.01 inches, which is considerably less than has been recorded at
at least five other stations in the prairies during this century. 16

Vegetation. Much speculation concerning the development of grasslands in the humid portions of the United States has developed as a result of the apparent climatic suitability of these areas to the growth of trees. Other forested portions of Louisiana, notably the north-central part, receive from six to ten inches less rainfall during the warm season than does the prairie section, yet the summer temperature averages are essentially the same as those found in the prairie. This would seem to indicate that neither insufficient total precipitation nor excessive summer evaporation could account for the development of grasslands in humid areas.

Two other factors suggest themselves, either of which might well provide a solution to the problem of the prairie origin. If the area were formerly covered by

16 Abbeville, Crowley, Grand Coteau, Gueydan and Lafayette all recorded in excess of 16.50 inches on August 8–9, 1940. The largest of these was 19.78 inches recorded at Crowley. This amount, however, is exceeded by the amount of 21.40 inches recorded at Alexandria on June 15–16, 1888, which is the largest twenty-four-hour amount ever recorded in the state.

There are at least a half-dozen instances in which stations in the South have received in excess of 20 inches in twenty-four hours. Most of these heavy rainfalls in short periods result from tropical cyclones, and are mainly concentrated in a belt of under 200 miles in width along the coast.
forest growth, the most logical instrument for its removal is fire, regularly and frequently destroying the old trees and preventing the young from maturing. Such fires might have been the work of man or nature or both. If such a forested area existed, it had disappeared long before white man came to this continent in appreciable numbers, and this disappearance was so complete that no evidence can be found of its former existence. The other possibility is that the area was never forested but has remained a grassland from the beginning. This assumption leads to the conclusion that the development of a grassland in this environment is attributable to edaphic factors resulting from slope, drainage, and the nature of the parent material.

This last-mentioned possibility seems to gain support from the nature of the species forming the plant community, though doubtless fires have been a factor in preventing tree growth. These coastal prairies are dominated largely by water grass (Paspalum sp.), switch grass (Panicum virgatum), broom sedges (Andropogon glomeratus, A. saccharoides), and bluestem (A. furcatus), all of which can persist in a wet soil. Along the lower margin, these grasslands merge almost imperceptibly with the marsh grasslands of the coast.

Along the present and former stream channels, strips of riverine woods, of approximately one-half-mile in width,
project across the prairie, carving it into a number of named divisions or "coves". These lowland areas are occupied by forest stands of cypress (*Taxodium distichum*), red gum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*), tupelo (*Nyssa aquatica*), water ash (*Fraxinus caroliniana*), cottonwood (*Populus balsamifera*), and several types of oak (*Quercus lyrata*, *Q. agrifolia*, *Q. nigra*).
CHAPTER II
CULTURAL SUCCESSION

French Settlement.\(^1\) The first European claim to the area known as Louisiana was that of France, based upon the discoveries of LaSalle. He sailed down the Mississippi River and at its mouth on April 6, 1682, claimed for France all the territory drained by the Mississippi system. In 1699, the French established a base near the present city of Biloxi, Mississippi, and from there they moved along the coast and up the Mississippi River, exploring and settling gradually the vast territory claimed by LaSalle.

Not until a half-century after the French began settling Louisiana and after the transfer to Spain, did the prairies in the southwestern part of the present state of Louisiana receive any appreciable number of settlers.

\(^1\)Material concerning the Indians of this area, which would be pertinent to a treatment of agricultural settlement, is extremely limited. For the most part, there are two sources: 1) the American State Papers, which deal with the transfer of land by the Indians to other individuals, and reveal vague locations of Indian villages, but little else; 2) letters and documents of the early French and Spanish occupation, which give only general lists of crops and rough approximations of numbers.
Although a small number of hunters, trappers, and adventurers had pushed westward beyond the swamps of the Atchafalaya Basin, the prairies had been left in the hands of local Indian tribes. About 1765, groups of Acadian families, whom the British had expelled from Canada, began arriving at New Orleans in search of new homes.² A small number of these people were settled along the Mississippi River above New Orleans, but the majority removed to Bayou Teche and prairie streams to the west. Gayarre states:

Thus between the 1st. of January and the 13th. of May, 1765, about six hundred and fifty Acadians had arrived at New Orleans, and from that town had been sent to form settlements in Attakapas and Opelousas, under the command of Andry.³

Here, on lands granted by the Spanish governor, they built homes, cleared fields, and attempted to restore the way of life from which they had been uprooted a decade or more earlier.

Land Survey System. The manner in which the Acadians settled on the stream banks was not unlike the pattern appearing along the Mississippi River and other settled streams in Louisiana, for they all followed a system

³Ibid., p. 122.
established fifty years before by the French. Shortly after the turn of the eighteenth century, France began a rather vigorous campaign to attract settlers to the Louisiana territory. Of the many inducements which France offered the settlers, the most successful was the practice of granting to each new immigrant land for home site and fields.

The early settlers were, in almost every instance, given lands abutting against rivers or other streams. Although lands so located were desirable because of their accessibility to water transportation and their better drainage, such beautifully rational explanations do not adequately account for the most unusual survey system employed in dividing the land into individual holdings.

The arpent, which is equivalent to 192 American feet or roughly one side of an acre, was the unit of land measurement used by the French in Louisiana. Each grantee received a tract of land bordering on and extending at right angles away from the river. The side along the stream came to be known as the front, and varied from as little as one arpent to as much as several hundred in the very early grants. The side extending away from the stream is the depth, and customarily measured forty arpents, or nearly 3,000 feet. (Figure 5)

Many early settlers in Louisiana were granted tracts of land with fifty or one hundred arpents frontage, much of
Figure 5. -- Aerial View of the Pattern Produced by the Long-lot Survey System. The stream shown is Bayou Boeuf at the junction of Evangeline, Avoyelles, and St. Landry parishes. All property holdings fronted on the bayou until a major highway, which did not follow the contour of the stream, provided frontage for other property.
which remained unimproved. Some who were granted large tracts cut and sold the timber and left the land unproductive, while others accepted grants only to sell the land to other settlers at a profit. In 1716, King Louis XIV, seeking to stop these practices, issued a decree which ordered that all land which had not been cleared or otherwise improved would revert to the crown and be re-granted to other settlers in tracts having two to four arpents frontage. 4

How this system of survey originated is somewhat problematical, for the mode of land division established by the French in Louisiana is not unique to that state. Many early settlers in Canada were granted holdings along the St. Lawrence River which measured 766 feet in front and 7,660 feet deep. 5 This is only a few feet less than forty arpents depth by four arpents frontage. This elongated type holding is found in almost all other early French settlements in North America as well as in such insular outposts as Reunion in the Indian Ocean.

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Without doubt, a very similar system was used in Europe long before its introduction into North America. Jules Sion discusses areas of Normandy which were settled in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, in which the lots were arranged along the road with the house built at the front of the lot.\textsuperscript{6} There are similar settlements in parts of Germany, and property divisions in the polders of the Low Countries are of this pattern. A map of Martinique, made in 1671, shows the first landholdings on the island, and the lots are long and narrow and arranged in a manner very similar to that found in Louisiana.\textsuperscript{7}

In Louisiana, as in other areas settled by the French, the law of coparceny, or equal inheritance rights, brought about repeated division of property into increasingly smaller holdings. The manner of dividing in the case of a multiple inheritance was such that each recipient had an equal share of the frontage and a full depth. To prevent the continued partitioning of fields until they were practically useless, an ordinance was passed in 1745, prohibiting the building of houses or stables on land holdings.


"less than an arpent and a half in front by thirty or forty arpents in depth." This ordinance was difficult to enforce, and it is not unusual today to find a deed which reads, "one arpent less twenty-five feet front." (Figure 6)

Spain acquired Louisiana from France under the treaty of November 3, 1762, and on assuming control of the territory continued the French system of land survey. Each grantee received land fronting on a stream and extending back to a depth of forty arpents. For each adult in the family or each adult slave, the settler received an additional amount of land up to a maximum of eight hundred arpents in superficies. In general, the intent of the Spanish policy was to grant an individual the amount of land that he and his dependents could cultivate. Under these laws and customs, the Spanish governor granted lands to the Acadian settlers in the long, narrow strip pattern begun by the French, thus extending the long-lot,

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8 William Smith, History of Canada: From the First Discovery to the Peace of 1791, (Quebec: 1815), I, pp. 199-200.


10 Ibid., p. 231.

11 Loc. cit.
Figure 6. -- Manner of Property Division through Inheritance as Practiced by the French in Louisiana. Though this parcel is located on Bayou Lafourche in Lafourche Parish, it is typical of all areas settled by the French in Louisiana.

This property of nine arpents front by forty arpents depth was originally confirmed to Gregory Landry (confirmation American State Papers, vol. II, p. 340, no. 117). In 1837, the property was divided among his nine children. Jean Baptist Landry, son of Gregory, died in 1881 and his coparceny, plus a tract purchased from his brother Vincent, was divided by his heirs. Elodie Landry, daughter of Jean Baptist, married Numa Blanchard, in 1883. They had three children who reached majority. Two died without issue, and intestate and left Willie Blanchard, great-grandson of Gregory Landry, as the present owner of a tract approximately one-third arpents in front by forty arpents in depth.

This map was made from a plat attached to a title abstract prepared by the Louisiana State Abstract Co., Napoleonville, Louisiana.
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or linear-survey system into the western part of Louisiana.

The exact localities of all grants made to the Acadians have not been determined, but in general the area settled by them is marked by the occurrence of the long-lot survey tracts west of the Atchafalaya Basin. (Figure 7) The system of land division used by the Spanish in making grants to the Acadians did more than merely separate the individual property holdings, for the long, narrow strip of property produced by this mode of survey resulted in a sharply distinctive settlement pattern.

Road Pattern. Along the crests of the natural levees narrow roads paralleled the stream banks serving as routes over which the settlers traveled on social visits as well as hauled their agricultural harvest and other goods. The character of the roads reflected the lack of suitable surfacing material in the alluvial soils, for they were little more than cleared trails which were traveled for short distances only. Roughly paralleling the river-bank roads were, in many instances, secondary roads along the forty-arpent back property line. Being farther down the slope of the natural levees, the forty-arpent roads were of limited use because of poor drainage and frequent muddiness. Although the front roads adhered to the natural levees in smooth-flowing curves, the forty-arpent roads followed the offsets or jogs of the property boundaries.
Figure 7. -- The Western Extent of the Long-lot Survey System in the Prairies. Though this system is used extensively farther eastward, this is the approximate western limit of its occurrence. The distribution of this system of land survey in the prairies is of significance, since it indicates the approximate area of early Acadian settlement, which is the present nuclear area of Acadian culture. (Map courtesy Grover C. Murray.)
Front roads were, for the most part, only a link between members of the same inhabited cluster, particularly in the case of quite isolated groups whose contact with other settlements might be made best by boat or over one of the many prairie trails.

