Travels in Louisiana: journeys into ethnicity and heritage by two Hispanic groups

Dominica Dominguez Ramirez
Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, dramire@lsu.edu

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TRAVELS IN LOUISIANA: JOURNEYS INTO ETHNICITY AND HERITAGE BY TWO HISPANIC GROUPS

A Thesis

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

In

The Department of Geography and Anthropology

by

Dominica Dominguez Ramirez
B.A., Louisiana State University, 2000
May, 2004
“As we ourselves are telling others about our experience, we sometimes realize, even as we speak, that our account does not fully encompass all that we thought and felt during that experience” (Bruner 1990: 7)
Para Marcionila y Julia López López, dos robles
en el bosque de mi vida.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Heartfelt and endless thanks to Miles Richardson, who is absolutely the coolest guy out there. I will treasure all the years you have worked with me and will always value your teachings. To Jill Brody and Kent Mathewson, I also want you both to know how much I have appreciated your feedback and comments. I have had wonderful courses with the both of you. Much of my research for this thesis was funded by the West Grant and I am grateful for the help it gave me.

I wish to thank all the individuals in Zwolle, Robeline, and the Canary Islanders Heritage Society of Louisiana that sat down with me to share their thoughts. I would especially like to thank those members of the Canary Islanders Heritage Society of Louisiana that made me feel part of their family.

To my own family, my parents and my sister, gracias por todo. Somos pocos, pero siempre estaremos juntos. To Mary and Jen, I miss the Agnes Morris House and I want to say that my time there was an amazing experience. Jen, here’s to daily revolutions. I also want to thank several of my friends. Steve and Jolie, thank you for being there and for being such fun co-workers, roommates, and buddies. Corey, a part-time renegade, thanks for being my partner in crime. Angela, you’ve always been there for me and you always find a way to make me laugh.

Never last and never least, Dorrell. Gracias por todos nuestros viajes y aventuras. A dónde iremos mañana?
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ABSTRACT

This thesis addresses how the notions of ethnicity and heritage are experienced, negotiated, and displayed by two Hispanic groups in Louisiana. Hispanic identity is a nebulous term anywhere and Louisiana is no exception. In this investigation the two groups—descendants of Canary Islanders and descendants of the Los Adaes communities—both profess Hispanic heritage, display it, and promote this heritage in divergent ways, with significant differences in the meaning of their heritages. Differences between groups are also reflected in the historical spatial representations of the two groups, with Isleños connecting with a far-away but set of islands which they visit, and the Los Adaes peoples connecting with a long gone Spanish mission and fort that can only be reached through historical recreation and storytelling. Conceptions of ethnicity can remain powerful even while the common understanding of the meaning of “Spanish” is vaguely conceived. These two groups expressing an historic Louisiana Spanish heritage are, in fact, exceedingly dissimilar.
1.1 The State(s) We Live In

At work, a rather large map of the state of Louisiana hangs above my desk. A good portion of my time is spent listening to tapes of people talking about certain aspects of their lives. Whenever I need to figure out just where a person is from or what town he or she is talking about, all I have to do is look up and find the place. At home, I have put up a map, a much smaller one, of Louisiana above my own desk. I did not put it up there to recreate my office workspace. I put it up there to remind me that there is so much of this state that I have not seen, and also to remind me of the places I have traveled to and visited.

The map also reminds me of others’ traveling: of the many travels people have made to, within, and from Louisiana. Travel is something we all experience. We go places on foot, in cars, in our imagination. My thesis focuses on the travels of two groups of people to Louisiana and the many kinds of journeys they have made and continue to make when they tackle such seemingly close-to-home matters as ethnicity and heritage.

The metaphor of travel is powerful. “When one thinks of travel, one most often finds things of the interest and excitement that comes from seeing exotic places and cultures” (Van Den Abbeele 1992: xiii). For this thesis, the interest and excitement comes from being around people within Louisiana and learning about the many voyages they have embarked on.

Van Den Abbeele also discusses the concept of travel, or the voyage. He writes, "A voyage is initially defined in grammatical terms as the 'transport of a person from the place where one is to another place that is far enough away.' Travel is thus first defined
from an anthropological perspective; it refers to the movements of human beings, of a 'person,' from one place to another." He goes on to write that, "to be sure, the agent of this transportation remains unclear: the person is transported." (Van Den Abbeele 1992: xv)

When I was little, I had a magazine subscription to Your Big Backyard, a publication of the National Wildlife Federation. The children’s magazine shows us just how much we have to explore out there, even if it is in the space of our backyards. For over a decade now, Louisiana has been my big backyard.

The well-known folklorist, Alan Lomax, once said, “I think Louisiana is the richest of all American states culturally” (Spitzer 1977). Among the many groups that have added to the cultural diversity of the state are the French, African, German, Spanish, West Indian, Irish, Yugoslavian, Chinese, Italian, Lebanese, Hungarian, Filipino, Native American, Anglo, U.S. Southern, and Celtic. But despite this diversity, the state is still typically seen in only two dimensions.

In Delta Sugar, Rehder writes that, “Louisiana still preserves two distinct culture areas: French Louisiana in the southern part of the state and Anglo-American Louisiana in the portions of the state north of Alexandria” (Rehder 1999: 21). The media contributes to this distorted view of the state, and sometimes further simplifies to make it seem as if the state is just one thing – Cajun (Spitzer 1977: 88). In 2003, Louisiana celebrated the bicentennial of the Louisiana Purchase. Events commemorating various cultural groups were scheduled all over the state, including many that observed the Spanish presence and contributions in this state.

The fairly extensive literature on Spanish Louisiana mostly focuses on colonial times and on New Orleans. There are also several sources that discuss other areas of Spanish Louisiana around the state. In Samuel Armistead’s The Spanish Tradition of
Louisiana, he describes four geographic areas of Louisiana where different dialects of the Spanish language have been spoken continuously from the 18th century down to present day (Armistead 1992: 2). These four regions are home to three distinct dialects of Spanish linked to three groups: the Isleños in St. Bernard parish, the Brulis in Ascension, Assumption, and Iberville parishes, and the Adaeseños in Natchitoches and Sabine parishes (Figure 1.1). Although the Isleños are the best-known group of the three, many serious scholars, according to Stanley Hordes, have also ignored their history (Padron 1980: 355). Overall, the history of Spanish groups in Louisiana has been overlooked.
Shortly, I hope to introduce you to the descendants of two of these groups, the Brulis and the Adaeseños. I do however refer to the Brulis as either Isleños or Canary Islanders because that is how they refer to themselves. The majority of the people I have met from these groups no longer speak Spanish, and those who do only know a few words, or have learned it in school rather than at home. Although these two groups are in two separate areas of Louisiana, they both can trace their history back to Spanish colonial times.

Louisiana’s physical and cultural landscapes vary greatly from region to region, as does the history of Spanish influence. In northwest Louisiana, in the areas surrounding Natchitoches, lie communities with a long history of Hispanic presence. Beginning with the early Spanish settlers and colonists and continuing to the recent influx of Mexican and Mexican-American workers, Spanish speakers have interacted with other ethnic groups such as the Native Americans. In south Louisiana, in the area that today comprises Ascension and Assumption parishes, live descendents of Canary Islanders (Isleños) who settled around Bayou Lafourche during colonial times.

Today, these histories emerge through the ways that people approach their own identities and heritage. Not only are the notions of heritage and ethnicity constantly negotiated, but the ways in which they are expressed and displayed are also fluid. For example, during Zwolle’s annual tamale festival, the juggling of multiple identities does occur, in that a strong Native American presence makes the creation of a dichotomous categorization, like black-white or Anglo-Hispanic, more complex. Also, there is what I call the “Mexican factor,” referring to the histories of Mexican migration to the area. The present and historical presence of Mexicans and how they have and are perceived is also
contrasted with the notions of what it means to be white or Native American. In Zwolle, having historical connections to Mexico has yet to be a source of pride.

In contrast to the dispersed communities in northwest Louisiana, in the south, the Canary Islanders Heritage Society of Louisiana is well organized. Founded in 1996 as a non-profit organization, the society meets every month at the Baton Rouge State Archives. Members meet to discuss a wide range of topics: from area history, to family trees, and ship records. They trace their ancestors to those that came from the Canary Islands to places like Galveztown, Barataria, and Valenzuela as well as other areas around Donaldsonville. Because there is no “Mexican factor” in south Louisiana like there is in Zwolle, the connection to Spain may not only be nostalgic, but direct. This issue is further explained and clarified in chapters three and four.

Although the Spanish language ability among members of the two communities discussed here may not be strong, there are other factors that promote group identity. Food is one of the multitudes of symbols that display heritage and ethnicity. But if tamales are what feed the Zwolle community, then it is genealogy that nourishes the Canary Islanders Heritage Society of Baton Rouge. Both cooking and digging for family roots are crafts through which identification can be created.

In "Reinventing the Old Fatherland", William Frijhoff describes the Dutch colonists in the New York and New Jersey state regions. By the nineteenth century, they had lost contact with their Dutch language and religion. Something else emerged in its place: a search for a common ethnicity under pressures of Americanization (Bendix 2000: 124). A parallel situation exists among the Spanish speakers in the two Louisiana communities I consider. Until recently, the Isleños of Ascension and Assumption parishes knew little of their Hispanic origins. This is in contrast to the Isleños of St. Bernard
Parish (Armistead 1992: 6). Francis Hawley's 1973 thesis on Hispanic folk medicine in Ascension Parish, noted that calling oneself *Spanish* was less important than retaining the Spanish language, Hispanic folk medicine, and folk Catholicism (Hawley 1973: 3). In the course of my research however, I encountered individuals who did place great importance on the label *Spanish*. Isleños have a specific point of European origin that strengthens their identity.

The communities in northwest Louisiana, on the other hand, do not always have a clear point of reference when it comes to their own ancestors' origins. There was a great influx of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans into Northwest Louisiana after the boom in the lumber industry in the late 19th and early 20th century, and many of the area's population, including those from traditionally Spanish-speaking families, are also of Apache or Choctaw tribal ancestry. In the northwest, the Native American component is prominent.

In the south, with the Isleños, there is at times a Cajun component. Samuel Armistead's linguistic study of Spanish enclaves in Louisiana revealed that the Spanish spoken on Bayou Lafourche included both English and French loan words. Hawley goes further to write, "Individuals of . . . Spanish descent maintain, at best, a subconscious cognizance of their actual ethnic background while identifying with and proclaiming their fictive "French" heritage (Hawley 1973: 1).