Travel across the prairies from one settlement to another did not require the building of roads, for the natural grassland allowed travel in all directions with little or no difficulty. The numerous trails of grazing animals crossed the prairies in all directions, following the easiest and most direct routes to provide ready travel on horseback or afoot. With continued use, some favored few of the trails gradually became recognized roads joining adjacent settlements. A century after the beginning of settlement in the prairies, Samuel Lockett described the routes across the open prairie in the following manner:

...Through these prairies numberless tracks are made by their cattle in their journeys to and from watering places... The inhabitants know which of these trails are their "bon chemins", but a stranger would do well to rely on his compass and look sharply to his bearings in traversing these broad spaces so destitute of striking landmarks, as every trail will seem equally "bon" to him.12

Location and Spacing of Farmsteads. The system of land survey was reflected not only in the road pattern but

in the location and spacing of farmsteads as well. To take advantage of the better drainage offered by the greater elevation of the natural levees paralleling the streams, the settlers placed their dwellings near the banks at the front of their claims. This location of dwellings gave rise to a series of sinuous settlements along the stream banks with the wide intervening prairies almost or completely unsettled.

Houses were oriented toward the streams, the distance from the bank varying with the width of the natural levee, but in all cases quite near the levee crest. In all instances, in which very old houses were observed, sufficient room for a road and a rather generous front yard was allowed between the house and the stream bank.

Spacing of houses was determined by the extent of the property front, for each individual holding had only one dwelling that served for the owner and his family. Property frontage varied from two arpents to as much as the legal maximum of twenty, with the exception of properties which, for natural causes, could not extend to a full forty-arpent depth and were given a proportionate increase in frontage. Thus the spacing of farmsteads, with allowance for their original clustering in settled areas, was somewhat closer than customary in frontier agricultural settlements in most other parts of the United States; still, it was not so close as the present-day distribution of the long-lot pattern indicates. Acadian settlers arrived in rather
sizable groups, each of which located together to form a small nucleus of settlement. Often many miles separated one such settlement from another, both across the prairie and along the streams.

Though settlements were often isolated and had relatively little contact with others, the elements, forms, and patterns of the material culture were in all cases the same. The Acadians brought with them to Louisiana a full and rich cultural pattern, many elements rooted in old French practices, while others were recent modifications in adapting to new and different physical surroundings. The wide range of natural conditions between France, Nova Scotia, and Louisiana doubtless contributed to modification of the material culture, but each succeeding group of Acadians arriving in Louisiana seems to have accepted the adaptations made by earlier arrivals.

Farmsteads. Acadian farmsteads were not pretentious establishments, for the economy required little in the way of farm buildings. Generally, two or three buildings grouped in one enclosure formed a small and compact farmstead, which adequately served the needs of the individual farmer. Other fenced areas were few and restricted to cultivated fields.
The largest and most prominent building in the Acadian farmstead was the dwelling. The term, "Acadian house," has been applied to this type of building in southern Louisiana, but the substitution of the term "Creole house" is suggested as more accurate. The origin of the house is not certainly known, although considerable speculation surrounds its development and spread in the French colonies of the New World. Certainly, the Acadians were not responsible for its development, nor was its use restricted to these people. From a very early date, the French settlers along the lower Mississippi River were building this type house, and its association today with the Acadians may be attributed to their having adopted the structure from the earlier settlers. (Figure 3)

The half-timbered mode of construction used in building the Creole house was in use in Northwest Europe much earlier. The form of the structure seems likely to have been a development in the New World, for in marked contrast to the generally porchless dwellings of northern France, the most characteristic feature of the Creole house is the large front porch included as an integral part of the structure. (Figure 9)

Most Creole houses built in the prairies seem to have been about the same size, although there was some variation in this respect. The house appears to be square, although closer observation will reveal a considerable
Figure 8. -- The Distribution of the Built-in Porch House Type in Louisiana. The name Built-in Porch is used to include both the true Creole house made of mud daub and its later counterpart made of wood. The restriction of this house type to the stream areas is a reflection of its association with the French. The forty to fifty per cent occurrence in St. Landry Parish suggests the Acadian cultural nucleus. Subsequent study has revealed the high frequency of occurrence in northeast Louisiana to be due to a house type of somewhat similar form though of unrelated origin. (Map from Office of Naval Research survey.)
LOUISIANA

DISTRIBUTION OF THE BUILT-IN PORCH HOUSE TYPE

- 0-10%
- 25-40%
- 10-25%
- 40-50%
- 50-75%

SCALE - MILES

0 10 20 30 40 50

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Figure 9.
A true Creole house with the gabled end boarded over as a protection against the weather. Beneath the boards is a wall of mud-daubing over a hand-worked frame.
disproportion between the width and length. Commonly, the houses measure some twenty-four feet from gable to gable, and about thirty-six feet from front to back. (Figure 12) Quite frequently, houses were built doubling the measurement between the gables while retaining the same front-to-rear distance. There are instances in which a house measuring approximately twenty-four by thirty-six feet was built and at a later date another the same size added to one end.

Construction began with heavy foundation sills of hand-hewn cypress laid as a base for the walls. Two-inch by four-inch vertical members were mounted on the sills at intervals of two or three feet and strengthened by diagonal braces. All the pieces in the framework were hand-hewn, morticed at the joints, and anchored with wooden pegs. Round, horizontal scantlings, one to two inches in diameter, were placed between the vertical members at intervals of a few inches. The spaces within the framework were filled in with a mixture of mud and some vegetable fibre such as rice straw or moss (Dendropogon usneoides), smoothed and made flush with the timbers. (Figure 10) The outside walls were covered with hand-split boards to protect them from the ravages of the weather, while inside walls were white-washed with a mixture of lime and water. Hard-packed earth made a substantial floor, while the mud-daubed fireplace at
Figure 10.

The front wall of the house shown in Figure 9, showing the vertical and diagonal timbers between which the walls were daubed in. This portion of the house was not boarded over, since the wall was protected by the front porch. Some traces of a former coat of whitewash may be seen below the shutter.
one end or in the center served as both heating unit and kitchen, for it was not until sufficient boards had been split that a kitchen could be built. When a kitchen was added, it was generally placed to one side or at back and, being a separate structure, was usually separated from the main house by a distance of three to four feet. (Figure 11)

Approximately one-third of the area under the roof at the front of the house was left unwalled to provide a front porch running the entire width of the house. The wide porch roof protected the front wall of the house so that it was seldom boarded over, but rather was usually whitewashed like the house interior. (Figure 12) From the front porch, a ladder or flight of stairs provided access to a rather commodious attic, where considerable space was available for storage.

The oldest informants have very little knowledge of the types of barns and other outbuildings used by the Acadians who settled the area almost two centuries ago. From such information as is available, it appears that barns, as such, were almost entirely lacking in the farmsteads of the early Acadians. A small structure, usually located behind the house in the same fenced enclosure, served as both grain storage crib and barn. A single pen constructed of horizontal poles and covered by a gabled roof of cypress shingles was the corn crib. The exact
Figure 11.

A view of the same house, showing the porch across the entire front. To the right of the house is a small kitchen leading off the front porch. This small structure is separated from the house and is reached by a plank walkway about five feet long.
Figure 12. -- An Acadian House Shortly Before the Turn of the Century. This photograph, taken by Barnett's Studio of Crowley, shows the characteristic house of the prairies from the beginning of European settlement until about 1900. Faint sign of a former chimney position may be seen near the center of the wall. The woman is demonstrating the use of the mortar and pestle for hulling rice.
method of construction has not been determined, as the informants disagree as to the details. It seems likely that some form of notching was used in joining the poles at the corners and mud-daubing was used in some instances, while in others the cracks between the poles were left open. The only positive evidence comes from a photograph of unknown date, which shows a building of horizontal poles with the corners clearly notched and the cracks left unchinked.¹³ (Figure 13) By the addition of shed roofs to one or more sides, a covered space was provided for storage of equipment or for feeding animals from troughs attached to the outsides of the primary structure. These shed roofs were of two types: one, as in the photograph, a continuous roof from the ridge pole of the crib to the eaves of the shed; the other, a separate shed roof attached to the sides of the crib at a point below the roof eaves. No data are available as to which, if either, of these methods was most commonly used, but informants agree that both were "acceptable" methods of construction widely used in the area.

Additional buildings were not found on all farmsteads, for the simplicity of life was manifest in the

¹³The use of log construction by the Acadians was restricted to their outbuildings and probably was borrowed from the Anglo-Americans.
Figure 13. -- An Early Acadian Farmyard. This is the yard of the house shown in figure 12. The small structure to the left of center serves as grain storage and as a barn. It is of horizontal logs or poles, notched at the corners, and the cracks are left open. The roof is obviously newer than the rest of the structure and is made of sawed boards.

The structure at right is a grist mill which is powered by what appears to be two small mules turning the large horizontal wheel. Notice the fence along the side is of vertical pickets, while the fence in front is of pieux. The trees at right are chinaberry and the first one has already been trimmed for fire wood. No one has been able to identify the object under the shed.
lack of complex forms in the cultural landscape. Within each community there were usually more-aggressive, industrious, and resourceful farmers who provided the community with the services of grist mills and cane mills. The grinding portion of the grist mill, consisting of two circular millstones, was housed in a structure with a gabled roof of shingles. (Figure 14) Power was provided by either oxen or horses harnessed to a wooden wheel, approximately twenty-five or thirty feet in diameter, mounted on a vertical axle. As the animals turned the wheel, a large rawhide rope imparted a rapid rotary motion to one of the millstones by means of a pulley attached to a vertical shaft mounted in the center of the millstone. Corn, fed through an opening above the millstone, was ground and ejected as meal from a spout at the side. It was customary to grind corn for an agreed share of the product, usually one-fourth or one-fifth going to the miller.

Cane mills were less elaborate in construction than the grist mills and usually they were not housed. A horizontal pole mounted atop a primary vertical roller was turned by horses or oxen. This imparted a rotary motion to the primary roller, which was geared to a secondary roller. Stalks of cane were fed into the mill between the two rollers. The juice was pressed out and
Figure 14.

An Acadian Grist Mill. Though labeled a pumping plant, this is an Acadian grist mill. There is little possibility that such a device was used in pumping water; however, such use might account for the animals traveling in the wrong direction. (Photographed from the Crowley Daily Signal, special issue of May, 1898.)
drained into a container or chute leading to the cooking vat. Quite frequently, the cooking vat was covered by an unwalled, shingle-roofed shed. In the cooking vat the cane juice was boiled and sufficient moisture evaporated to produce a syrup or molasses. This product was then stored in jugs or barrels to be used during the winter. If a wine cask were available, it was considered excellent for the storage of molasses, since a very pleasing flavor was added.

The farmstead proper and areas of cultivation were usually fenced against livestock, although in some instances only the area around the house and barn was enclosed and work stock, pigs, and cattle kept there. One type of fence was used to the exclusion of all others in enclosing the fields. Split timbers, somewhat like rails, with the exception that each end of the timbers was tapered, were used in building the pieux fence, the term pieux applying to both rails and fence. (Figure 15) Posts in which five oblate holes had been cut were set vertically and the tapered ends of the pieux inserted in the holes to form five horizontal runners, one above the other. The finished fence was some five feet in height, quite distinctive in appearance as well as sufficiently strong to keep out cattle.

Fences around the house as well as the garden plot were usually constructed of split palings or pickets.
Figure 15. — An Early Acadian Farmstead. This drawing shows the simplicity of the farmstead and the relationship between the buildings in regard to size and location. The small building directly behind the house is constructed of horizontal logs and serves as grain storage. The extended roof of this building provides implement storage on one side and animal shelter on the other. The building and adjacent structure in the most distant corner of the enclosure is the grist mill. Outside the enclosure in the rear is a woodlot of chinaberry trees.
Posts set in the ground were connected by horizontal runners, one just above the ground and another just below the top of the posts. To these runners, pickets of several inches in width were attached vertically at intervals of a few inches. Generally, the tops of the pickets were tapered to a point. This type of fence was both ornamental and functional in that it restrained large animals as well as hogs and chickens.

**Cattle.** Cattle raising occupied an important, if not leading, position in Acadian subsistence from a very early date. The origin of the cattle is somewhat problematical, for as early as 1769 these people were reported to have as many as 4,000 head. It is not likely that all or even a large part of these animals were brought west from the settlements along the Mississippi River. Early literature makes frequent reference to attempts to secure cattle from Mexico, the West Indies, and the Carolinas. So critical was the cattle supply in

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Louisiana that, in 1723, the killing of cattle of any kind was forbidden, and as late as 1737, slaughter of livestock was permitted only when an official declaration of intention was made in advance. The situation apparently improved some but again, in 1748, another order was issued forbidding the slaughter of heifers and cows.

When the Acadians arrived in Louisiana, one colony of these people made a contract with a Capitan Dauterive, who agreed to furnish each Acadian family with five cows and their calves and one bull. During the first year, he agreed to accept the risk and replace any losses. At the end of six years, the Acadians were to return the original number of cattle of the same kind and age and half the profits and increase. No mention is made as to the source of these cattle, but trade in cattle and horses had been established with the Indians in contact with the Spanish at least as early as 1719. Quite probably, the

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17 Lewis C. Gray, History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860, I, Peter Smith, New York, 1941, 79.


19 Surrey, op. cit., pp. 371, 410, 446.
cattle of the Acadians were in no small part animals which had been introduced by the Spanish at an earlier date and subsequently entered southwest Louisiana via Mexico and Texas.

Considered in the light of its importance in the Acadian economy, it is surprising that the cattle industry did not have a more marked effect on the cultural landscape. There were a few items associated with the cattle industry which were prominent in the observable scene, but none persisted beyond the cattle era. The cattle were allowed to graze freely on the open prairie without being attended. In spring, the animals were rounded up for branding. At the time of branding, the animals were herded into a large corral made of pieux. This corral, along with the animals themselves and the trails they made across the prairie, was the only structural evidence of the Acadian cattle industry.

Agriculture. Acadian settlers in Louisiana were not noted for their agricultural skills and techniques, for the long growing season and abundant rainfall required little in the way of human effort to support their subsistence agriculture. Four crops: corn, rice, sweet potatoes, and cane., augmented by a small vegetable garden, regularly provided the basic foods of the Acadian diet. As early in the history of settlement in the prairies
as 1770, the cultivation of wheat was greatly encouraged by the administrative officials:

There are excellent prairies covered with small grass suitable as pasture for sheep. There are also places where undoubtedly good crops of wheat could be raised if only an ardor for its cultivation existed among the inhabitants. The products raised at present are rice, corn, and sweet potatoes, as well as much livestock consisting of cows, heifers, and some sheep. These products are used for the sustenance of the people and for trade with the natives, who ought to apply themselves to the raising of sheep and planting of corn, wheat, oats, rice, and flax since they have the most excellent land for these crops.20

The same year, another writer listed wheat as one of the crops then being grown:

Twenty-five leagues up this river is a settlement known by the name of Pelousas and Attakapa; it is formed by about 60 families of Acadians, discharged soldiers and inhabitants from Toulouse, on the river Alibimons who have a few slaves. They raise tobacco, maize and wheat; the latter only for their own consumption.21

Doubtless some wheat was grown but apparently for only a very brief period, since the literature does not mention wheat after the initial period of settlement and the present inhabitants do not list wheat as a crop grown by their ancestors.


Though preferring wheat, the French settlers along the lower Mississippi River had been growing Indian corn or maize for many years before the Acadian arrival in Louisiana. Many references are made to the condition of the corn crop in the literature of this early period. In a letter dated June 15, 1737, the following comment was made:

Now besides this real and foreseen impediment it has happened that the Mississippi rose so high in March and April that it broke through the levees above and below the city and flooded the plantations so that a large part of the rice already planted and sprouted was uprooted and carried away. The waters have engendered a large number of insects that have eaten the corn so that it was necessary to replant it, and now that the river is going down the settlers are also going to make new plantings of rice.²²

Apparently the Acadians, on their arrival in Louisiana, began the cultivation of maize in the manner of the earlier French settlers. Maize was planted in rows in a well-drained spot, usually toward the front of the farm, and frequently beans were planted among the maize to provide an additional crop and to improve the maize production. After planting, the maize received little attention other than an occasional weeding with a hoe. The warm spring rains, coupled with the fertile soils, in due time produced

²²Bienville and Solmon to Maurepas, Mississippi Provincial Archives, 1729-1740 (Jackson: Mississippi Department of Archives and History, 1929), I, p. 353.
a surprisingly bountiful harvest. With the approach of harvest time, but before the silk had dried, the farmers, individually or with the aid of neighbors, had a "corn bending". As the name implies, a corn bending consisted of bending and partially breaking the stalk below the lowest ear, in such a way that the upper portion of the stalk would hang downward at an angle below the horizontal, yet not touch the ground. It is said that bending the stalk caused the shuck to shrink and tighten about the ear, affording, along with the downward angle of the ear, better protection from both rain and birds. (Figure 19) Thus protected, corn could be left in the field until time was available for harvest. Bent corn left standing in the field contributed a most peculiar form to the landscape until late summer or autumn, when corn was harvested and the stalks broken down.

The exact time of the introduction of rice into Louisiana is difficult to establish, though some sources state that it was introduced as early as 1718.\textsuperscript{23} The French did not have rice at their settlement on the Gulf of Mexico near the present site of Biloxi, Mississippi, in the year 1710;\textsuperscript{24} nor had seed rice been received in 1712,

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{tabular}{ll}
\textsuperscript{23} & The Rice Journal, XXX (December, 1927), 11. \\
\textsuperscript{24} & Letter from Diron d'Artaguette to Ponchartrain, Mississippi Provincial Archives, 1701-1729 (Jackson: Mississippi Department of Archives and History, 1929), II, p.59.
\end{tabular}
\end{footnotesize}
according to the following report of that year:

... The Indians grow their Indian corn on fields that are inundated by overflowing waters; these are the only places that are productive! I think that rice will grow well there. I have several times asked for some from Vera Cruz in order to plant it. I have not been able to obtain any except some that was suitable for eating. (Hulled rice?)

In 1722, Bienville, in a letter to the Navy council, expressed the hope that the "...country would soon be in a position to yield returns in rice and tobacco." This could be interpreted to mean that rice was being grown, but not in sufficient quantities to more than supply the colonist. The following year, rice was certainly being produced and in considerable quantity, for the minutes of the Superior Council of Louisiana, dated October 23, 1723, state that rice grew so well and in such abundance that the price was quite sufficient. In any event, the Acadians adopted rice cultivation as they passed through the French settlement to the east and rice became a staple in their diet. Though the crop itself was borrowed from other French settlers along the Mississippi, the methods of

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25 Ibid., p. 63.

26 Ibid., Volume III, p. 320.

27 Ibid., p. 272.
cultivation used there did not suit the environment in which the Acadians settled. Along the Mississippi River, fields planted in rice could be easily flooded with the annual rise of the river level, but in the prairies the lack of such periodic floods necessitated a change in the mode of cultivation.

Since flooding with water from the streams was not practicable, it was desirable to plant rice in low, poorly drained areas in order to receive as much as possible of the large amount of water required. Suitable sites were quite numerous in the form of the circular depressions called marais. (Figure 4) In these depressions the Acadians planted what was called "Providence rice," since sufficient water for its maturation was a matter of Providence. Toward the eventuality that the water supply of Providence might prove to be inadequate, many farmers provided a water storage facility by building a small earthen dam across the lower end of a depression. The site for such construction was chosen so as to lie at a higher elevation than the marais.

Cultivation preparatory to seeding was accomplished by means of a large, wooden, triangular harrow, about four feet on each side, made of four-by-four-inch timbers supporting spikes about six inches in length. Seeds were

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\[\text{De Bow's Review, II, pp. 426-27.}\]
then sown broadcast by hand and covered by dragging a treeto
top across the ground.

Late in summer, when the grain heads had filled and
ripened, the rice was cut by hand with a sickle, bound into
sheaves, and stacked in the field to dry. (Figures 17-18)
When properly dried, the rice was hauled to the house,
where the grain was threshed from the stalk. Threshing
was accomplished in several ways. A wooden flail was used
by some, while others grasped small bundles of rice by the
lower stems and beat the grain heads against a wooden
block, floor, or wall. The straw was placed in a stack
to be used as winter feed for the cattle and even for
building material.

Sweet potatoes were grown near the house in better-
drained, sandier soils. (Figure 16) Seed potatoes from
the previous year were placed in a bed where they sprouted,
sending up a large number of young plants. These young
plants, called slips, were pulled out and planted separately
in well-prepared beds. In autumn, the vines were pulled up,
bringing with them some potatoes and loosening the ground
so that the remainder could easily be removed. In a spot
near the kitchen, the potatoes were placed in a pile
covered with a layer of straw and a layer of earth. As the
potatoes were needed they were removed through an opening
at the base of the pile, while those unused were carried
Figure 16. — An Idealized Sketch of an Acadian Farmstead. Here may be seen the location of the house and crops in relation to the natural levee. Corn and sweet potatoes are usually grown near the crest of the levee in the coarser-textured and better-drained land, while sugar cane is placed lower on the natural levee in the poorer-drained land. The circular enclosure is a pieux fence around a marais planted in Providence rice.
Figure 17. -- Sheaves of Rice Stacked in the Field to Dry. This rice was cut by machines but earlier the rice was cut by hand and stacked in this same manner. (Photograph from the Acadia Parish Association of Commerce.)
Figure 13.

A Modern Scene of Rice Stacked in the Field to Dry.
Figure 19.

Bent Corn Standing in the Field. The practice of bending corn contributes a peculiar feature to the landscape.
through the winter in good condition, to be consumed the following spring or serve as seed for the succeeding crop.

With the better-drained lands utilized for corn and sweet potatoes, sugar cane was usually planted farther toward the back of the farm, since this crop grows well with abundant water. (Figure 16) Methods of cultivation did not differ markedly from those used in growing corn, though the cane did not require replanting every year, for two or three crops could be grown from one planting. Before the first frost in autumn, the cane was cut and stripped of leaves by hand, and hauled to the site of the cane mill where the juice was extracted. The crushed stalks were left in a large pile near the mill and, when sufficiently dry, used as fuel for the cooking vat. The cane juice was boiled until the proper amount of moisture had been driven off and the remaining syrup was of the proper consistency, then placed in barrels, jugs, or other containers to be stored until needed. For the succeeding crop, seed cane was placed in a pile and covered with a layer of straw topped by a layer of earth in order that it might go through the winter unfrozen.

One additional, and perhaps peculiar, type of planting might be included in the agriculture of the Acadian farmers. Wood for fuel was not too plentiful on the prairies and as more and more land was cleared for settlement, the small stands of riverine forests were seriously

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depleted. The chinaberry tree, which is fast growing and highly prized for its ornamental nature, was planted in groves near many of the Acadian homes. (Figure 12) During the cool season, the limbs were cut and used as fuel. The large tree trunks standing in rows were a striking sight during the winter, but with the coming of spring the appearance of a normal grove of trees was rapidly resumed as new limbs and foliage developed into full tree crowns, which in turn provided fuel for the next winter.