I would not go as far as calling the "French", or rather Cajun, heritage claimed by some Spanish-speakers in south Louisiana as completely fictive, but for a surprising amount of time there was very little intermarriage between the Isleños and other ethnic groups. Trying to pass as French also occurs among those of Spanish/Hispanic descent in
the northwest, where Van Rheenen found that for many it was simply more convenient to identify oneself as French. (Van Rheenen 1987: 48)

There is a chapter by Malcolm L. Comeaux in the book *To Build in New Land: Ethnic Landscapes in North America* that considers the Cajuns in Louisiana. Comeaux writes of the controversy surrounding the term “Cajun,” writing that, “In the strictest sense, they are Gulf Coast residents who are the descendants of French speakers who once lived in Nova Scotia. There are, however, few pure Cajuns,” (Noble 1992: 177). The point made about Cajun purity can be applied to other groups as well: there is no “strictest sense” anymore for any ethnic groups in Louisiana. The groups from Zwolle or Ascension Parish aren’t Spanish or Isleños in the narrowest meaning. Like the Cajuns, these Spanish-descended groups have interacted with several other groups for decades.

Fieldwork by Janet Shoemaker and Mary Van Rheenen in these two separate regions, among groups whose histories date back to the colonial period in Louisiana, has revealed that the way in which heritage and ethnicity are displayed and performed problematizes catchall ethnic categories like *Hispanic*. Terms like *Hispanic*, *Spanish*, and *Mexican* have various meanings for these groups.

How do people label themselves and others? Why do they select particular affiliations and in what contexts do they display them? What are the vehicles they use to display heritage and ethnicity? What factors (social, economic, educational, historical, etc.) influence how people identify themselves and each other? What happens when formerly prized ethnic markers like language and traditions are lost? If markers are lost how can they be revived or can they even be revived at all? The strategies in the two communities that were studied differ. While the Canary Islanders society conducts intensive archival, historical, and genealogical research to find out about their ancestors,
many in northwest Louisiana rely on verbal histories and nostalgia. How do these different strategies affect the ways in which ethnicity is expressed?

1.2 Travel Stories

“Every story is a travel story – a spatial practice” (Michel de Certeau)

This thesis looks at how two groups with Hispanic backgrounds negotiate ethnicity and heritage through events and daily interaction. Within these events and interactions, travel on various levels occurs. First, there is travel to Louisiana. People came from Spain and Mexico to Louisiana during the 1700s and afterward, to the areas now known as Sabine and Natchitoches parishes. Around the same time, people from the Canary Islands settled in south Louisiana in what are now St. Bernard, Assumption, Ascension, and Iberville parishes.

Another level of travel involves people from those areas today making journeys by bringing the past into the present. Community members in Zwolle reflect on their Hispanic and Native American histories, and express them in an event such as the Zwolle Tamale Festival. Members of the Canary Islanders Heritage Society of Louisiana attend public events in historical 18th century dress.

We also have people today who travel to and within Louisiana to those areas to learn about these groups’ pasts and histories. Many of the people in the various groups, the communities of northwest Louisiana, the Isleños, Louisiana Hispanics, and those who study them, make mental journeys to Spain to try to capture this past in order bring it to the present.

Lastly, we have my own travels as an anthropologist, as a tourist, and as a person living in Louisiana. I share some things with both the community of Zwolle and the
Canary Islanders. My mother is from Spain and my father is from Texas (with family from Mexico). All of us (my parents and myself) moved to Louisiana around 1990. By attending such events as the Zwolle Tamale Festival and meetings of the Canary Islanders Heritage Society of Louisiana, I have made additional journeys.

I chose to study two Spanish identified groups in part to show that this state is varied. I also chose them because although they both have ties to Spain, the ways in which they have developed differ in many ways. Zwolle and Donaldsonville are much more than merely just weekend getaways. These are where people came from and where they live.

Using a comparative method involves hardships, because there are so many variables. There is no equivalent of Zwolle in southeast Louisiana, nor is there an institution like the Canary Islanders Heritage Society in northeast Louisiana. In the last chapter, I offer a rather crude chart (Figure 5-1) comparing features of the two communities.

The ideal comparison is one that, “compares apparently dissimilar constructs within one culture in an effort to establish to what extent the processes of meaning creation, which underlie them, are different,” rather than, “similar forms, objects of constructs in two or more cultures with the objective of elucidating the defining processed through which the meanings are constituted.” (Holy 1987:12)

My fieldwork has taken place over several years. I have gone to Zwolle many, many times during the last five years. Unfortunately, because of time and distance, and lack of a formal institution like the Canary Islanders Heritage Society of Louisiana, none of those visits have lasted more than a few days. I haven’t been able to set up the kind of relationships there that I have with people in the Canary Islanders Heritage Society of
Louisiana, who I saw sometimes several times a month. But overall and hopefully, I wish for people, including myself, to continue to travel to these places and travel with these communities.

Throughout this thesis, I have chosen to change the names of some of the individuals I met. I would also like to note that I have taken a very conversational approach to my writings, especially in the third and fourth chapters. I wanted to capture and relate the feel of my fieldwork experiences as I had as best as I could.
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Faces of Ethnicity: From the Melting Pot into the Frying Pan

The issues of ethnicity and ethnic identity, although often difficult to grasp with words, belong to the realm of seemingly inexhaustible and truly confusing topics. Studies in ethnicity and identity are far from overdone. Part of the problem rests on the contexts wherein ethnicity and identity are described. Many community studies, “go too far in treating ethnic communities as ‘worlds unto themselves,’ and tend to gloss over the extent to which these communities are integrated into and dependent upon the institutions of the surrounding societies.” (Steinberg 1981: 53). Before entering into my community studies, I shall attempt to look at the many faces and definitions of ethnicity.

To begin with, ethnicity is not limited to a prescribed set of people. Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan, in 1975, implied that all Americans belonged to an ethnic group. There were several people, if not the majority, who felt that the white Anglo-Saxon population did not deserve to belong to an ethnic group (Bendix 2000: 162). While some anthropologists are willing to accept WASPs as an ethnicity, others discard such a notion. According to anthropologist Brackette Williams, “lay and academic tendencies to equate ethnic with lower-class or ‘minority’ status.” (1989 in Bendix 2000: 162) General consensus seemed to regard ethnicity as a kind of emotional medication used to treat lower-class and minority populations to or make them feel better; to feel part of something.

Ethnicity was reserved for minority groups not only in the United States, but in Europe as well. The traditional European ethnology and folklore was designed to investigate peasant communities (Bendix 2000: 43). An ethnic group, in this case,
referred to those living in a closed, bounded territory. Such a group would share a language and culture distinct from those of the surrounding society.

Ethnicity exists between groups and not solely inside. It is not the property of one group (Bendix 2000: 187). The key is interaction. Positions of contrast influence identity: “I identify myself with a collective we which is then contrasted with some other . . . what we are, or what the other is will depend on the context,” (Epstein 1978: 100). Epstein begins by insisting that identity be placed at the center of analysis. It is through this placement that we can begin to understand the dual aspects of ethnicity, the “we” and the “they”.

Barth addressed the bounded characterization of ethnic groups in the United States and Europe in his early definition of the concept. Barth spoke of boundary maintenance among ethnic groups. Boundary maintenance involved instances of social contact between different cultures. But, an ethnic group only persisted as a significant unit if it displayed marked behavioral differences, (Epstein 1978: 96). “The critical focus of investigation is the ethnic boundary that defines the group, not the cultural stuff it encloses,” (Epstein 1978: 96) Such a statement invites criticism, in that it is the “cultural stuff” that contains the forces for boundary construction, (Cohen 1986: 3). That “cultural stuff” is also what is present in interaction among groups.

Although Barth stressed the permeability of the ethnic boundary, the metaphor was all but impermeable to others. The boundary had become too rigid, “like a frontline or trench, with people on either side eyeing each other with hostility from the outset.” (Hefer in Bendix 2000: 159). Other critics consider Barth’s ideas to place too much weight on self-ascription, to the point of becoming entirely dependent on self-ascription only, (Melville 1983: 274). Although his works are open to critique, Barth does make a
case for interactive factors of ethnicity, and points out the power of ethnic markers, those cultural forms transmitted within a group (Henry 1976: 10). “Actors use ethnic identities to categories themselves and others for the purposes of interaction, they form ethnic groups” (Barth 1969: 13-14).

It is when conflict arises between ethnic groups that people stress their identity and exclusiveness (Henry 1976: 10). But when Frances Henry contemplated both Barth’s and Cohen’s views on ethnicity, along with those of other scholars, he concluded that they all had failed to distinguish ethnic group behavior and consciousness from other group behaviors, consciousnesses, and identities (Henry 1976: 11). To add mutability and ambiguity to the already multivocalic terms ethnicity, “common peoplehood,” “shared history,” and “common ancestry” has results that are just as unsettling (Henry 1976: 11).

In the earlier studies in ethnicity, ethnic groups were evaluated in the context of assimilation. As far as some were concerned, all immigrant or ethnic groups would eventually be blended together in the great melting pot of the U.S.. It was Robert Park who developed the melting pot theory. Park thought that multiple ethnic groups would eventually merge into one, due to assimilation. Would groups succumb to the mythic model of the U.S.? This model, though, could never be influenced by those whose own customs and cultures were melting away.

In 1963, Glazer and Moynihan rejected the assimilationist fate of ethnic groups and told people that there was something Beyond the Melting Pot. Even after identifying markers like language and customs are lost, ethnic groups are continually reconstructed by new experiences in America (Glazer 1963: 17). Beyond the Melting Pot pushed aside
the idea of the one-dish country, highlighting cultural pluralism. The ethnic group had now become a new social form, as it was never fully assimilated.

In turn, however, the very forces of assimilation made the contributing groups identifiable. Steven Steinberg critiques both the melting pot and the assimilationist definitions. Perhaps he has a bigger problem with the description of cultural pluralism. “The trouble with this current celebration of ethnicity is that it ignores the essentially negative basis on which pluralism developed historically. In doing so, it fails to recognize the fragility of ethnic institutions, and it misconstrues the significance of the recent ethnic upsurge,” (Steinberg 1981: 4). Quoting Ortega and Gassat in Nisbet's *Community and Power*, he further goes on to state that, "people do not live together merely to live together. They live together to do something together," (Steinberg 1981: 58).

Ethnic groups can be seen to gain strength and cohesion from the discrimination of neighboring societies. Today, other elements join a group even after parts may be "cut off" to form bonds (Hutchinson 1996: 137). For example, the Irish of today do not consist of descendants from Irish immigrants. People join ethnic groups in order to form alliances, and Daniel Bell also indicates that individuals make strategic choices in forming group membership (Hutchinson 1996: 146).