Methods of Transportation. Transportation was not a serious problem to the Acadian farmer, for he had few places to go. On infrequent trips across the prairies to visit neighboring settlements or hauling the harvests of his agricultural crops, the Acadian farmer used a large two-wheeled cart. The large wooden-spoke wheels supported a rectangular bed to which oxen or horses were hitched by means of a stationary tongue projecting forward from the cart. (Figure 20) The vehicle was no new development for it was basically the same as that which had been used in Acadia and France, as well as in the settlements along the Mississippi River.

The more wealthy families are reported to have traveled in more comfortable fashion. From a manuscript of the Reminiscences of Thomas C. Nichols, Post quotes the
Figure 20. -- An Acadian or Creole Cart. This vehicle was the almost universal means of transportation in the prairies until the latter part of the nineteenth century. Crowley Daily Signal (Louisiana: Crowley, 50th Anniversary Edition, 1949), p. 104.
following description:

On a Saturday evening, might be seen, caleches (as they were called) a wooden vehicle, put together with pegs, not a particle of iron, being used in their construction, mounted on wheels without tire, placed on rawhide supporters attached to two little windlasses, behind which they were wound up, to the proper height filled with young ladies, and old ladies, wending their way to the coming ball in the foot of the carriage, might be seen one or probably two shot bats, [sic] filled with dollars intended by the old ladies to furnish the means of indulging in their favorite game of Vingt-uns, during the evening. 29

The caleche seems to have occurred more frequently along the lower Teche than along the upper Teche and prairie streams, however.

Though water transportation was never so important in the prairies as it was in southeastern Louisiana, there was considerable use made of boats during the very early days of settlement. The dugout pirogue was the most common, if not the only, boat used by the Acadian settlers. The technique of building dugouts had been learned from earlier settlers and the Indians in Louisiana, and the finished product in the prairies was as skillfully done as any other. Quite large pirogues were made, and the devices for propelling as well as the terminology were the same as those in southeastern Louisiana. 30

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29 Post, op. cit., p. 130.

Community Facilities. Louisiana Acadians, who were invariably of Roman Catholic faith, found formal worship difficult, for in the prairies their numbers were hardly sufficient to support a church, though there was a resident priest in Opelousas as early as 1765. Their spiritual welfare was provided for as much as possible by Jesuit priests who rode out from Opelousas to hold services in the homes, since there was no church west of that settlement. These trips were quite infrequent, so that the arrival of the priest in a community occasioned a general holiday. Along with comforting the sick, christening the young, and saying mass, the priest joined couples in holy matrimony. A wedding was usually sufficient cause to extend the festivities over several days of feasting, dancing, and general merrymaking.

Unlike marriages, deaths could not be timed to the arrival of the priest, and in the heat of summer it was not always possible to postpone a burial. In such cases, a most holy member of the community performed the last rites and the remains were placed in a small community cemetery. These cemeteries were usually enclosed by a picket fence and the graves marked by wrought-iron or wooden crosses.

Many factors surrounding the establishment of the Acadians in the Louisiana prairies combined to make their settlements resistant to change, not the least of which
was the circumstances involved in their departure from Canada. At a much later date, one of their descendants wrote:

Expelled from Nova Scotia for the main part, the scattered huddles of humanity seemed content to live in a small- and undisturbed-orbit, introducing nothing newer than their grandsires had known of methods and habits. Their homes were of mud, as were the chimneys with their large open fireplaces in which simple, filling dishes were prepared.  

Doubtless much of this resistance to cultural change was a result of isolation. No other group of French settlers in Louisiana has displayed the degree of conservatism found among the Acadians who settled along the upper Teche and prairie streams to the west. The lower reaches of the Teche, from about Parks southward, though settled largely by Acadians, show a much greater tendency toward the acceptance of new ideas, methods, and habits and actually bear a greater resemblance to the lower Mississippi than to the upper Teche. This similarity of the lower Teche to the lower Mississippi may be attributed to the early establishment of contact and relatively easy communication between the two, while the upper Teche remained in relative isolation. To some extent, the changes which occurred along the lower Teche but failed to occur along the upper

Teche may be accredited to edaphic or other physical factors. A plantation-type agriculture spread up the Teche from the south but apparently was never very successful above the town of Parks. The slight superiority of the lower Teche soils for sugar-cane cultivation was perhaps a factor, but seems hardly sufficient cause for the rejection of the entire plantation complex along the upper Teche.

Some small changes were inevitable, for as the population grew in numbers the settlements expanded in size, but always in the same patterns. Technological advances in the form of the mechanical cotton gin occasioned the introduction of cotton as a commercial crop into the area of the Acadian farmers along the upper Teche and streams to the west, but other than this it is difficult to establish definitely the occurrence of any major changes until well after the Civil War.

In rapid succession, following the close of the Civil War, a series of developments in the Louisiana prairies brought about changes so great that they would have rent asunder a less dynamic cultural nucleus. Heeding the call of land company and railroad, large numbers of settlers from Germany, midwestern United States, and other areas flowed into southwestern Louisiana to initiate a period of cultural change which even yet has not run its course.
CHAPTER III
EVOLUTION OF ACADIAN SETTLEMENTS 1865 TO 1950

Land Survey System. When Louisiana was obtained from France by purchase in 1803, the laws of the United States called for the division of public lands into townships six miles square, which were in turn cut into sections one mile square; consequently, most of the land in the prairies which had not been included in the French forty-arpent system were surveyed according to this General Land Office system. The contemporary Secretary of the Treasury suggested that the streams be "meandered" and the land surveyed into tracts of one hundred sixty acres each, having as much front in proportion to their depth as was customary in Louisiana. Correspondence on this subject

1The rectangular system of survey as reported from a committee of Congress, May 7, 1784, required the public lands to be divided into "hundreds" of ten geographical miles square and these subdivided into lots of one mile square. This was amended and townships reduced to six miles square May 20, 1785.

was communicated to the House of Representatives in 1803, but it was three years before any action was taken. Departure from the regular mode of survey was authorized by act of Congress, March 3, 1811. Section two of this act gave the deputy surveyor in Louisiana authority to survey lands adjacent to rivers, lakes, bayous, or other bodies of water into tracts fifty-eight poles in front by four hundred sixty-five poles in depth. This is three feet short of five arpents frontage and eight feet less than forty arpents in depth.

In the prairies of Louisiana, as well as in other parts of the state, large numbers of tracts were surveyed in the amended manner by the United States government between 1815 and 1820. Although no original surveys of this type have been made in almost a century, the act has apparently never been repealed. Tracts surveyed under the March 3, 1811, act are basically the same as the grants made by the Spanish, but in most instances it is possible to distinguish between the two. Most surveys of the United States government made in this manner resulted in several adjacent tracts of a uniform width with parallel sides. This high degree of uniformity is not characteristic of grants made by either the French or the Spanish. (Figure 21)

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3 A pole is equal to 16 2/3 feet, or one rod.
Figure 21. — Land Survey Sections in St. Landry Parish. This map illustrates vividly the distinction between those long-lot parcels settled by the French and those surveyed by the United States Land Office under the act of March 3, 1811.
ST. LANDRY PARISH
LAND SURVEY SYSTEMS
**Pattern of Roads.** Though the interfluvial prairie areas of southwestern Louisiana were surveyed according to the General Land Office system, no evidence of the survey was reflected in the landscape until the lands were settled. By the last decade of the nineteenth century, a rather loose network of roads following section lines and crossing at right angles began to appear over most parts of the open prairie. The development of this system of roads resulted in the gradual abandonment of the older roads along the natural levees except in the areas along the upper Teche which had been the principal Acadian cultural nucleus. Here, where the old system of land survey had been extensively used, the original pattern of roads was maintained. Even today, the front road along the crest of the natural levee as well as the forty-arpent road, in many instances, are the principal routes of travel. (Figure 22) State and U. S. highways which have been built in the past few decades have tended to follow the most direct routes, but frequent turns and short jogs are encountered in even these roads as they adhere to the property boundaries.

**Location and Spacing of Farmsteads.** Along the upper Teche and its right bank tributaries where the original road pattern has been maintained, farmsteads still form a linear pattern along the streams. With the
Figure 22. -- Highways and Section Lines in a Portion of Acadia Parish. Note the abrupt change in road pattern between the area of General Land Office survey at lower right and the forty arpent or long-lot survey at upper left.
A Portion of Acadia Parish

Showing Highways and Section Lines
increase in population and the consequent division of property through inheritance, farmsteads have increased in number and are more closely spaced, though seldom producing the city-street appearance that occurs in southeastern Louisiana. In Acadia and Jefferson Davis parishes, the building of roads in a rectangular pattern along section lines has resulted in the relocation of farmsteads along the roads at the expense of the older locations along the stream levees. (Figure 23) The relocation of farmsteads has proceeded to the point that virtually none is to be found along the stream banks in the prairies today and the sites of former settlement are marked only by the presence of jasmine bushes, chinaberry trees, or other ornamental shrubs.

**Farmsteads.** Multiple inheritance of property has gradually reduced the size of farms among the descendants of the Acadian settlers to the present average of forty to sixty acres. Improved methods of cultivation and the change to commercial agriculture, beginning with the introduction of cotton near the turn of the nineteenth century, have largely offset any decreased productivity which might have resulted from the decrease in farm size.

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Figure 23. — Highways, Section Lines, and Farms in a Portion of Jefferson Davis Parish. Here on the extreme western edge of early French settlement, the building of roads along the General Land Office section lines has resulted in the relocation of farmsteads along the roads at the expense of the older locations along the stream levees.
A PORTION OF JEFFERSON DAVIS PARISH

Showing Roads, Farms, and Section Lines
Commonly, the entire farm is separated into fields and two or more enclosures near the house which serve as barnyard, pastures, or chicken yards. The relatively small number of enclosures, the few buildings, the simplicity in general of the present-day farmstead are highly suggestive of the Acadian settlements in the area at an earlier date. (Figure 24)

Houses. Until about 1880 or 1890, the half-timbered Creole house was the only type of dwelling found among the Acadians, but near the end of the nineteenth century, sawed lumber became more generally available and by 1900 almost all houses were being built of this new material. There are a few half-timbered houses still to be found in the area today, but in no instance has one been found built later than 1900. Although the construction material was changed, the plan or form of the house was not altered. So closely were the new houses modeled after the older ones that it was a common practice to continue painting the front wooden siding even though the other outside walls were left bare. (Figure 25) At some time after the introduction of commercial lumber, a feature of unusual nature was added to the houses being built of wood. Along the edge of the front porch roof and the gabled end at the same level, a roof-like structure some three to four feet in width was attached. This is called a fausse galerie. (Figure 25)
Figure 24. -- A Drawing of a Contemporary Upper Teche Farmstead. Though the barn type may vary, the house type, fence type, and wide headlands between the crops are all characteristic of the Upper Teche complex. The small number of enclosures, the few buildings, the simplicity in general are highly suggestive of the early Acadian settlements.
Figure 25. — A Creole House with Painted Front. Built entirely of wood, this house has the front wall painted white, a heritage from the days when the same style house was built of mud daubing and the exposed daubed wall across the front was white-washed. This house was built near the turn of the century just south of Lawtell and was torn down in 1953. (Photograph by W. B. Knipmeyer.)
Both the origin of the feature and the exact time of introduction or development are still in question, for informants do not agree. In any case, it occurred after saw-cut lumber was in general use and before World War I, and probably between 1890-95 and 1910. Exact distributional data are not available, but it is agreed by those working in the field that maximum occurrence of the false gallery is in the area of transition between French culture to the south and Anglo-American hill culture to the north, suggesting interesting possibilities which invite additional study.