Fieldwork and research among ethnic groups in Louisiana provides yet another aspect to Louisiana ethnography and history. Information about under-documented groups helps to unravel some of the cultural complexities of ethnic labeling. By looking at both the community of Zwolle and the Canary Islanders Society, we can see two different ways in which people negotiate and communicate their ethnicity and heritage. In "Ethnicity and Economy in Rural Mexico," Scott Cook and Jon-Taick Joo, with similar ideas to
Steinberg, affirm that "the main question for anthropological inquiry into ethnicity is no longer one of authenticity in any primordial or historical sense but how and why presumed ethnocultural identities or affiliations originate and are represented within complex structures of asymmetrical relations of class and power," (Cook 1995). For many people in these groups, authenticity is not even a question.

Debates continue on the platform of ethnicity. Ethnic group allegiance can be for personal, political, or social reasons, or for a number of other reasons. Although going back to the idea of the melting pot may not be of best interest, it may be wiser to go even farther back instead. In the words of Heraclitus, all people ought to know themselves and everyone should be wholly mindful. No one can tell anyone else who they should be or who they "really are." But some of us do. Perhaps R.T Smith, in *The Politics of Space* sums it up best of all: “Ethnicity is like family or marriage: everybody knows what it means but nobody can define it” (Alonso 1994: 379).

I have chosen for this thesis to use the word identity instead of affiliation, the term preferred by Hollinger in *Postethnic* America. “An example of how a postethnic perspective builds upon the ethnic is …the emphasis on “affiliation.” The preferred word in multiculturalist discourse is, of course, identity,” (Hollinger 1995: 6). He feels that identity is more psychological than social and that it implies fixity instead of the flexibility affiliation promotes.

I agree with Hollinger to the extent that affiliation stresses having a relationship to something, but I think an identity also refers to a relationship and an interaction. Even though my handy computer thesaurus gives me the words individuality, uniqueness, self, and character for identity, I think the word also implies placing an individual among other people. I’m not here to write a ‘post’ anything. I simply want to introduce people to
those I’ve met in the past few years and share our conversations. They have told me things that I will now share.

2.2 Displaying Ethnicity and Heritage

Expressing ethnicity can occur through a wide range of mediums such as language, religion, foodways, music, dance, social practices, the built landscape, ethnic villages, dress and bodily adornment, festivals, film, television, murals, and even bumper stickers (Zelinsky: 2001). In Zwolle, there are times when ethnicity from an outsider’s perspective is reduced to a culinary event, such as during the Zwolle Tamale Festival. Quoting Pierre von den Berghe, Wilbur Zelinsky writes that, "[A]long with language, the food complex becomes a badge of ethnicity." (Zelinsky 2001: 65)

Heritage is a term that is often paired with ethnicity. Like ethnicity, it is also subject to multiple interpretations. Some interchange the word with others like patrimony, ancestry, descent, portion or right. Among the several definitions the American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language gives us for the word heritage are: property that is or can be inherited; something that is passed down from preceding generations, a tradition; and the status acquired by a person through birth (www.dictionary.com). In Heritage: Identification, Conservation, and Management, Graeme Aplin surveys these definitions noting that, “None of these…is particularly helpful, but ‘heritage’, in our present context, certainly implies a gift for future generations and benefits for the community” (Aplin 2002: 13).

Heritage can then really be seen a type of inheritance or gift, and also as a right. Even though heritage resembles ethnicity, another elusive and frustrating term, it is identified by some with more concrete ease in landscapes, buildings, structures, relics, and other non-renewable cultural resources (Aplin 2002: 15). UNESCO, United Nations
Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, has defined tangible heritage as including “all assets that have some physical embodiment of cultural values such as historic towns, buildings, archaeological sites, cultural landscapes and cultural objects” (McKercher 2002: 25). There is also intangible heritage, or, “traditional culture, folklore, or popular culture that is performed or practiced with close ties to ‘place’ and with little complex technological accompaniment” (McKercher 2002: 25). Intangible heritage includes people such as artisans. Thus, heritage is performed in all arenas where people are or have been present.

Festivals are arenas where experiences are negotiated in the public sphere. Anthropologists not only look at the negotiations and activities taking place, but they ask how political systems are legitimized and how the formations and transformations of collective identities and memories emerge. Naturally, imagination plays a role in festivals.

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, in *Destination Culture*, writes about the issue of staging culture for festivals. She says that people are drawn to festivals because of “their promise of sensory saturation and thrilling strangeness,” and peoples’ “insatiable and promiscuous…appetite for wonder” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1988: 72) I’m not sure if “thrilling strangeness” is provided by all festivals or even if we look for that at all. I do agree with the idea of sensory saturation. We want to experience something all the way. We want to feel, smell, touch, see, and taste the sensation that ethnicity and heritage can offer, and that can help us understand what they are. Mental concepts are solidified in the form of food and music. “All four senses intimately involve the individual with local place – with a person’s immediate environment. To be place-bound, to become emotionally tied to place, implies a profound reliance on these channels of awareness”
(Tuan in Richardson 1984: 8). Place is yet another one of those nebulous concepts that becomes visually defined at an event such as a festival.

Figure 2.1: Pin from the Tamale Fiesta in Zwolle, Louisiana (photograph by author)

In Zwolle, the Tamale fiesta provides income and publicity for Zwolle as well as entertainment. It began in 1985 and according to some local residents was designed to foster tourism and improve Zwolle's image. Tamales were chosen just for the sake of choosing a focal point, but it just so happened that families in the area were used to making and eating them. Even though they are a Native American food from Mexico, they are associated with Spanish food by means of the Spanish language. To make matters more complicated, or rather more intriguing, stereotypical Mexican imagery is used to represent Spanish heritage in Zwolle. Visions of cacti, sombreros (Figure 2.1), and donkeys dancing in our heads only clash with local desire not to be associated as Mexicans. Visitors see these images, and take them to represent the festival and Zwolle. Does the community want visitors to think they are Mexican? Local community members seem not to want to have the stigmatized Mexican identity attached to them.
Isleños do not have a specialized food festival like Zwolle’s yearly celebration of tamales. Instead of narrowing a festival down to a food item, they have ethnic and heritage festivals. On the last weekend of March, 2001, The Historic Donaldsonville Museum held its annual "Heritage Day" celebration. Every year, they choose a different ethnic group to commemorate, and that year the museum sponsored the event "Heritage Days: A Salute to the Canary Islander Settlements of Valenzuela and Galveztown."

Working closely with the museum in the months leading up to and throughout the "Heritage Days," the Canary Islanders Heritage Society of Louisiana helped design and set up the various exhibits, and contacted many of the artists. As one of the several Canary Islander societies in Louisiana, this group carries, creates, presents, and represents the group members' histories and heritage. The word heritage is strongly emphasized in the mottos of both the museum and the heritage society. While The Historic Donaldsonville Museum pleads, "Let us, before we die, gather up our heritage and offer it to our children," (www.hdm1806.org) the Canary Islanders Heritage Society of Louisiana reminds us that it is, "dedicated to the preservation of the heritage of Spanish ancestors from the Canary Islands who settled in Louisiana" (www.canaryislanders.org).

The Canary Islanders Heritage group negotiates their Canary Islander identity during events such as the festival. They negotiate this identity between two places - Louisiana and the Canary Islands - thus experiencing duality in self and place. The experience of these to places is a result of diaspora, or the dispersion of people from a homeland. The Isleños are part of the diaspora of the Canary Islands. A diaspora is also a community that is formed because of the dispersal.
Lavie and Swedenburg, in *Displacement, Diaspora, and Geographies of Identity*, describe diaspora as "one attempt to name this hodgepodge of everyday out-of-country, even out-of-body experience . . . it accounts for one type of displacement. Diaspora refers to the doubled relationship of dual loyalty that migrants, exiles, and refugees have to places - their connections to the space they currently occupy and their continuing involvement 'back home'' (Lavie 1996: 14).

![Figure 2.2: Display of Canary Islander heritage at The Historic Donaldsonville Museum (photograph by author)](image)

Although the Isleños have been in Louisiana since the late 1700s, their emphasis is placed on displaying what is considered traditional and authentic in the Canary Islands (Figure 2.2), while the experience of the immigrants in Louisiana is downplayed. Proximity with the Canary Islands and with the past is achieved through such displays.
The first Canary Islanders may have stepped off the boat in Louisiana in 1778, but they continue to arrive today through cultural performances in 1778 dress.

Both the food and the ethnic festival are channels to exhibit the multiple heritages of a region. A significant growth in an interest in heritage, in the general sense, took place in 1970s, as represented in the 1972 Ethnic Heritage Studies Act, which acknowledged that a "greater understanding of the contributors of one's own heritage and those of one's fellow citizens" would lead to increased patriotism and harmony (Kammen 1991: 616). Soon after, ethnic studies courses appeared in high schools and universities. But as Michael Kammen observes in his very lengthy *Mystic Chords of Memory*, the heritage boom led to commercialization, vulgarization, and oversimplification. (Kammen 1991: 628).

It is tempting to try to monopolize the powerful tool that heritage is. But heritage isn't lost or found or stolen (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1988: 149). Heritage can in fact be created and (re)interpreted to produce new things. Just as people can choose to belong to an ethnic group, they can also chose to perform a tradition, or heritage. Hollinger stresses the degree of choice available in a post-ethnic world, and David Guss, in *The Festive State*, questions the motives behind such choices. Is the choice, as Guss quotes Werner Solles, “the acquired sense of belonging,” or are the choices and “temporary perches from which to assess and redefine new social relations and hence tools of empowerment and resistance?” (Guss 2000: 63)

Perhaps the interest in heritage and the ensuing festivals are a result of an American hunger for membership (Hoelscher 1998: 16). An explosion of interest in one’s ethnic past (including language, food, religion, and material culture), “fostering a
hyphenated identity, and even reverse name-changes” to the old-country spelling have all become fashionably American (Halter 2000: 9). To be an American now is to be ethnic.

2.3 I Once was Cajun, but Now I’m Hispanic: Ethnic Identity Shifting and Name-Calling

During a Canary Islanders society meeting last year, a member proudly asserted his newfound identity, "With my last name, I thought I was just a Cajun here in south Louisiana. But I learned that I'm really Spanish." Another member had previously told me how she used to consider herself as just a white person, but now she marks off the Hispanic box on governmental and public forms.

Zwolle residents attach a negative stigma to Mexicans, but choose to nostalgically embrace Spain while associating to that country through Mexicanisms. At times, they would rather say they are just Spanish instead of claiming Native American background, and especially instead of being Mexican. They have, "nostalgic allegiance to the culture of the immigrant generation or old country," (Gans in Hutchinson 1996).

And so begins the juggle of ethnic terms. Some people choose the word Hispanic to describe themselves. What does Hispanic mean? How about Latino? For years, disputes have arisen about which of these is the proper term for those with Spanish surnames (Morales 2002: 2). According to some sources, the term Hispanic was invented by the Nixon administration to allow those with a lighter complexion a chance to claim a European heritage. Hispanic came into extensive use in the 1970s for the U.S. Census tallies. It allowed all the people in the Americas with Spanish language and background to be tidily lumped together.

Latino, as Darryl Fears writes in the Washington Post article, “Latinos or Hispanics? A Debate About Identity,” is from the word Latin that dates back to “an 18th
century spat between England and France.” It was used to differentiate Italy, France, Spain and their territories in the Americas from the British colonies and empire. He writes, “Latino was popularized during the social movements of the 1960s” (Fears 2003: A01).

The debate over these labels can sometimes become heated, while others think it is ridiculous. For Ed Morales, _Hispanic_ is the preferred term of the assimilationists while _Latino_ is the term of academia, politicians, and young urbanites (Morales 2002: 2). He stresses that the difference rests on ethnic mixture, for _Latinos_ are a mixture of Spaniards, Africans, and indigenous people. _Latino_ for many stresses the brown/indigenous influence.

Others also criticize _Hispanic_ for "elitist evocations of Spain" (Dávila 2001: 40). Even though one should never tell someone else who they really are or should be, I refer to the communities of northwest and south Louisiana as Hispanic for several reasons. There was historically a presence of Spaniards in the areas and they did influence the populations. I will not deny the impacts of other groups in the regions (Native American, Mexican, Cajun, etc.) At present, many of the individuals either speak or understand a little Spanish or they remember family members speaking the language. Many also have Spanish surnames.

Kendra Hamilton, in her article “Finding a Name that Fits” from Black Issues in Higher Education, talks about how businesses are “jumping on the Hispanic bandwagon” (http://www.findarticles.com/cf_o/m0DXK/16_18/79743148/print.jhtml). _Hispanic_ is a marketable word and an umbrella term. For this thesis, such an umbrella term fits. It applies to both groups because of their paths back to Spain.
The idea of advertising and selling ethnicity is discussed in considerable detail with many examples in *Shopping for Identity: The Marketing of Ethnicity* by Marylin Halter. In this book, Halter explains that identities were previously the result of the relationship between humans and material objects whereas now, “people most often construct their own identities and define others through the commodities they purchase,” (Halter 2000: 6). Instead of grocery stores having a ‘Mexican foods’ aisle, they might have an ‘Hispanic foods’ aisle, although they will only stock Mexican products and cater to Mexicans and Mexican-Americans.

Ethnicity is not created through interaction; it’s created through acquisition, (Halter 2000: 6). Regarding the idea that ethnicity equals Americanness, Alisse Waterson in “Hispanic doesn’t equal just Spanish anymore: Ethnic identity transcends language” says that marketers, with help from the 2000 census, recognize that ethnic diversity is a hallmark of North American society (Waterson 2002).

Although the term *Hispanic* might not mean anything at all to some people, another identity term might elicit a reaction. During one of my visits to Zwolle, Sally Parrie told me in her living room that, “*Hispanic* is not a term here. *Mexican* is what *Hispanic* is.” Daniel Johnson, who wrote a book about Zwolle, said during a conversation with me that the term *Mexican* “was used in derision,” and that it was for “anyone who had brown skin.”

That same day I spoke to Sally Parrie, I went to see Helen Ebarb Parrie, just a short drive from her relative Sally’s house. Helen, a native of Ebarb, told me that she, “grew up unseen and unheard. I never knew who my kin was, everyone was an aunt or an uncle.” Helen attended a country school, and was never taught anything about local history. “Then came the ‘Hot Tamale Deal’ – digging up all people to be Mexican.”
Because even her family wouldn’t tell her about her background, she still strongly believes that, “You take me as you see me because I have no proof of being nothing.” In other words, Helen won’t say she’s Mexican, or Spanish, or Native American because she doesn’t know specifics about her family history. This doesn’t bother her, and she welcomes people to refer to her as anything they wish.

Stereotypes are evident whether one is labeling another or oneself. Individuals in Zwolle and also in Canary Islanders Heritage Society of Louisiana express the essentialist idea that an attitude, a behavior, or a practice is “in our blood.” Someone once commented, “Oh, that’s just the Spanish in me,” when referring to being loud at social gatherings. Stereotypes can unite and separate people just as much as labeling can, and they can be applied from the inside as well as from the outside.

A member of the Canary Islanders Heritage Society of Louisiana, believes that Spanish is the language or a person from Spain while Hispanic is a person who speaks Spanish or is of Spanish or Latin American descent. For her, and for many others, Hispanic includes Spaniards. There are those who argue that Hispanic is only for those from the Spanish Americas. People she works or socializes with see her as Latina or Hispanic to, but to her husband, who is from Columbia, she is just a gringa.

Whether or not people choose to use Hispanic to describe themselves may change from generation to generation. The younger generations use the term Hispanic more often than the older generations, even though both generations may keep up with how ethnic categories change over the years. Besides generational differences, there is also a class or caste prejudice. Many associate Latino or Mexican with immigration (Hamilton 2001).
Overall, open discussion of ethnicity does not occur among members of the Zwolle community. Many of the ethnic labels such as *Mexican* or *Native American* still cause both anger and confusion. Both the definitions and manifestations of ethnicity are puzzling and this is further discussed in the next chapter. Heritage, on the other hand, is the focus of the Canary Islanders Heritage Society of Louisiana. Asserting Canary Islander background is allowed and accepted. Ethnic terms are not so much an issue or a problem with the Canary Islanders Society as they are in Zwolle.
“Much of life becomes background, but it is the province of art to throw buckets of light into the shadows and make life new again.” (Ackerman 1990: 15)

3.1 Land of the Mission and the Tamales

From 1806 until 1820, the area to the west of Natchitoches was part of the Neutral Strip, or the No Man’s Land (Nardini 1961). During that time, the land was under no one’s rule and lawlessness was the norm. But today, what was once was referred to as No Man’s Land, is now more of a No Recognition Land. As mentioned in the first chapter, there are large portions of Louisiana that don’t exactly fit into the molds of either Anglo or Cajun Country. Natchitoches and Sabine parishes have Spanish histories that date back to the 18th century. People of African, German, Nordic, Italian, Chinese, Norwegian, Native American, and Creole descent have also contributed to the history of the area (Cohen 1984; Hall 1992; Hardin 1939: 308).

In the late 19th century, Chinese settled in North Louisiana after they had been introduced as laborers in the South in 1867 (Cohen 1984: 52). Planters in northwest Louisiana brought them in to work on the plantations, but the Chinese who settled on the Louisiana plantations did not stay long. Both plantation owners and Chinese laborers broke their contracts (Cohen 1984: 105). Many Chinese came from Cuba, where they had also worked on plantations to replace African labor, and thus carried Spanish surnames.

Let us begin with Natchitoches first, and then move west to Los Adaes and to Zwolle. Natchitoches is designated as the oldest permanent settlement in Louisiana. Founded in 1713, Natchitoches is the home of the Cane River Creoles. In contrast with their 18th and 19th century contemporaries, Cane River free people of color had wealth,
education, and support for their Catholic religion that often exceeded that of their Euro-American neighbors (Gilley 1984: 93).

The official Spanish history of Natchitoches is unrecorded until the years between 1764 and 1800. The dates of Spanish influence are more difficult to determine (Portrebabinski 1936: 61). It could be said that Spanish influence began in 1721, with the establishment of Los Adaes. But in order to understand why Los Adaes was set up, we have to go further back.

Spanish expansion in the 16th century had been primarily propelled by economic and missionary stimuli. Native American groups were converted, exploited, and placed on plantations, in mines, or on ranches. By the end of the 17th century, however, the Native Americans had returned. Another agent had entered New Spain that threatened the cities, churches, and land claims of the Spanish – the French. Defense became, in time, the main motive to further Spanish advances to new areas (Bannon 1963: 43). In response to commercial activities and the establishment of a French post in Natchitoches, the Spaniards established missions and forts.

Fort St. Jean Baptiste aux Natchitos was established in 1714 by Louis Juchereau de St. Denis as a French post on the Red River. The post was built for three primary reasons: to open trade relations with Mexico, to stop Spanish encroachment on New France, and as a permanent source of supplies for the growing colony of Mobile (McLeod 1936).

The Spanish, in return, established the outpost of Nuestra Señora del Pilar de los Adaes to counter French western trade (Figure 3.1). In 1721, the palisaded fort was established to guard the mission and also to claim Spain’s sovereignty of the Red River in opposition to France. In 1772, Spain ordered that Los Adaes be closed. The following
year, 500 soldiers and their families were forced to leave for San Antonio. After arriving in San Antonio, many left and went on to found Nacogdoches, Texas, while others came back to Louisiana.

Fig 3.1: Region of Texas and Louisiana from 1700-1800 (Bolton 1915)

The presidio at Los Adaes “represented the easternmost Spanish colonial settlement in the province of Texas,” and can be understood in terms of its cultural impact on the region. At this location, Caddoan Indian groups, Spanish soldiers and their families, and French soldiers and their families cooperated in, “spiritual, social, political, and economic relationships, which gave rise to a unique culture whose traces can still be seen today” (Los Adaes State Commemorative Area Interpretive Prospectus, 1999).

On December 20, 1803 the province of Louisiana was transferred to the United States and in 1821, Mexico gained its independence from Spain. The interaction between Mexico, Texas, and Louisiana continued after Texas achieved its independence in 1836
and joined the United States. Migration and trade flowed steadily and during that period, and stagecoach lines were established. The link between railways and lumber towns created employment opportunities as well as new settlements. In 1900, there was another influx of Spanish speakers into the area when the Kansas City Southern Railroad was built through northern Louisiana. Many of the workers for rail construction came up from Mexico.

![Map of El Camino Real](image)

**Figure 3.2: Map of El Camino Real (Simons, 1992: 5)**

Robeline and Zwolle are both associated with the Camino Real in northwest Louisiana (Figure 3.2). Robeline was established after the Texas and Pacific railroad was built through Natchitoches parish in 1881 (Hardin 1939: 506). No town had been established prior to the construction of the railroad. With a current population of just over 150, Robeline has a rich history of interactions among people. Conflicts among
nationalities and ethnic groups were and still are apparent. The outcome of groups working together is also apparent. Residents of Robeline cluster themselves according to ethnicity. Within Robeline is the Caddo Adai Indian Community, with Chief Reynolds as the tribal chair.

Figure 3.3: Map showing Robeline and Zwolle (By D. Dorrell)

Robeline and Natchitoches are both in Natchitoches parish, while Zwolle is in Sabine parish (Figure 3.3). Sabine parish was created in 1843 and named after the Sabine River (the Spanish called it Rio Adays after the Indian tribe that inhabited its banks). Jan DeGoijen, a Kansas City Southern line stockholder, named Zwolle in 1896 after his birthplace, Zwolle, the capital of the Province of Overijssel, Netherlands. DeGeoijen has even been referred to as “Zwolle’s Godfather”. (Gentry 1999: 22)
Bayou Scie cuts through Sabine Parish and Zwolle. Some of the first European settlers to arrive in the Bayou Scie area were Spanish priests, in the late 1790s. As a resident I spoke with theorized, Bayou Scie could be a corruption of the Spanish word “vallecillo” which means “little valley”. It was there that the Spanish established a mission and several churches.