During the second decade of the twentieth century, a complete revolution in house types began in the Upper Teche area. The factors responsible for this change are at present unknown, but the possibilities offer ample opportunity for speculation. To what extent might economic changes or a cultural upheaval resulting from World War I be reflected by changes in house types? To what degree, if any, was the lumbering industry, which reached a peak of development in Louisiana at this time, responsible for the introduction of new and different house types? Whatever the causes, they were not restricted to any one section of the state, for in all parts of Louisiana a very marked change in house types occurred between 1915 and 1920, though the change was not to the same types in all areas.
Along the eastern edge of the prairies two house types, which heretofore had not been present in great numbers if at all, rapidly became the most common dwellings as the older type fell from favor. Introduction of one of these houses from outside the area can be traced, but the other, by far the more numerous of the two, shows a distribution which suggests at least local modification, if not development.

**Upper Teche House.** A small house, two rooms wide and one or two rooms in depth, with sideward-facing gables attains a forty to sixty per cent frequency over a considerable area in the eastern part of the prairies. (Figure 26) This house was built of vertical boards and after about 1930, frequently covered on the outside with imitation brick siding-paper. Since its introduction or development about forty years ago, it has become the most common type of dwelling among the descendants of the early Acadian settlers. Morphologically, it is possible to divide this house into two types: those with a small shed-roof front porch, and those which are porchless. However, this difference seems minor as compared with their seemingly close genetic relationship and for that reason both are placed in the same category.

The restricted distribution of the Upper Teche house and the relatively high frequency of occurrence in
An Upper Teche House. This house type made its appearance in the upper Teche country about forty years ago and now comprises from forty to sixty per cent of all rural dwellings in that area. The imitation brick siding dates from the early thirties.
the Upper Teche area is difficult to explain, for there is no evidence of its development from an earlier type in the area, nor does the distribution indicate introduction from outside.

"Shotgun" House. From the lower reaches of the bayous to the east a house type, commonly referred to as the "shotgun" house, spread northward and westward, reaching the eastern part of the prairies between 1910 and 1920. This house, with frontward facing gable, is only one room wide and two or more rooms in length. (Figure 27) Though it has been in use for an equal length of time, the "shotgun" house has never attained the popularity of the Upper Teche house in the prairies, as is evidenced by the lower frequency of occurrence. (Figure 28)

Barns. Several factors influenced the number and kind of barns built in the prairies by the descendants of the Acadian Settlers. Three barn types are used quite extensively in the area today. Two are elaborations of the shedded corn crib used much earlier, and the third was introduced from outside the area. All three barn types appeared at about the same time and quite possibly as a result of the same influences. During the last decades of

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Figure 27. -- A "Shotgun" House. A common house in the prairies after World War I, the shotgun house comprises less than twenty-five per cent of the rural houses even along the eastern edge of the prairies.
Figure 23. -- Distribution of the Shotgun House. The shotgun house is a river-bottom house and though it has penetrated the prairies its frequency of occurrence there exceeds twenty-five per cent in only two very restricted areas.
the nineteenth century, as commercial agriculture began to replace subsistence agriculture, the need arose for more feed and equipment storage space. Small to medium-sized barns were built with a central passage to provide access for wagons. On each side of the passage were stables for stock or storage for equipment while above there was storage for hay and feed. The only significant difference distinguishing the three barns was the roof form. One type was covered by a frontward-facing gabled roof which extended unbroken over the entire barn. (Figure 29) A second had a small gabled roof over the central portion: from below its eaves, shed roofs extended out on either side. (Figure 30) A third was characterized by what is architecturally termed a gambrel roof, but is widely referred to locally as a hip-roof. In this instance, the gabled roof is continuous but the pitch changes abruptly, making the lower portion much steeper than the upper and giving a somewhat angularly convexed appearance. (Figures 31, 32)

**Fences.** The *pieux* fence which had been so extensively built in the prairies during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries rapidly declined in popularity as the value of timber increased and fencing wire became more available. Beginning in the 1880's, field fences made of *pieux* were gradually replaced with wire, and today not a
An Upper Teche Barn Type. Barns of this type have one or two attached sheds but in the upper Teche area they almost always have an open passage for access with a wagon.
Figure 30.

An Upper Teche Barn of the Double-Roof Type.
Figure 31.

An Upper Teche Barn of the Hip-Roof Type
Figure 32. -- Distribution of Hip-Roof Barns. The hip-roof barn reaches its highest frequency of occurrence in an area which approximates quite well the Acadian cultural nucleus along the eastern edge of the prairies.
LOUISIANA
NUMBER OF HIP-ROOF BARNs PER TWENTY RURAL DWELLINGS

1
2
3-5

SCALE - MILES
0 10 20 30 40 50
single pieux fence can be found in the prairies, although thirty years ago they were still quite common. Somewhat less has been the decline in the use of the picket fence, for though this fence is not so extensively used as formerly, it is occasionally found enclosing gardens and house yards. No major alteration in form has occurred over the years, but most picket fences built within the last half century have been of sawed pickets, giving a greater uniformity in width and thickness. For the most part, the purpose of picket fences in the area today is as much ornamental as functional; consequently, many, but by no means all, are painted.

Agriculture. As indicated previously, near the beginning of the nineteenth century plantation agriculture spread westward from the Mississippi River and northward along Bayou Teche toward the prairies. Along the lower reaches of the Teche, the new agricultural system became well established and remains dominant today. However, the upper Teche and Acadian settlements to the west remained predominantly areas of small farms. The spread of the plantation system was in part a response to the adaptation of cotton to large-scale cultivation through the development of the mechanical cotton gin. Although the plantation system did not succeed along the upper Teche, cotton was established as a crop and
contributed largely toward the shift to commercial agriculture in the area. Subsistence crops of rice, sweet potatoes, and corn continued to be grown until the early decades of the twentieth century, when rice was discontinued as a result of its cultivation as a commercial crop on the open prairie. Another change occurred as sweet potatoes shifted from a subsistence to a commercial crop. Starting slowly in the 1930's, sweet potato production advanced rapidly during and immediately following World War II, to become a leading crop in southwestern St. Landry and northeastern Acadia parishes. (Figure 33)

Unlike many other areas of commercial agriculture which turned to mechanized cultivation, the nuclear area of Acadian settlement has been reluctant to abandon the use of horses and mules. This may be due in part at least to the small size of the farms which makes the purchase of tractors and other machinery no great saving. However, other factors should not be completely discounted. Resistance to change in agricultural practices is evident in the retention of other items whose original reason for existence has long since been forgotten, but which are rationalized in various ways. Notable among such items is a method of field or crop division into parcels of two or two and a half acres. The division is accomplished, not by means of a fence, but by strips of uncultivated land twenty or thirty feet wide which traverse the fields at right
Figure 33.

Planting Sweet Potato Slips. Most of the sweet potatoes grown in the upper Teche area are planted by hand.
angles. The strips, known as headlands, are left in grass and provide a source of hay in season. (Figure 34)

The length of time that headlands have been in use in the area is questionable, although their use began at a very early date, possibly with the beginning of settlement. Some speculation exists as to the possibility of the headlands having been an outgrowth of a system of work allotment during the time that slave labor was used prior to the War Between the States. Such a task allotment was used in rice cultivation in Carolina, with each slave assigned the task of planting one-half acre daily, plus hulling six pecks of rice by the men and four pecks by the women. Obviously, this does not in any way suggest that headlands were used in Louisiana to separate one individual's allotment from that of another, nor does it establish the use of such a system in Louisiana, even in rice cultivation along the Mississippi River. The size of the plot enclosed by the headlands does conform fairly well to the area which one man can cultivate in a day but beyond noting such items, the origin of the headlands remains a point of pure conjecture.

The use of the inordinately wide headlands is restricted to a relatively narrow strip paralleling Bayou

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7De Bow's Review, XII, 297; XVIII, 350; XXIV, 324.
Figure 34.

Headlands in a Corn Field South of Opelousas. These strips are twenty or thirty feet wide, traverse the fields at right angles, and remain uncultivated. Though their origin and purpose are much in doubt, they are restricted to a zone of from fifteen to twenty miles wide along the eastern edge of the prairie. This is perhaps one of the most characteristic traits of the Upper Teche complex.
Teche and extending westward some fifteen or twenty miles. This area, as will be noted, conforms quite well to the present distribution of Acadian descendants, and is in fact an outstanding characteristic, if not a product, of that cultural nucleus.

In addition to the regular crops, there are today two other types of plantings found in the Upper Teche area. One, noted earlier, is the wood lot of chinaberry trees which served as a source of fuel from a very early date. Gradually, the use of these wood lots declined, particularly as the growth of the petroleum industry made natural and liquified petroleum gases available as a replacement fuel. There are a few of the old wood lots still to be found, but for all practical purposes they are no longer functional. The last and final blow to these sources of fuel was dealt by the tremendously increased availability of gas immediately following World War II.

Near the end of the nineteenth century the catalpa tree (Catalpa bignonioides) was introduced into the Upper Teche country. This tree, noted for its durability, was much advocated as a source of fence posts that would out-last most others. Cuttings from the catalpa tree were sold by itinerant peddlers passing through the area and
numerous tracts up to ten acres were planted. Many of these post lots have since been removed but many are still present and functional, though no new plantings have been made recently.

**Expansion of the Upper Teche Complex.** Beginning in the 1920's, and continuing through three decades a slow but continual influx of small farmers, originating around the upper Teche, has added a distinctive and incongruous element to the landscape of the open prairie. These farmers have taken up tracts of land from forty to sixty acres in size and have transferred there all aspects of the Upper Teche settlement complex. (Figure 37) In an area devoted almost exclusively to rice, these small farmers cultivate corn, cotton, and sweet potatoes, inserting headlands between their crops. The continuing use of horses and mules is reflected in the barn, which is the same as that used farther eastward. The strong preference of these farmers for the small Upper Teche type houses with sideward-facing gables, immediately marks them as recent arrivals from the Upper Teche. Such a conclusion may be readily verified if one speaks French, since this will be the preferred if not the exclusive language spoken by these farmers.

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8 Many informants report either having seen these peddlers or hearing older members of their families talk of them.
A Post Lot of Catalpa Trees. Approximately ten acres of catalpa trees were planted here about 1900 and have been cut numerous times for posts. This plot is one mile south of Lawtell, St. Landry Parish.
Figure 36.

The Remains of a Post Lot of Catalpa Trees. This plot is little used any more and has been crossed by the highway. Located about seven miles south of Lawtell.
An Upper Teche Farmstead in the Prairies. A farm of sixty acres devoted to the production of corn, cotton, and sweet potatoes about five miles southwest of Elton. All surrounding farms are devoted exclusively to rice. This farmer came from just south of Opelousas and speaks only French. Note the small farm house and the small barn so typical of the upper Teche area, at extreme left the remains of a ten-acre tract of pines planted as a tree claim or timber culture (p. 171).
Methods of Transportation. Along the Teche and eastern portions of the prairie a small one-horse buggy came into general use very early; however, farther westward the large two-wheeled cart remained the common vehicle for passengers as well as for general farm use. Also in vogue about the same time was a small two-wheeled passenger vehicle or sulky which was pulled by one horse. These latter were small, rather speedy rigs which carried only one or two passengers. The introduction of the sulky and buggy did not completely replace the two-wheeled cart, for the latter was used for general hauling until well after the turn of the twentieth century, when it was gradually replaced by a four-wheeled wagon; nor did the era of the automobile see the end of the buggy, for today buggies parked before the church on Sunday morning are a common sight in the Upper Teche country.