![Figure 3.4: Zwolle Train Depot (photograph by author)](image)

Zwolle was established as a railway station in 1898, and incorporated as a town in 1901 (Figure 3.4). It had several large sawmills: the Sabine Lumber Company, the Progressive Lumber Company, and the Mansfield Hardwood Lumber Company. In addition to the lumber mills, oil was another leading industry. Currently, the town of Zwolle has a population of around 1800 people, and lumber mills are still a source of work.

Near Zwolle is the Toledo Bend Reservoir, a relatively recent and controversial addition to Sabine Parish. Formed by a dam on the Sabine River, it borders both Texas and Louisiana. Beginning in May 1963, land acquisitions for the J.B. Reservoir started as a joint project of Texas and Louisiana River Authorities. As the largest man-made body
of water in the south, Toledo Bend was built primarily for purposes of water supply, hydroelectric power, and recreation. By 1966, the dam was completed.

But the reservoir created a number of problems. Van Rheenen, in her master’s thesis for L.S.U., discuss how, “the reservoir inundated major portions of the community, wiping out all of the Blue Lake Community, Beartown, and Sulphur Springs” (Van Rheenen 1987: 32). Inhabitants of those communities were forced to relocate, which “hastened the passing of community ways” (Van Rheenen 1987: 35). Underneath the waters of Toledo Bend are still the remains of some Indian graves. Cultural resource archaeological excavations took place before the flooding; their findings of Native American occupation promoted an awareness of the Native American history of the area.

Among the Native American tribes that first were in the area were the Caddo. Within the Caddo groups in the East Texas and northwest region of Louisiana were the Hasinai that lived in the Neches and Angelina River valleys, and the Kadohadacho and Natchitoches groups on the Red River. The Louisiana Caddoan-speaking groups were the Adaes, Doustoni, Natchitoches, Oachita, and Yatasi. These groups seemed to have been concentrated around the Natchitoches area (Gregory 1978: 18).

Natchitoches, Robeline, and Zwolle all lie on what was once the Camino Real. The “King’s Highway” spanned a distance of more than 500 miles, and is one of the oldest and most traveled overland routes in North America. In 1691, the first Spanish provincial Governor of Texas, Domingo Teran de los Ríos, ordered that a trail be blazed as a direct route from Monclova, then the capital of the province, to the Spanish
missions established among the Indians of east Texas. The Camino Real was incorporated into State Highway 21 (Texas), and connects into Highway 6 (Louisiana) (Figure 3.5).

The Spanish, Mexican, and Native American cultural legacies of the region still continue today. Those community members who do speak Spanish use nahualismos (loan words from Nahuatl, the administrative language of the Aztec empire still spoken in South-central Mexico) and many people have metates in their kitchens (Berthelot 2001: 83). Metates are large, flat, slanted volcanic rock objects used to grind corn. Metates were used to grind corn for making tamales before ready-made masa became available. The metate, as domestic material culture, shows how Hispanic identity and heritage in the area is expressed through food and food related items.

The making of tamales at home is still practiced in the area, and this food item has come to symbolize Zwolle. Many of the traditional foods of the area are labeled by both residents and visitors as Mexican, Spanish, and Indian. Even though Tex-Mex and
traditional Mexican dishes are also made, people refer to them as Spanish, even though they may not have anything to do with peninsular cuisine.

3.2 Here Come the Anthros: Native Americans and Zwolle

Floyd Westerman, a Sioux, wrote the song “Here Come the Anthros” in 1969 (Medicine 2001: 3). The song is not an ode to anthropologists at all. One of the stanzas in the song reads:

And the anthros bring their friend
And when their pens run dry,
They pack up their things,
And away they go

Later on in the same song, another stanza reads:

And the Anthros keep on diggin’
in our sacred ceremonial sites.
As if there was nothing wrong,
and their education gives them the right

It is a very powerful song and Westerman pens what many others have thought for many decades. The relationships between Native Americans and anthropologists often involve feelings of suspicion or offense. Vine Deloria Jr.’s Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto was published the same year Westerman’s song came out, and his very first article attacking ‘anthros’ also first came out in 1969, in an issue of Playboy. In Custer Died for Your Sins Deloria writes about tribalism, the fraught relationship between Native Americans and the Federal Government, and stereotypes. He also writes about the distrust and disgust many Native Americans come to have regarding anthropologists. In one section, he explains, “There is a pan-Indian joke heard in many American Indian communities. It involves an anthropologist who supposedly asked an Indian from the tribe, ‘do you speak Indian?’” (Medicine 2001: 19).
You simply cannot talk about the history of Zwolle without talking about the Native American history of the area. On one of my visits, I spoke to Rebecca Aucoin, a graduate student at Northwestern University in Natchitoches. Rebecca’s family’s name, Remedies, used to be Ramirez. While discussing the Spanish and Native American in her family and in the region she said, “You can’t have one without the other.”

Sally, the aunt of a high school student in Zwolle, who also has Spanish and Native American ancestors, said that “Now people fight as to what amount of Indian they have.” She thinks that, “If you look like that you shouldn’t have to prove you’re Indian.” Others, like the chairperson for the Choctaw-Apache Tribal Office, argue that looks don’t count and that you should have to put it on paper.

Early in 2003, I went to the Choctaw-Apache tribal office in Zwolle. About two years had passed since I had last been to the Choctaw-Apache tribal office. Every time I had tried to go there, it had been closed during the weekends. I was finally in Zwolle during their business hours. As with all my visits, nervousness had accompanied me. It was a beautiful Tuesday and I had already eaten my forgettable lunch at some fast-food place right off the interstate in Natchitoches. I arrived in Zwolle around one-thirty and drove straight to the tribal office on Highway 171. The woman who I had spoken to on two prior occasions was no longer there. People had mentioned to me that an idiotic drunk driver basically put her out of work, and that made me upset.

There were several of cars outside of the office building in the smallish dirt parking lot. I noticed that one of the vehicles had a “Louisiana American Indian” license plate (Figure 3.6). This was the first time I had seen such a license plate. I made my way into the building and the main room was full of people standing up, sitting down, and moving around.
After letting my eyes adjust to the light indoors, I looked around for someone who wasn’t busy. I went up to one of the secretaries and introduced myself and told her as best as I could that I was interested in finding more information about the tribal office and its history. After listening to my quasi-questions she said, “Hold on and let me see if our chairperson is in.” After a few seconds, she led me to a back office where I met Bobby Shelton. Many people had mentioned Bolton to me in conversations, and I could talk to him finally. Sitting across from him and his desk I barely got a few words out before he started talking. And he talked a lot, and he spoke fast. “Do you mind if I take some notes?” “No, go ahead.”

The Choctaw-Apache tribe is the third largest of the eight recognized Native American tribes in Louisiana. The “Apache” part of the tribe comes from the Lipan Apache who joined the Adai in the 1700s, and the “Choctaw” part is from the Choctaw who joined the Adai and Apache families. Shelton explained that in 1978 the tribe was recognized by local residents. From 1978 until 1993, nothing was done and there was absolutely no activity. Then in 1993, Shelton wrote a letter to the Bureau of Indian
Affairs. They gave him a list of seven mandatory criteria to meet for federal recognition. He made me a photocopy of the Rules and Regulations from a Federal Register that includes those criteria. They are: 1) The petitioner has been identified, 2) A predominant portion of the petitioning group comprises a distinct community and has existed as a community from historical times until the present, 3) The petitioner has maintained political influence or authority over its members as an autonomous entity from historical times until the present, 4) A copy of the group’s present governing document including its membership criteria, 5) The petitioner’s membership consists of individuals who descend from a historical Indian tribe, 6) The membership of the petitioning group is composed principally of persons who are not members of any North American Indian tribe, and 7) Neither the petitioner nor its members are the subject of congressional legislation that has expressly terminated or forbidden the Federal relationship.

Bobby Shelton slowed down after a little bit to tell me more about the Choctaw-Apaches. The Choctaw-Apache Community of Ebarb, Inc. was formed in 1979, and it has about five thousand members nationwide on list, and fifteen hundred members locally. The main purpose of the office is to obtain Federal recognition, which involves an ongoing battle with the B.I.A.(Bureau of Indian Affairs)

Shelton jumped around a little when it came to history, and we both knew there was no way we could cover the area’s history in a few hours. I asked him what was being taught in the schools about local history. “Nothing.” He said, “The teachers aren’t interested.” Not too long ago, the office had sent out a culture-based curriculum to some of the area schools, but nothing was done with it. He added, “It’s a long awakening. People are hiding who they were.”
Many families in the area have changed identities in censuses through the years from Indian to Mestizo to Spanish to Mexican and then back to Indian. There also hasn’t been much done in the area during November, Native American month. I remembered how on one of my visits to Los Adaes, Gerald Anderson, an archaeologist, and I spoke about caste systems in the region. Anderson explained how at first, there was a simple system, broken into black, white, and Native American categories. Then it became more complex with terms like *lobo* or *coyote*. Such terms were applied to “mixed races,” based on levels and combinations of whiteness, blackness, etc. The elite white were the ones who assigned such labels. The system went back to a simple, three-part classification. Anderson went on to point out just how complex it is today with all the categories on the census and even predicted that perhaps one day, it will go back to a more simple system.

Figure 3.7: Railroad tracks in Zwolle (photograph by author)

Shelton then explained that the school in Ebarb is one of the two Indian schools in Louisiana (the other is in Houma). Both Zwolle and Ebarb have less-than-good reputations. They are considered as being on the “other side of the tracks.” (Figure 3.7) Perhaps this is even more the case in Ebarb because of its Native American population. It
is interesting to note that the school mascot for Ebarb High School is the Rebels. Zwolle Intermediate School and High School has the hawk as its mascot. Is the hawk a reference to some stereotypical aspect of Indians?

While talking about a wide range of topics concerning Zwolle and the area’s various cultural histories, Shelton told me how he enjoys history. He finds it disheartening that although relatively extensive histories have been written about Nacogdoches and Natchitoches, nothing has been written about what is in between. It continues to be a No Man’s Land, almost as if Zwolle were a vacuum. The first census in Sabine Parish was done in 1850, but they never did count the area residents because they were “a different kind of people.” They are still considered different.