Community Facilities. From the beginning of settlement to the latter part of the nineteenth century there was little change in the facilities which the church provided for the Acadian population. Churches were established quite early in the centers of population along Bayou Teche, but the more scattered settlements to the west continued to be served by priests who rode out periodically. As the population increased, Catholic churches were established in the larger of the prairie centers, such as Rayne.
1872, Roberts Cove 1873, and Mermentau 1882. The Catholic church was not alone in the area, for very early Protestant workers began activity among the Acadian settlers. Shortly after the turn of the nineteenth century, Methodist circuit riders from Mississippi began work around Opelousas and the territory to the south and west. In 1820 the first Protestant church west of the Teche was built on Bayou Plaquemine Brule, near the present town of Branch, and served as a Methodist mission. The building is described in such a way as to leave much doubt concerning its form:

It was about twenty-four by thirty-six feet, and on the Spanish model; roof largely projecting, and walls of wattle plaster, white-washed on both sides; the outer walls of which gave the church, at a distance, a very fine appearance.9

Another writer gives the impression that this structure had a spire:

Nearby a rustic footbridge spanning a "coolie" the church spire pointed upward, gleaming under the rays of the morning sun. 10

Whether the spire was also constructed of "wattle plaster" or was only poetic fervor is questionable, but perhaps no

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more so than the use of the term "wattle plaster" in the original description. No evidence has been found of the use of wattle construction along the upper Teche, although its use had been extensive along the lower reaches of the streams and in the marsh to the south. Doubtless the "Spanish model" referred to in the quotation was half-timber construction, using mud-daubed walls. This conclusion is by no means certain, since the gentleman responsible for the building of the church was an Irishman who had spent most of his life in New York City.

From this early beginning, neither the Catholic nor the Protestant church had any great development until well after the turn of the twentieth century. In large part church buildings followed the same structural lines. Most churches were built of wood with frontward-facing gables topped by a spire. The spires were of two general types: those which were square towers topped by a pyramidal roof, and those which tapered to a point. (Figure 38) At least a slight majority of the tapering spires are to be found associated with Catholic churches, while the square tower seems to be most common on Protestant churches. This generalization is drawn from casual observation rather than from statistical analysis.

In most but not all instances a cemetery was located adjacent to the church building. These cemeteries have at least one feature in common which is not found in
Figure 33

A Roman Catholic Church in the Upper Teche Area. Most of the Catholic churches are topped by a tall tapering spire while those with pyramidal roofs are more typically found on Protestant churches.
Louisiana outside of the area settled or influenced by the French. That is the almost exclusive practice of partial or complete above-ground interment. (Figure 39) Tombs of brick or cement stand from several inches to several feet above the ground and are almost invariably painted white. Statuary is heavily used, and it is not unusual to find the cemetery planned around or oriented toward a large statue of some saint or biblical figure. Many of the small community cemeteries later became the sites for Catholic churches. An example typical of this development is the town of Iota, Acadia Parish. Jesuit priests held services in the home of Matthieu Pousson who later donated land for a chapel that was to become the center of a church parish in 1892.
A Cemetery at Church Point, Louisiana.
Partial or complete above-ground interment
such as pictured here is typical of all
areas in Louisiana which were settled or
influenced by the French.
Settlement in the Louisiana prairies by groups other than French did not occur to any important extent until after the middle of the nineteenth century. Immediately following the Civil War a gradual influx of settlers from both the southern and northern states added a new, though small, element to the prairie population. Many northern soldiers who participated in General Bank's Red River campaign returned after the war to homestead land in the prairie parishes. Confederate soldiers also found a new and better opportunity in the free unsettled West. Although these settlers came with an Anglo-American background, they settled for the most part along the streams near the French and were shortly absorbed by these people of Acadian culture. Most of the long-strip sections of land surveyed by the United States Land Office during the second decade of the nineteenth century were occupied during the late 1860's and early 1870's by the new settlers. Doubtless many new elements were added to the cultural forms by the non-French settlers, but for the most part these were short lived and are no longer evident.
After 1870 Morgan's Louisiana and Texas Railroad Company surveyed a line westward across the prairie. Advertisement by the railroad and land promotion companies created great interest among the agricultural population of the midwestern portion of the United States. Heeding the call of land company and railroad, settlers in large numbers flowed from the midwestern part of the United States into southern Louisiana. Grain farmers by tradition, these people sought the open prairie where broad level lands were ideally suited to grain cultivation. By railway, down the Mississippi River in steamboats, and overland by covered wagon hundreds of settlers poured into these grasslands at such a rate that towns sprang up almost over night where formerly had been only open prairie. Many sections of the United States contributed to the peopling of this area but predominantly the settlers came from Illinois, Indiana, Nebraska, Iowa and adjacent midwestern states.

In 1871 another element was added to the population of the prairies when one Father Leonard Thevis, a Roman Catholic priest of German origin, persuaded several families of his friends and relatives to leave Europe and settle in Louisiana. The new settlers occupied lands near the eastern edge of the prairies in Acadia Parish. Others followed in the early 1880's and selected lands nearby.
To this group were added many German families who had come to the United States and settled in other sections at an earlier date. These people moved south during the 1880s, along with the other Midwesterners.

**Land Survey System.** Immediately after the purchase of Louisiana the United States had all public lands in Louisiana surveyed into townships and sections with the exceptions already mentioned. The General Land Office mode of survey provided the basis for settlement in all the open prairie of southwestern Louisiana, and it stood in marked contrast to the older system employed along the streams by the Spanish. Attention is called, not so much to the system used, as to the profound influence that system had in determining the overall distribution and relative location of the various elements and forms of the settlement pattern. (Figure 23) Certainly the open and level prairie was receptive to the new system of settlement and, what is more important, makes the pattern more conspicuous than if it were in wooded hill land.

**Location and Spacing of Farmsteads.** As had been the practice in the Midwest, most of the settlers in the prairies located their farmsteads near and square with the section lines if no roads existed and along the roads if such had been opened. In some few instances farmsteads
were located near or at the center of a section, but these were temporary and exceptions to the usual practice. In one instance two brothers, having filed on an entire section, built one house in the center to satisfy the residence requirements. The spacing of farmsteads varied considerably during the period of settlement, for many sections were not occupied as early as others, but the pattern of spacing was related to the size of the holdings in the occupied sections, with usually one or two farmsteads to a section.

Each settler was entitled to homestead a quarter section, or 160 acres, of land and through other means might receive title to additional acreage, so that most farms were a minimum of 160 acres and usually two or more times that. The size of the land holdings was to a small extent reflected in the number and size of buildings in the farmstead, but most farmsteads consisted of a large number of buildings, eight to ten being not unusual. In like manner the number of separate enclosures showed some variation, but generally the figure was high, with three to five about average. (Figure 40)

**Houses.** Several house types were used by the settlers from the Midwest and Germany when they arrived in Louisiana, but though these houses differed considerably
Figure 40. - An Early "Midwestern" Farmstead in the Prairies. Here is pictured a typical farmstead in the prairies of Louisiana as introduced by the grain farmers from the Midwestern United States. Though only one is shown here, these farmsteads often had several large barns as well as the other outbuildings such as the cow shed, chicken house, brooder house, wash house, and others. A common feature not shown is the lightning rod on both the house and barn. The buildings from left to right are: the barn, cow shed, chicken house and small brooder house, granary, shop, and wash house.
in detail, there were many characteristics in common. All were large, with many rooms and more than one story.

**I House.** This house, so called by Kniffen for its high frequency of occurrence in the states of Indiana, Illinois, and Iowa, is perhaps the most characteristic type of the Midwestern settlers. The floor plan of this house resembles the letter T. The cross bar of the T forms the front of the house and is two stories in height, with usually a small attached front porch at first-floor level. A wing projects back at right angles, perhaps two stories high but often only one. The roof is gabled and almost invariably topped by several ornate lightning rods. As is immediately evident to those familiar with the midwestern part of the United States, this house is one of the most common types found in that section of the country. (Figure 41)

**Two-Story Square.** Another house type found quite frequently in the Louisiana prairies is square in floor plan and two stories high. The roof in this instance is pyramidal, and the lightning rods may be mounted in the center or on each corner. The square house may or may not have a front porch, but if such does occur it is usually

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¹Kniffen, *op. cit.*, p. 185.
Figure 41.

A Midwestern House of the "I" Type. (P. 139)
small and, as with the porch on the I house, has a roof which slopes toward the ends as well as toward the front. Appendages are sometimes added to the back of the square house and are usually one story and gable roofed.

**Large Two-Story with Dormer Windows.** This house may have a large number of variations as to details but all show a basic similarity. (Figure 42) The floor plan may be square, rectangular, or T-shaped. They are one and a half or two stories with large dormer windows projecting from the roof on one or more sides. In sharp contrast to the other house types used by the prairie settlers, this house has a large porch which may be only at the front or may extend along one or more sides. Entrance into the house from the front is usually by a centrally located door which opens into a hallway running through the house from front to back. The hallway is seldom if ever left open at the ends, as was the case in early American log houses, but is usually closed on the front by wooden and glass panels flanking the door and at the back by boarding over all except the doorway. This house found most extensive use among the German settlers in central Acadia Parish, though its use is not restricted to those people or that area.

**One-Story Large Attic.** Smaller than all other houses used by the prairie settlers was one with a floor
Figure 42.

A Two-Story House With Dormer Windows. Though similar in floor plan, this house differs from the "I" house in that it has large dormer windows and a porch around one or more sides. In general this house found most extensive use among the German settlers in Acadia Parish.
plan the same as that in the I type. The basic difference is the height of these houses, which are only one and a half stories. The separation of the one story and the "I" houses is deemed warranted by the difference in height, even though they probably have a common source. (Figure 43)

**Barns.** Two facts concerning the barns in the midwestern settlement catch the attention of the observer. First, their size, which is much greater than is commonly found in barns in other parts of Louisiana. Though the barns are larger than those in other areas of the state, the types are largely the same. These types are: the hip roof (Figure 44), the double roof (Figure 45), and the double shed (Figure 46). The second fact immediately evident is the large number of barns associated with each farmstead. Not all houses have a large number of barns, or even one for that matter, but the prairie area is outstanding in that it is the only area of Louisiana in which considerable numbers of farmsteads have several barns. (Figure 47)

**Other Outbuildings.** Not only were the Midwesterners' farmsteads characterized by a large number of barns, but also by a large number of other farm buildings. The buildings seem to have been arranged with little or no system over a rather large area behind the house. (Figure 48) The size of these buildings varied as to their use,
Figure 43.

A Midwestern House Type with One Story and a Large Attic. This house seems to have come into use during the second decade of the twentieth century.
Figure 44.

A Large Hip-roofed Barn. It is barns of this size which characterize the farmsteads of the Midwesterners.
A Large Double-Roof Barn. Though the barns vary as to type all barns of the Midwestern farmers in the prairies are extremely large. Most are topped by lightning rods.
Figure 46.