A little after he spoke about censuses and the lack of good local history, he said, “If I had it my way, I’d put up signs that would say ‘Anthropologists keep out’.” As he said these words, he made a cross with his hands as if to ward off a vampire. Was I this vampire? He brought up Mary Van Rheenen and Janet Shoemaker, two former graduate students of L.S.U.’s Geography and Anthropology department who had done research in Zwolle in the late 1980s. Others I spoke to in Zwolle also brought up Van Rheenen and Shoemaker, and sometimes it was in a negative light. Even though I had never met them, I wanted to defend them. This reaction is ironic in view of the history of their presence in the area: they had been asked to come by an earlier tribal council, to conduct genealogical research that would help establish tribal status.

In the late 1980s, the two women were interested in ethnic identity and language loss. They also collected oral histories for the Mennonite Church. With oral histories you do have a list of questions to work with during taped interviews such as: What foods did
your mother make when you were growing up? How did she make them? How did she learn to make them? Did she make any handcrafts? How? Out of what?

It was this type of interview that Bobby Shelton did not like, and I think he confused ethnographic and anthropological fieldwork with oral history interviews. I’m not sure what look I had on my face at this point after he said he disliked anthropologists. All I knew is that I felt about two inches tall and that I needed to…not say much. Quickly, he brought up digging up dead people. “Or is that what archaeologists do? You’re not an archaeologist, are you?” I never answered that. I didn’t have to. Perhaps his source of confusion was not ethnography versus oral history, but archaeology versus ethnography, and the disruption and removal of Native American burials.

Then, he did ask me what I do, “Is it history?” I said, “Just guess. You’re gonna love me!” He guessed right and said, “No, I’m just kidding.” He sensed that I felt uncomfortable, and I checked to see if I was visibly showing it. “I don’t really hate anthropologists. Well, not really.” He was very honest with me and I strangely appreciated it.

Having recently read Vine Deloria Jr.’s *Custer Died for Your Sins*, I wanted to ask Bobby Shelton if he was a fan, but I did not. Deloria Jr.’s book covers the often strained relations between Native Americans and anthropologists. I remembered a section of the book that read, “Into each life, it is said, some rain must fall. Some people have bad horoscopes, others take tips on the stock market. McNamara created the TFX and the Edsel. Churches possess the real world. But Indians have been cursed above all other people in history. Indians have anthropologists” (Deloria 1969: 78).

Shelton went on to speak about newly formed tribes in Louisiana that he said were out for gambling money. He shows me some newsletters and fliers from several tribes
including one that bothers him. “You see that?” he said pointing to names. “I can’t stand it when people take up names like Shooting Arrow or Silver Creek. When people ask me what my Indian name is, I say Bobby Shelton.” He also talked about how a chaplain who works at a jail once asked him, “Do you need a spiritual advisor? Do you have one?” He answered, “Yes, I have one. I’m Catholic and my spiritual advisor is a priest.” And when I asked him what he thought about the Tamale festival he told me that, “It would be okay if it weren’t run by two white guys.”

Shelton had come back from serving in Vietnam at the age of 21, and that is when he started finding out more about his family history. He became interested in tribal history because of all the mis-identification that has been going on in the area. His grandmother used to get upset when people called her Mexican. She was also ashamed. These feelings of anger and shame at being labeled as Mexican have not disappeared.

He also remembers when the Western Auto in Zwolle used to be a grocery store, and he would have to go through the back door. It wasn’t a big deal to him at the time, but then he learned that the “Black and brown people went through the back door.” The railroad tracks were a division between the white people and the “brown and black” people. I left his office about three hours later, after it had closed for the day. I suppose I managed not to offend Bobby Shelton. Going into or out of Zwolle, you drive along those railroad tracks. Even though the tracks are no longer a physical division between people, the idea of “staying on your side of the tracks” (including anthropologists) remains.

3.3 All in the Family: Thoughts Across Generations

On one of my visits to Zwolle, I met with Mike Roberts. I had been looking up information on the Internet about the area and came across a genealogical and historical
website by a Zwolle resident. Mike, a high school senior, has for years enjoyed family
genealogy and town research. I contacted him and told him that I was interested in visiting him. Little did I know that he would introduce me to other family and community members and show me around Zwolle, letting me into homes of people who might not usually want to talk to an outsider.

Many of the people of Zwolle and the surrounding small communities are, as Mike Waters told me, “not open to outsiders.” This doesn’t mean they won’t invite you in or show you around at all. They hold many large annual events to bring visitors to the area, including the Zwolle Tamale Festival. But, when they are asked personal questions, especially from an anthropologist wanting to learn more about their cultural background, they are hesitant to speak about the subject.

I showed up to Mike’s house on a Friday afternoon. Mike is a studious, slender, and polite young man who works part time at the Toledo Bend Reservoir. He enjoys doing crafts, including scrap-booking and quilting, and spending time with his family. His aunt, Sally Parrie, lives right across the street from him and has an impressive mini library of Louisiana history and folklife.

That afternoon, we sat in his living room and he showed me several binders full of photocopies, newspaper clippings, and articles he has gathered through the years about genealogy and area history. One binder contained a list of annotated transcripts for oral history interviews that were conducted from 1999-2000 as part of a town project.

Starting in October of 1999, many individuals from Zwolle received a grant from the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities to write down the history of the town. Edith J. Palmer served as the director for the project, and James Salter was the author. It came out in time for the 25th annual Tamale Fiesta in 2000. Several town residents
helped gather information, including Mike Waters and some of his family members. They interviewed several members of the community asking questions such as: When you were young what kind of streets and businesses were in Zwolle?; Do you speak Spanish?; Do you remember a town named Clyde?; and, Are there any Indian people around Zwolle? Other questions had to do with specific businesses and people, the Tamale Festival, and even the town’s reputation as a bad place. The bad reputation part could be due to some historical instances of fights (including those involving guns and people being shot to death) having been blown out of proportion and subsequently regarded as the norm. I’m not exactly sure why it is regarded as a dangerous area, but it still is.

In one interview, a woman with Spanish and Native American background expressed the wish that she knew how to speak Spanish. When she was a young girl, people would look down upon her at school because it was well known that her paternal grandmother was part Indian. This was before it was “popular to be Indian.”

Figure 3.8: The Zwolle Tamale Inc. Store (photograph by author)
Another woman talked about the Tamale Festival. She recalled her mother raising corn and pepper and grinding the corn on a metate. Her mother would also butcher hogs to make tamales. Back then, it wasn’t a special food; everyone in the area ate it. Now, Zwolle is mostly known for tamales, and it has become a celebratory food. She also talks about the Zwolle Tamale Inc. factory (Figure 3.8) that ships tamales weekly to Angola so the prisoners get to enjoy them. The factory ships even ships the tamales nationwide.

The next day, Mike and I walked across the street his aunt’s house. There, I met Sally Parrie and Mike’s grandmother, Merna Parrie. We sat in Sally’s living room and talked for a while. As with most of my conversations with people from Zwolle, the subject of tamales came up. Sally said that, “With the tamales, people here take their time with them. There are no shortcuts. You would wash and grind the corn in addition to hog head.” Mike jumped in and said, “They run you out of town if you use masa meal!” Betty went on to say that, “We have the Indian incorporated into our tamales.” She said that the man who started the Tamale Festival was from south Louisiana and married into Zwolle. At first, the very idea of the festival insulted people. They didn’t want to be Mexican or Spanish.

Sally Parrie let me borrow several books, and gave me a copy of a cookbook from the Zwolle Fiesta Association. Among the first pages of the cookbook, is a large, black and white photograph of the “Father of Tamale Fiesta,” Rogers P. Loupe, wearing a jacket, a tie, a pair of dark-rimmed glasses, and a slight smile. On the opposite side of the page from Loupe’s photo is a short history of the Tamale Fiesta. A section reads:

“This all began when Mr. Roscoe Carruth (deceased), who was manager of the Sabine Parish Chamber of Commerce, came upon the idea of a folk festival because ‘Zwolle has a Spanish background and a historical setting. Zwolle doesn’t have to search for a romance of the Spanish people or the setting, it is
already there,’ he said. It wasn’t until he discussed the idea with Roger Loupe that it became a reality.” (Zwolle Fiesta Association, iv)

Among the “Appetizers, Beverages” section are recipes for Tangy Tamale Balls, Cheese Enchiladas, and Border Layered Dip. In the “Soups, Salads” section you can find out how to make three different versions of Taco Soup and three kinds of Taco Salad. For “Vegetables”, there is Hominy Casserole and Corn and Rice Pudding.

The recipes in this cookbook can be categorized under Mexican or Tex-Mex. Several residents of Zwolle and areas nearby strongly affirm their Spanish heritage. Some consider a Mexican dish like menudo to be from Spain. As noted, the label of Mexican is still not a good thing, but when mediated by food, it seems to be more accepted. Perhaps Mexico is too close geographically to be positive and there are general negative attitudes across the U.S. against the on-going immigration of Mexicans. Mexicans are also too “dark” in skin color (darkened also by stereotypes and ill-feelings towards them to be viewed positively). Spain, on the other hand is distant. It is far away across the Atlantic, and there hasn’t been a large migration of Spaniards to the area in hundreds of years. Nostalgia can be very forgiving. Also, Spanish people are seen as “whiter.”

Sally and Merna talked more about tamales. They mentioned a local woman, Hazel Rivers who, in addition to making deer sausage and rosary beads, “will make tamales however you would like. Pork or chicken or whatever.” Local people seem to like a lot of red pepper on their tamales (they call salsa red pepper in Zwolle). Some eat their tamales with ketchup or syrup and pair them with ice tea or sweet coffee. Merna Parrie recalled when her family, who were farmers, used to make syrup. Everyone in the
room agreed that the, “food around here is not strictly Spanish, Indian, French or black. Just like the people.”

From food, the conversation switched to talking about categories of ethnicity and how they relate to education since Sally is a teacher. In the schools, socially there is a clear division between black and white. She went on to explain that Native American and Mexican fall under “black,” and that Hispanic is not a term used here. Instead Mexican replaces Hispanic, even though Mexican continues to be a term of insult. Mexicans from Mexico also fall into this category. I asked about Mexicans in the area today and was informed that there are a few Mexican families (directly from Mexico) in Zwolle, and many of them work in the concrete business. One family has even opened up a Mexican restaurant near the tamale factory.

When checking off boxes on records, Sally Parrie always chooses Native American. “You’re not Hispanic here in the sense that you speak Spanish and clique together.” She remembers being called a Mexican in school and soon afterwards she tells me that her brother was the first Spanish person in the area to be co-valedictorian. Again, the terms Mexican and Spanish are switched around. Even though they were called Mexican in school, they are referred to as Spanish because they did well in school. Being called Spanish is a lot more prestigious. There is a joke that is told as follows: If you give a Mexican some money, he turns into a Spaniard. Would someone apply this joke in Zwolle? Would a Spaniard be a Mexican with prestige and rank?