A Large Double-Shed Barn. This barn type is seldom as large as the hip-roof and double-roof barns but it is extensively used by the Midwestern farmers in the prairie. This barn type occurs frequently on farmsteads with more than one barn.
Figure 47. -- Rural Dwellings With Four or More Barns. Not all farmsteads in the prairies have a large number of barns but the nuclear area of Midwestern settlement is the only area in Louisiana in which as many as ten per cent of the farmsteads have four or more barns.
Figure 48.

A Midwestern Farmstead. The house type, the number of buildings, and the windmill all mark this as a farmstead of the Midwesterner.
but all were generally small buildings with either a shed or gabled roof, both types appearing on each farmstead. The shed roof was used most commonly on two of the largest of the outbuildings -- the chicken shed and the milking shed. (Figure 49) In addition, a smaller brooder shed was often covered by a shed roof. (Figure 50) Other buildings were smaller, except the granary (Figure 51), and were usually topped with a gabled roof. The last-mentioned buildings were for such purposes as wash house, small-implement shed, granary, pump house, and the like. (Figure 52)

**Fences.** With few exceptions the houses and yards were surrounded by a wire fence of an ornamental nature. All were not the same type; nevertheless, they contrasted sharply with the Upper Teche Area in that they were manufactured for such a purpose and were intended to be decorative, as opposed to barbed wire used by the inhabitants of the Teche.

Around the fields simple three- to five-strand barbed-wire fences were used for the purpose of restraining cattle, while a barnyard fence was usually constructed of horizontal boards. An additional fence type was found around the chicken yard; this consisted of a relatively fine mesh woven wire some eight or ten feet high.
Figure 49.
The Chicken House on a Midwesterner’s Farm.
Figure 50.
The Brooder House on a Midwesterner's Farm. Not esthetically gratifying, but a thoroughly functional unit in the farm economy.
Figure 51.

The Granary on a Midwesterner's Farm. Earlier this building was found on all the rice farms but with the advent of rice dryers the granary has now disappeared or assumed a different function for the most part.
Figure 52.

The Wash House on a Midwesterner's Farm. Most of the farms of the Midwesterners have a wash house and, though they have been equipped with modern machines, they have apparently changed little over the years.
Agriculture. When the Midwesterner and other settlers came to the prairies of Louisiana it was thought that the area would be well suited to the cultivation of wheat, but in a short time the energy of all the farmers was directed toward the cultivation of a different grain. The original settlers along the streams had been quite successful in rice cultivation without extensive irrigation. Many newcomers attempted the cultivation of providence rice on a commercial scale with considerable success, but realized that with irrigation the risk of crop failure would be lessened and better quality rice produced in larger quantities.

First attempts at irrigation made use of water from Bayou Plaquemine Brule which was lifted over the stream bank by a rather crude but successful method. This early attempt is described in the Crowley Daily Signal just after the turn of the twentieth century:

Among the miscellaneous articles brought from their Michigan home was a quantity of log chain. This suggested the idea of constructing an endless chain, with buckets at intervals for raising the water. The power was furnished by a little three and one half horse power engine that had once done duty an [sic] a small steam launch. This was geared on an old threshing machine cylinder, around which the endless chain, with its arrangement of wooden flanges standing out at right angles to the chain, ran.

...The water was emptied into a small wooden flume, which conveyed it about a hundred feet to a small canal, perhaps four
From this rather feeble start the development of irrigation was extremely rapid. The original inventors, the Abbots, developed better means of lifting water from the streams, and each year the acreage which they planted in rice increased. The first year only nineteen acres were planted, the second year 100 acres, and the third year 260 acres. These were not the only fields being planted to rice at that time, for the Abbots made a number of pumps for their neighbors. Many imitators followed along the trail blazed by the Abbots even though they had laughingly remarked during the first attempt at irrigation that "water doesn't run up hill in this country."

The first canal to be built for the purpose of supplying water on a rent system was constructed by the Abbots in 1894, just six years after the first attempt at irrigation. This canal was twenty feet wide and supplied water to areas three and a half miles from the bayou. In


3 This first pump built by the Abbots did not supply the volume of water desired and shortly after an Archimedeanscrew was fashioned from a hollow log with a shaft through the opening to which were attached paddles or blades set at an angle to lift the water through the hollow log. These first attempts were crude and only experimental for as soon as the practicality of rice irrigation had been demonstrated, commercial pumps of greater capacity were purchased.
less than ten years the total of canal mileage had grown
to more than a hundred of main canal and five-hundred of
laterals in the parish of Acadia alone and comparable
growth was experienced in other prairie parishes (Figure
53).

The availability of water for irrigation in areas
not served by canals was made possible through the use of
wells drilled to depths of some thirty to forty feet to
reach the artesian sources below. These wells were pumped
since the head of water was not sufficiently high to flow
onto the land. (Figure 54) These two methods of pro-
viding water for irrigation made possible extensive rice
cultivation which brought about numerous alterations to the
landscape. Other than the increase in field size, the
addition of wells and pumps and irrigation canals, this
extensive cultivation required commensurate changes in
methods of cultivation and harvest. Efficient flooding
of large fields required that the land be leveled. The
general slope of the land was so small as to be of
limited importance but minor irregularities were removed
by a grader-like machine with a long wheel base. The land
was then surveyed to determine the location of levees or
dikes which would follow the contour of the land at
vertical intervals of about three inches. These levees
were of earth some two feet high and were necessary to
hold the water on the gently sloping land. In the oblique
Figure 53.

A Rice Irrigation Canal in the Prairies. These large irrigation canals are for the most part constructed and operated by water or irrigation companies. The farmers may purchase water for an established fee or contract with the company to supply all the water required in return for a share of the rice crop.
A Rice Irrigation Well in the Prairies. Much of the rice is irrigated with water from wells on the farm. Some of the wells are pumped by gasoline engines but most of the pumps are powered by Diesel engines.
view the levees are not so conspicuous, but from the vertical they immediately assume dominance over most of the other features. (Figure 3)

After the preparation of the seedbed the rice seed were planted either broadcast or by drills. In the earliest operations broadcast seeding was used extensively, but it required more seed and produced a poorer stand of rice, so was abandoned in favor of the drill. The fields were not flooded until after the seed had germinated. If the field was heavily infested with weeds, water was applied a week or ten days after germination, but if weeds were not too numerous water was withheld until the plants were about three weeks old. After application the water was held on the fields continuously until maturity but the depth was increased from a minimum coverage to a depth of about six inches as rapidly as the growth of the plants would permit.

Irrigation water was conducted to the fields in small canals which were constructed along the edge of the field at an elevation which permitted water to flow into the areas between the contour levees. These canals were flanked by earth dikes which could be broken to allow water to flow onto any desired portion of the field. When the crop of rice was approximately mature -- when about seventy-five per cent of the grain heads had turned down -- the contour levees were broken to allow the water
Prior to the last decade of the nineteenth century, cultivation had been with oxen, but during the 1890's a rapid change was made to the use of horses. Two factors seem to have influenced the change in motive power; one was cultural in the sense that the newer settlers in the prairies were accustomed to the use of horses and pre-disposed in their favor, the other was a matter of time efficiency. While oxen were sufficient for the cultivation of small areas, their speed left considerable to be desired, where horses worked at a rate which made possible the cultivation of greater areas.

Rice cultivation at a subsistence level, as practiced by the Acadians, required only a minimum of machinery, but large-scale production necessitated horse-drawn reapers and binders and engine-powered threshers. Ripe grain was cut and bound into sheaves which were shocked in the field to dry. (Figure 55) When the proper degree of dryness had been attained, the grain was hauled to the location of the thresher which was operated by a steam-engine tractor. (Figure 56) As the rice was threshed, the grain fed into bags while the straw was blown out onto a pile. (Figure 57) The straw stacks were of conspicuous size with a height of twenty feet and diameter of thirty to fifty feet. During the winter months cattle fed on the straw and most stacks
Figure 55. — Reapers in the Rice Field. These machines are cutting the rice and binding it into bundles or sheaves. Earlier the grain was cut by a reaper and bound by hand and now the binding is dispensed with as the grain is cut and threshed in one operation by the combine. (Photograph from the Acadia Parish Association of Commerce.)
Figure 56. -- A Tractor Powered Thresher in Action. Until about 1940 all rice sheaves were hauled to a thresher powered first by steam-driven tractors and later by gasoline tractors. Here the grain is fed into the thresher and the rice grains are separated from the stalk and emptied into bags. The straw is blown into a large pile to be used as cattle feed. These large straw piles are fast disappearing. (Photograph from the Acadia Parish Association of Commerce.)
Figure 57. — Bags of Rice Hauled to Storage. After threshing, the bags of rice were hauled into town to be stored or marketed. This scene occurred in the town of Crowley about 1930 or shortly after. (Photograph from the Acadia Parish Association of Commerce.)
soon attained a mushroom shape as the diameter of the lower portions was gradually decreased by cattle eating their way toward the center. (Figure 58) During the period of rapid alteration in methods of rice cultivation, a description of some of the changes was recorded in a local newspaper:

Larger fields were found necessary and more water for the proper flooding of the fields, gullies were dammed up and allowed to fill with water during the winter months, and small pumps were operated by five and six horse power engines to pump this water on the fields during the growing season. The small fields enclosed by the old fashioned pieux fence soon gave way to eighty or one hundred and sixty acre farms, fenced in with barbed wire. The broadcast seeder attached to the farm wagon rapidly superceded the planter with his bucket of rice sowing the seed by hand. First the cradle and then the self-binding harvester took the place of the old-fashioned sickles in the harvest fields. Kansas and Nebraska farm horses and Missouri and Tennessee mules rapidly took the place and crowded out the diminutive Creole pony in the farm work. The little six and eight-inch cotton plow was laid away or left in the field, and carload after carload of sulky, riding and gang plows took their places. The old-fashioned, three-cornered drag, or cultivator, with its straight wooden handles, found their places in the past history of the country and their going made room for the spring tooth, the cutaway and the disc. The man who pounded out a few sacks of rice in a day with his flail and the next day cleaned it if the wind blew, stood with his hands in his pockets and stared helplessly at the steam thresher as it threshed and cleaned from twelve to fifteen hundred bushels of rice per day.4

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Figure 58.

Straw Stacks in a Fallow Rice Field. These stacks are about one year old and have begun to assume a mushroom shape as cattle eat away the lower portions. Fewer straw stacks are made each year as more of the rice is harvested by combines.
A most outstanding feature of the landscape in the prairies resulted from a provision of Congress relevant to the disposal of public lands in areas of natural prairie. Settlers were authorized to file a claim on a quarter section of land if ten of the 160 acres were planted in trees. Many settlers, after homesteading a quarter section, secured an additional quarter section in this manner. Yellow-pine trees were usually planted in these ten-acre plots which rose above the otherwise almost unbroken horizon with an abruptness and regularity which marked them immediately as a work of man. (Figure 59) Trees other than those in these timber-culture tracts were also planted as windbreaks around the farm houses and from a distance gave an appearance somewhat similar to the tree claims but generally lacked their size and regularity and were usually composed of oak and other broad-leaf trees.
A Ten-Acre Tree Claim in the Prairies. This is one of the few ten-acre tracts of tree left in the open prairie. These trees were planted in order to secure title to a quarter section or 160 acres of land. This land was granted under authority of an act of Congress in 1879 known as the Timber Culture Act.
CHAPTER V
EVOLUTION AND CHANGE 1915-1950

System of Land Survey. As a feature in the landscape, the General Land Office System of land survey became conspicuous only as the land was settled, and fences, roads, and land utilization distinguished one individual's land holding from that of another. After 1880 the lands were rapidly settled and by 1900 the land survey system had established its rectangular stamp over most of the prairie lands in southwestern Louisiana. Many roads had been built along section lines and even trails were pushed into a rectangular pattern as more and more land was fenced for cultivation. The greatest period of change came with the automobile, for then the need for roads became more acute. During the second and third decades of the twentieth century the network of roads developed until almost all section lines were marked by either hard-surfaced, graveled, or graded roads. In only a few instances have roads been placed along routes which do not follow section lines; these have been built along and parallel to the railroads which were surveyed in the last part of the nineteenth century.
Location and spacing of farmsteads. Families of
the prairie settlers were quite large and the natural
growth of population resulted in closer-spaced houses. By
the middle of the twentieth century each section of land
had five or six houses, but of these, usually, only two
or three were farm units. The others were occupied by
sons, daughters, or other relatives who assisted in the
operation of the farm or were employed in the nearby towns.
With the growth of mechanization of agriculture, the size
of farms generally increased so that today farms of five-
hundred acres are not unusual. There has been during the
same period a general increase in the number of small
forty-to-sixty-acre farms, as was pointed out in the
discussion of the expansion of the Upper Teche Complex
into the prairies.

Houses. The house types discussed earlier as being
characteristic of the midwestern settlements remain quite
prominent in the landscape today, although they are fewer
in number. Most of those still extant were built during
the last two decades of the nineteenth century and none
has been found that was built after World War I. Since
the second decade of the twentieth century there has been
a steady decline in the number of large "Midwestern"
dwellings as newer types and smaller houses were favored.
Several factors may bear a causal relationship to the
decline of the larger types, but no one or two can be singled out as having been dominant. As pointed out earlier, this was a period during which house types underwent a rapid change over the entire state of Louisiana and it is to be expected that these changes were widespread in the United States. Possibly additional study will result in a precise statement of the causal factors involved in revolutionary changes in an element of the material culture.

Houses built after about 1915-20 were of many types, but few achieved a frequency of occurrence of more than ten per cent. The most popular of the new types is called the "bungalow," (Figure 60) a small house, two rooms wide and two or more rooms deep, with a frontward-facing gable. The façade varies in respect of the porch, for some have a porch covered by an extension of the gable roof; on others the porch roof is a shed type attached to the front of the house; while still others have no porch at all. From its introduction until about 1940, or World War II, this house was the most common house built in the prairies, and in 1950 it showed a frequency of occurrence of fifteen to thirty per cent over most of the prairie, with peaks of thirty to forty-five per cent in parts of Acadia and Calcasieu parishes. (Figure 61)

In addition to the bungalow, the small attached-porch and porchless houses of the Upper Teche Complex were
A Bungalow House.
This house type was introduced into the prairies between 1915 and 1920 and is the most popular of the new types introduced in the past few decades.
Figure 61. -- Distribution of the Bungalow House Type. Though this house type has been in the prairies only since about 1915 or 1920 it has achieved a frequency of occurrence of from thirty to forty-five per cent in several areas. Note, however, that the frequency of occurrence in the Acadian nuclear area is less than fifteen per cent.
LOUISIANA

DISTRIBUTION OF THE BUNGALOW

- 5-15%
- 15-30%
- 30-45%
- 45-60%
- 60-75%

SCALE - MILES

0 10 20 30 40 50
introduced into the prairies beginning in the third decade of the twentieth century. The influx has continued to the present time, and although the map shows a frequency of occurrence of from twenty-five to forty per cent, the Upper Teche types do not attain anything like that percentage, but instead, due to error in classification, would be something less than ten per cent.

Barns. In keeping with the trend toward smaller house types after 1915-20, the barns built by the prairie farmers have declined in size during the same period. As will be pointed out in the discussion of agriculture, the decrease in barn size has resulted from changes in methods of cultivation which made large quantities of barn space unnecessary. Unlike the changes in type which resulted when smaller houses were built, barns did not undergo changes in type. Essentially the same barn types have been built from the beginning of settlement until the present day. However, a trend away from traditional barn types and toward a new structure has developed since World War II. This development takes the form of a long low shed or perhaps several of them. The sheds have at least one side open and are constructed of corrugated metal, serving for animal feeding and shelter and machinery storage. (Figure 62) In addition to those which have been built, it developed that all informants agreed that such a
Figure 62.

An Open-sided Feeding Shed.
These sheds are rapidly replacing the large barns on the farms of the Midwesterners. Most farmers indicated a preference for this type of structure over the large barns. The sheds are cheaper to build and adequately serve the needs of beef cattle.
structure would best suit his needs today and would be the type selected if the occasion arose. None indicated that he would build a large barn of the older type.

A change from barns to sheds cannot be considered anything more than a trend today, for it has not progressed enough to radically alter the landscape. Those farmers with barns are not likely to replace them with sheds until the barns are no longer serviceable. This is by way of pointing out that barns are still not only extremely common but one of the most outstanding and conspicuous characteristics of the area. The only area in Louisiana which shows more than four barns per twenty rural dwellings marks fairly well what might be considered the nucleus of midwestern culture. (Figure 47)

Other buildings. Changes in outbuildings other than the barn have been confined, for the most part, to changes in function in association with older farmsteads and a decrease in the number of such buildings with the newer farmsteads. Both changes have occurred more recently than the altered trend in either house types or barn size. Structures which were built to serve as smokehouses are no longer used for that purpose. Improved transportation and home refrigeration, which expanded rapidly as rural areas were supplied with electricity, have both contributed toward the decline of home curing of meat in the South.
This does not mean that the smokehouse has completely disappeared from the farm, but rather that it has been relegated to other uses on older farmsteads and has not been built on those constructed after the 1920's. No particular function has been associated with the old smokehouse, but rather it is generally used as storage for a wide variety of items.

Granaries have also been dropped from the farmsteads since new methods of harvest make home storage of rice quite difficult. The older farmsteads still have the granary building, in many instances, but like the smokehouse its use has been changed. Some have been converted to garages, shops, and many other uses. The newer farmsteads, those built after the mid 1920's, do not usually include granaries. There is not a great number of farmsteads without granaries however, for the older farmsteads are much more numerous than the new. It should be pointed out here that neither house type nor building assemblage is indicative of the farmstead's age, since many of the older farmsteads have been rebuilt. Certainly the older farmsteads can be easily identified when either the house or the building assemblage is original; it is quite commonly found that either the house or the building assemblage is of the old type while the other belongs to a later period.
Agriculture. Prior to World War I, rice cultivation in the Louisiana prairies was mechanized to about as high a degree as was then possible; however, most of the motive power for cultivation was furnished by horses. Following World War I, and particularly during the third and fourth decades of the twentieth century, gasoline tractors completely replaced horses and mules for agricultural work. The conversion to the tractor greatly facilitated cultivation in that it made possible the use of more-efficient implements and generally increased the speed of cultivation. (Figure 63) The new source of power encouraged the trend toward larger farms, but no major changes occurred in the field pattern and associated features other than the previously noted shift toward smaller barns as the use of draft animals declined.

Few other changes occurred in the cultivation of rice until the past decade, when new methods of harvest brought about sweeping changes. Over a period of several years attempts had been made to adapt the combine to the rice harvest. Safe storage of rice required a moisture content in the grain of not more than fourteen per cent, and in order to lower the moisture content to that level it was necessary to leave the grain in the field to dry several days after it had been cut. Obviously, if the combine were to be used, this would not be possible, so
Figure 63. -- Preparing the Ground for Seeding. Here is the modern method of rice planting in Louisiana. With just one trip over the field these men prepare the ground and plant the seed. This is probably not a method which will be in use for very long, however, for some farmers are beginning to sow the rice seed in a flooded field from an airplane.
other means of drying the rice were needed. A technique for rice drying was gradually developed, using heated air blown up through a tall structure in which the damp harvest had been placed. Rice driers rapidly became very prominent features in the towns of the area. All were constructed of corrugated sheet metal and stood forty to fifty feet high. (Figure 64) Adjacent to the drier and usually connected to it were lower-standing buildings of the same material for bulk-rice storage. The structures bear a close resemblance to the grain elevators of the wheat belt, and like them are usually located along the railroad track.

Just as the use of the combine brought about the addition of new elements to the landscape, it also caused some to disappear almost as rapidly. Whereas with the reaper-and-binder method the grain was shocked in the field and later threshed to produce large straw stacks, the use of the combine resulted in the straw being thrown back on the field as the grain was cut and threshed in one operation. (Figure 65) Today a few fields may be found in which rice has been shocked in rows and a few large straw stacks still appear after each harvest season, but they are becoming more rare each year. During the first few years that the combine was used, combined rice brought a lower price on the market than did thresher rice, but
Figure 64.

A Rice Dryer and Grain Elevators.
As the combine came into use and the straw stacks decreased in number, these new features began to appear in increasing numbers.
Figure 65. — Rice Harvest in the Modern Manner.
This fleet of rice combines will cut a swath of from sixty to eighty feet wide in one trip around the field. The grain that has been cut and threshed and loaded into a hopper on the combine is now being unloaded into trucks beside the combine. From here the grain goes to the rice dryer and then to the elevator.
now, as a result of improvements in drying techniques, combined rice brings as much and sometimes more. Without doubt the time is rapidly approaching when rice shocks and straw stacks will be as difficult to find in the prairies as pieux fences are today.

Increased beef prices during and following World War II encouraged the development of better pastures in the prairies of Louisiana. For the good of the soil it is wise to leave the land fallow a year or more between rice crops. Fallow land has always been used as pasture, but little or no attempt was made to improve its quality. Several programs of rotation between rice and improved pasture are in use in the area today, producing higher yields of both beef and rice. Improved pasture is not by any means a universal practice among rice farmers, but is becoming the accepted and common practice over most of the area. (Figure 66) The somewhat increased emphasis on beef cattle has caused little change in the landscape other than the previously mentioned trend toward open-side feeding sheds built in preference to barns. This is not unexpected, since cattle have always been a secondary production of the commercial rice farmer.
Cattle Grazing on a Fallow Rice Field. With the increased beef prices during and after World War II, rice farmers turned more attention to beef production. By rotating rice land from rice to improved pasture it was found that there was an increase in both rice and beef production.
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VITA

The author was born March 17, 1921, in DeSoto Parish, Louisiana. He attended Trees City Elementary School and was graduated from Vivian High-School, Vivian, Louisiana, in 1937. Enrollment in Louisiana State Normal College, Natchitoches, Louisiana, began in 1939 but was interrupted by military service from 1941 to 1946. Re-enrollment in 1946 led to the granting of the Bachelor of Arts degree in the summer of 1946. The Master of Arts degree was received from Louisiana State University in 1948, where he was a graduate student and teaching assistant from 1946 to 1949.

The 1949-50 year was spent as an Instructor in Geography at Indiana University. Since 1950 he has been a member of the Department of Geography of San Diego State College, San Diego, California.
EXAMINATION AND THESIS REPORT

Candidate:  James William Taylor

Major Field:  Geography

Title of Thesis:  The Agricultural Settlement Succession in the Prairies of Southwest Louisiana

Approved:

Fred Krueger
Major Professor and Chairman

Richard H. Russell
Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

Paul H. Price

Eugene L. Dan

John T. Davis

Wm G. Haag

James P. Morgan

Date of Examination:

December 20, 1955