Later on that day, we all went over to Helen Ebarb Parrie’s home. Her living room is full of family photos, and I sat on the couch next to a lamp made out of egg cartons with holes punched in them so the light can come through. Helen’s mother was an Ezernack, another name that many have in the area. Ezernack is from the French
Charnack or Charbernack. In Van Rheenen’s thesis, she writes that, “family surnames were also subjected to foreign influence. The gradual transformation from Bermea to Malmay can be traced through...census records; the switch from Y’barbo to Ebarb...del Rio to Rivers...Sharnace, for instance, seems to have been changed into the Ezernack of today on the insistence of a school teacher” (Van Rheenen 1987: 19). Helen Ebarb Parrie does not bother with calling herself Indian or Spanish or Mexican. She lets people decide that for her.

That day, I was able to talk to several members of one family. Not only did they let me in on what they think, they also gave me information about the community of Zwolle that I would have never found out otherwise. I learned from them and from others as well that how they have identified themselves has both changed, yet, in a way, stayed the same. Being Native American is a lot more acceptable today, but calling someone an Indian is still highly controversial. Even though many of the individuals in Zwolle have ancestors from Mexico, the allure and higher status of being Spanish overrides everything. As with the term “Indian”, “Mexican” is still a volatile label. But what about the newly arrived Mexicans in the area? Will there be another influx of workers from Mexico to the region?

On a previous occasion, I was able to get together with another family. In January and February of 1999, I had the wonderful opportunity to speak with three generations of the Remedies family in Robeline. They live close to other family members in the Caddo Adai Indian Community located within Robeline.

On one of the mornings I visited the Remedies’ residence, Rob Remedies gave me a tour of the house and yard. The place once belonged to Rob’s father, who used to be a carpenter, and his old trunk is still on the porch. Behind the house is Spanish Lake, but
the body of water is not the only thing around that is labeled as such. The Remedies also proudly assert their Spanishness and Reed even calls Spain the “Old Country”.

Rob and Flora soon began to talk about family gatherings and cooking. In former days, the men would make corn whiskey at home. “That stuff was strong!” Around Christmas, they would butcher some hogs and make tamales and chorizo. Belma used to prepare a blood pudding with onion, garlic, black pepper, red pepper, and fat and she remembers making pinole “a long time ago.” She would mix cornmeal with milk and cinnamon.

Their daughter Sandy makes tamales when she finds time or during the holidays, but “they’re not like the ones in Natchitoches.” Sandy’s son, on the other hand, could care less about tamales or a bowl of sweetened cornmeal. He would rather have a few slices of pizza. Like her parents, Sandy also identifies herself as Spanish. In the area, Spanish heritage is often put up against Native American. When asked about local Pow-wows, she replies that they are, “like Mardi Gras, you know. You put on a costume, but you don’t really know what’s behind.” As she says this, I glance over at her stepdaughter, Tiffany, who is wearing a Pow-wow t-shirt.

3.4 Super Saturday

I’m walking to Zwolle
Gonna get me some tamales
I like em mild like em hot
Like em anyway you got
That’s why I’m walkin’ to Zwolle

(First stanza to the song/poem *Walkin’ to Zwolle*, author unknown)

On Saturday, October 12, 2002 two important events occurred. One was at the Los Adaes State Historic Site in Robeline and the other was in Zwolle. The Adaeseños Foundation was hosting its second annual Lady of the Pilar Program and meeting at the
State Historic Site while the residents of Zwolle, along with thousands of visitors, were celebrating the 27th annual Tamale Fiesta. Both events addressed the historic past and brought people in from other states.

That day, I left Baton Rouge later than planned after filling up my car with gas and grabbing a large coffee at a nearby Chevron. On the stretch to Lafayette I think to myself, “I’m finally going to the Tamale Festival!” I had written about the festival posters and the food of the area, but I had never attended the biggest annual event in Zwolle. It was not even just an event; it was an experience.

When I pulled into the Los Adaes State Historic Site around lunchtime, the parking lot was very full and I had to park on the grass because all the regular spaces were occupied. I recognized Mike Water’s family’s big van and remembered that he was coming. Before I even got to the door, he was standing outside holding a big binder and gave me a big hug. He could only stay for a few more minutes because he planned to go to the library at Northwestern University to look some things up.

Inside, I saw that William Walker, the Spanish interpreter was there. On a previous visit, I had sat down in his office for a few hours. Walker dresses in costume while working at Los Adaes as a soldado de cuero. He is a highly opinionated man with much to say about history and about other people. The first time I went to see him, he started off by saying, “A lot of people don’t know history.” He went on to tell me about Spanish Lake, Robeline, and Los Adaes, and was a fountain of historical information.

I sat across from Walker, while his alternate persona, Juan de Mora, a soldier from around 1730, explained to me about the Spanish and Indians of the area. The Adaeseños are the descendents of the people who lived at Los Adaes. According to Walker, there are no Indians in the genealogy. But, he explained that there were
intermarriages between Native Americans and Spaniards. Several other people told me that Adaeseños are both Indian and Spanish. Walker is insistent that there is only Spanish in the genealogy.

On the subject of Indians (a topic you no more avoid than that of tamales), Walker talked about the Caddo Adai Indian community. First, he told me that the Caddo Adai never existed as a tribe; there were the Caddo and the Adai, but never the combination. He then gladly said that he does not like Chief Reynolds of the Caddo Adai. “He has money and he attracts poor and ignorant people.” I asked him if it was okay if I wrote all of this down. “Oh, you can quote me on this!” According to Walker, the Caddo Adai want a casino, and Chief Reynolds and others have created something that does not exist. “You can’t create culture. You can’t be something you never were.” He and Chief Reynolds are “mortal enemies.”

Before discovering his Spanish ancestry, Walker started off to prove he was Indian. He is an artist, and wanted to sell his artworks for higher prices. He still likes the “spiritual aspect of Native Americans.” He does remember his grandmother speaking Spanish, though. Today, “Better educated people wish they could speak Spanish.”

“What about the term Mexican?” I asked. “People around here associate Mexican with the term greaser. It will still cause a fight. It was bad to be Spanish, Indian or a combination. But recently it’s okay to be called Spanish.” He is not the only person to pair calling someone a certain term with getting into a physical fight.

Los Adaes is in the area where Spanish Lake is, and according to Walker, “Spanish Lake gave Zwolle people the name greasers.” Zwolle has had a hard time shaking off a bad reputations as a town full of violence and rowdy Mexicans and Indians. Some books written about Zwolle further that reputation. In Quinton Brandon: The
*Marshal Who Tamed Zwolle*, Robert Gentry and Patricia Martinez write that “Zwolle’s first marshal lost his life in the line of duty in 1898. The Louisiana town was rough and rowdy even back then” (Gentry 1999: 11).

Walker is one of the founders of the Adaesaños Foundation, the editor for the group’s publication, and the president and one of the historians for the foundation. On that Saturday, they held a big meeting open to the public. At the meeting, several dozen people were in attendance, coming not just from Louisiana, but also from Texas, and California as well. Some people, besides Walker, were in period dress. The Foundation has around 50 members, from many states. Walker and Linda Flores Harvey, a historian and genealogist, started the Foundation in 1989.

There was a table full of food on one side, including tamales. Around noon, the people were about watch a video. Sitting in front of the television, Linda explained that “Gente de Razon: People of the Missions” is a wonderful video, and she is very excited to be showing it. The video had to do with the missions in Texas and the Native Americans that were there, but Linda wanted to emphasize that Native Americans played an important role.

After the video, I chatted with some of the people who are members of the Foundation. One man said, ‘I don’t want to read about the people on top. Those weren’t my people.” He’s talking about the high-ranking officials. Another person says, “I thought I was something else at first, but then I found out about my Spanish heritage and that was more exciting.”

After discussion of the video, Walker announced that there was a door prize that included chocolate, a molinillo (a handheld wooden device used to make hot chocolate), masa, and a sugar cone. While he gives it away, he says, “You get a little piece of
knowledge and a little bit of heritage with this.” The little bit of knowledge we all left with was learning how masa is added to thicken chocolate.

On a counter, there are stacks of fliers. One of the fliers announces that on May 16-18 of this year, Los Adaes Historic Site is going to host the 1st Annual Soldado Encampment and Fiesta, “where staff and volunteers dress as Spanish soldiers, traders, and settlers will be encamped on the grounds representing life at Los Adaes in the 1700s, a fiesta.” Walker and others travel to the past both when they do historical and genealogical research and when they wear period dress. The visitor is also transported to the past when he or she attends such an event where historical reenactments occur.

Figure 3.9: Banner from Lady of Pilar Program at Los Adaes (photograph by author)
I left Los Adaes before the festivities were over because I wanted to go to the Tamale Fiesta. But before I left, I walked outside and saw where they had placed two banners on the lawn. One had the image of the Lady of Pilar and the other had the Castilla y Leon Spanish flag (Figures 3.9 and 3.10). I drove down Highway 6 and past signs that read “El Camino”. The original Camino Real was a little further off, but Highway 6 is close enough to the real thing. On the 20 or 30 minute drive to Zwolle I scanned the radio for any station and 98.9 F.M., the rock station out of Shreveport comes in clearly. Between songs, the announcer broadcasted that, “our neighbors to the south” are having the 27th annual Tamale Festival. He urged us to leave before sundown if we’re not from Zwolle. This is another way of saying that Zwolle is a dangerous town. What if I stay after sundown? Does anyone besides me think it’s a nice place?
In Zwolle, parking was also an issue. There were so many cars everywhere, so much traffic. I parked across the street from the new festival grounds (Figure 3.11), near the tamale factory and the new Mexican restaurant. I’m not the only one that had a problem finding parking space. Another visitor rolled down the window of her large pickup and complained to two teenage boys about the lack of order in parking. One of them shouted out, “You’re in Zwolle now, baby!” Yes, yes we were. I payed my entrance fee and went to one of the tables nearby.

One of the tables near the entrance had a collection of scrapbooks from Zwolle, one dating back to 1976. I flipped through that one and one from 1985. Each scrapbook was handmade and full of newspaper clipping, artwork, photographs, and writing. I would have loved to have sat there for a few hours and look over them more carefully and wonder if they are available at the library. I moved away from the table and walk around other booths. There’s a sign posted up for a log-cutting contest, a reference to the influence of lumber and lumber mills in the area. In fact, there was a truck full of lumber (perhaps for the contest) near the ferris wheel (Figure 3.12).
In one area of the festival grounds are several tables selling merchandise and I purchased a tote bag and some cards with images of tamale posters from various years, and also grabbed a pamphlet (Figure 3.13). The posters themselves are fascinating. The festival’s committee members decide through a drawing which image will grace the
following year’s poster. The images on the posters have changed along with the images people have of ethnic groups, but they also cause confusion.

The first poster for the festival was made in 1985, when the Tamale Fiesta celebrated its 10th anniversary. It shows a Mexican man with a large mustache and a larger sombrero taking a siesta (Figure 3.14). Next to him is a plate of tamales and in the background are a flamenco dancer and fireworks exploding. The poster was chosen to represent the festival, but its stereotypic Mexican in the foreground conflicted with the stereotypic Spanish lady, conveying the local ambivalence. As Mary Van Rheenen comments regarding the Tamale Festival, “the annual Tamale Fiesta in Zwolle with its Spanish adjectives and Mexican costumes further confounds the puzzling picture of this unique group of people” (Van Rheenen 1987: 95).

Imagery using human figures appeared again the following years. For the 1986 poster, there is a flamenco dancer and three musicians (Figure 3.15); here the Spanish is foreground and in 1987 a man with a sombrero sits with his arm around a woman with
long, dark hair in braids as they stare at the moon behind cypress trees (Figure 3.16). Is the man Mexican? Is the woman Native American?

Figure 3.15: Poster for 1986 (photograph by author)

Figure 3.16: Poster for 1987 (photograph by author)

For the next 11 years, still-life images decorated the posters for the most part, and included objects of tamale construction like metates, corn, and garlic (Figures 3.17 and 3.18). The posters for the years 1991 and 1992 show Zwolle’s history in a scrapbook
fashion with images of the railroad and lumber industries and St. Joseph’s Catholic
curch. The 1993 poster went back to the image of the Mexican in a large sombrero
(Figure 3.19)

Figure 3.17: Poster for 1988 (photograph by author)

Fig 3.18: Poster for 1990 (photograph by author)
Starting in 1996, the imagery focused in more on the Native American aspects of the tamales and the area (Figures 3.20 and 3.21). The still life images do not openly point to a particular group as do the ones with human beings. The 1999 Tamale Festival poster has a Spanish conquistador, a Native American chief, a Native American woman sitting husking corn, and a Mexican with a sombrero (no Mexican man would be complete without one) playing a guitar (Figure 3.22).
Figure 3.20: Part of Poster from 1996

Figure 3.21: Poster for 1998
For the 25th anniversary poster, once again, a stereotypical Mexican man with a sombrero, playing the guitar is in the foreground (Figure 3.23). In the background, is the state of Louisiana and fireworks going off. The following year, a collage of things that represent Zwolle show up in the poster like St. Joseph’s Catholic Church, the railroad tracks, lumber, and tamales (Figure 3.24). But, on the bottom we see “Frontera por vida” written. A guess at the translation would be “border” or “frontier for life” The phrase does not really translate well. In a way, Zwolle has been and is a border and frontier for many things. This seems to be the first use of Spanish in a festival poster. Who can understand what it means? Is its meaning important, or is it just nice to have words in Spanish?
Figure 3.23: Poster for 2000

Fig 3.24: Poster for 2001
Overall, it is important to understand the extent to which the posters represent the ideas of the community with regard to identity. It is also important to note the influence of the marketing and selling of tamales in Zwolle. Many in the community agree that the festival is beneficial for tourism, and the people themselves actively participate in the events. Ethnic labels are misused and identities are sought in the posters and the festival’s material culture. Van Rheenen illustrates the Tamale Festival so well when she states, “as both ethnic celebration and caricature, the Tamale Fiesta did not give the area a new identity any more than its official images depict the people’s heritage. The event itself, however, expresses the complex perplexities of the people’s identity” (Van Rheenen 1987: 117).

Images used to reinforce social class and define cultural insiders and outsiders are now used on posters to advertise Zwolle to tourists and travelers. Over the past 27 years, the images have changed from stereotypes of what is Mexican but considered Spanish, to still life arrangements of food and objects for food preparation related to tamales, to images addressing the Native American history of the community, and again returning to stereotypes. The 2002 poster, however, is different from any other year’s. It has a red cartoon cat flying on a tamale with an interpretation of the American flag in the background (Figure 3.25). The cat is Charlie the Red Cat, by New Orleans artist Jim Tweedy, and invokes George Rodrigue’s famous Blue Dog.

Whether there’s a metate on the poster or a flamenco dancer or a big red cat, there are always tamales. Naturally, that is the focus of the posters. Zwolle’s main claim to fame could in fact be wrapped up in cornhusks. Tamales have come to be regarded as a Creole or mestizo food, just like the area around Zwolle is Creole or mestizo territory.
Tamales are a global food commodity, available year round and all over the world. In Zwolle, you can get them for around 4 dollars a dozen, although they hike the prices up during the festival.

Greg Richards wrote an article, “Gastronomy: An Essential Ingredient in Tourism Production and Consumption” and he noted that “heritage and nostalgia have provided a rich source of signs of identity, particularly in tourism…Given the strong relationship between food and identity, it is not surprising that food becomes an important place marker in tourism promotion” (Richards in Hjalger 2002: 4-5). The Zwolle tamale is indeed a powerful tourism item. The tamale, a food that combines many of the influences in the area (Native American and Mexican), has become something that Zwolle identifies itself with. No trip to Zwolle is complete without the purchase of a dozen tamales.
If you’re ever in Zwolle
Don’t forget to buy tamales
You better get em by the sack
You never know when you’ll be back
That’s why I’m walking to Zwolle

(Last stanza to the song/poem Walkin’ to Zwolle, author unknown)

3.5 Conclusion

Looking back on my interactions with people from the Zwolle area, I realize there is much left to see and learn. Van Rheenen and Shoemaker were able to spend many, many months living with the people from Zwolle and Ebarb. They established friendships that I could never obtain, although their legacy has become misrepresented within the very community that requested their presence. The literature on the area lacks depth, both depth of time and depth of the understanding of daily life in the area.

Reading historical accounts of the region is very instructive. Going back to the beginning of this chapter, I mentioned the phrase "No Man's Land." Louis Nardini wrote No Man's Land in 1961. One of the descriptions in the book is a dramatized fictional recreation, heavily florid and effusive. It reads, "At Los Adaes an incident occurred which changed life of the wilderness frontier. Two sets of Latin eyes met; in them reflected desire, passion, and love." He continues, "Out of the distance, on a pine-scented wind, came the singing voice of a Spanish serenader, accompanied by the soft music of a string instrument…A half-naked savage lurks in the shadows nearby" (Nardini, 1961)

Much of the historical literature is not recent. What is recent is the archaeological and ethno-archaeological research of Los Adaes. George Avery, archaeologist, is passionate about his work and eager to talk about it. The most recent book about Zwolle was the town history written by James Salter.
Salter and all others will tell you that, “Zwolle is a unique place.” The town owes its existence to a railroad and its popularity today because of a festival that revolves around a food. There was a time, as one community member told me, when Native Americans were not allowed to own property in Zwolle – a phenomenon that is deeply ironic since Native Americans were the original inhabitants. The descendents didn’t even call themselves Native Americans, but that has changed a lot. Now they have pow-wows and a local tribal office. Although Salter claims that there is more tolerance now than before between ethnic groups, others, like Bolton, disagree. The term Mexican is, “still used in derision.” There still appears to be a nostalgic yet simultaneously antagonistic relationship towards Mexicans.

Many people I have spoken with tell me contradictory things. First, they will say that residents of Zwolle and nearby areas are not open to outsiders, and this seems to me to be true for the most part. As a Zwolle resident told me during a conversation, “Small communities are reluctant to talk to outsiders.” I was very lucky to have the family of Cody Bruce welcome me into their homes.

On the subject of identities and name changing or name-calling, being called and Indian or a Mexican is still considered derogatory. Mike Water’s aunt, Sally Parrie, told me that you can “still get slugged” for calling someone a Mexican. Sally remembers being called a Mexican in school. An older woman’s mother spoke Spanish, but she doesn’t speak a word of it insisting that “It [speaking Spanish] sounds like they’re fighting.” But, she will say that “People around here are an amalgamate of everything—Spanish, French, Indian, black—all of them. People here are just strange about who they are.”
Zwolle also continues to have a bad reputation. Salter told me during a personal communication that, “Zwolle was a rough town in the early 1930s following the oil boom. There were fights on Saturday night. But, your community is basically what you make it.” People from Zwolle have not always made it violent; outsiders have also contributed to that image by believing and spreading rumors.
4.1 From the Islands to the Brules to Baton Rouge

Canary Islanders, known as Isleños, came to Louisiana between 1778 and 1783 and were established by Spain in the settlements of Galveztown, Valenzuela, Barataria, and Tierra de los Bueyes (in what is now St. Bernard Parish) (Holloway 1997: 1). On August 15, 1777, the Spanish Crown ordered the governor and commandant general of the Canary Islands to recruit 700 men for service in Louisiana. That was to be the start of a nonstop flow of Spaniards to Louisiana, but it never continued on a large scale. Those original Canary Islanders made up the largest arrival of Spaniards to Louisiana (Din 1998: 15). The Isleños came from 5 of the 7 islands (Figures 4.1 and 4.2): Tenerife, Gran Canaria, Gomera, Lanzarote, and La Palma (Hierro and Fuerteventura had no volunteers).

Figure 4.1: Map showing the Canary Islands (Fernández-Arnest 1982)
The first ship of Canary Islanders arrived in New Orleans on the 1st of November in 1778, after stopping in Havana due to sickness on board and to get more supplies (Din 1988: 21). Isleños continued to arrive in New Orleans for the first half of 1779 as well. By July of that year, a total of 1,582 immigrants had stepped onto Louisiana, and by 1783 almost 2,000 Isleños had arrived. The Spanish government gave the immigrants four years worth of supplies and farming tools (Coles 1999: 3).

By the time the Canary Islanders first came to Louisiana, it had been under Spanish rule for fifteen years. Governor Bernardo de Gálvez had the Isleños settle in four areas, two above New Orleans, and two below on opposite banks of the Mississippi River (Din 1988: 28). Galveztown and Valenzuela were upriver, and St. Bernard and Barataria were below New Orleans. There is more documentation on Galveztown than on the other three settlements (see Din 1988, chapter 3).

It was at Galveztown where the Canary Islanders suffered more than elsewhere. They had to deal with numerous diseases, such as fevers, scabies, dropsy, smallpox, and scurvy. Also, many of the Isleños didn’t even have houses. In addition to lack of shelter and widespread bad health, war broke out that year between Spain and Britain. There was
also flooding, and food was scarce. By 1807, Galveztown was basically in ruins. The settlers who made it through all the tragedies moved two miles away and created the settlement of Galvez.

Canary Islanders first arrived in Ascension Parish in 1781. There, on Bayou Lafourche, they founded Valenzuela. Around 800 Acadians joined the Isleños during the mid 1780s (Din 1988: 75). Before the arrival of the Acadians, Valenzuela did not have a church. It was afterwards, upon the insistence of the Acadians, that the settlement got its first church and first priests.

The settlements of Galveztown and Valenzuela exist now only in documents, and as historical markers by the side of roads that tell the public of these settlements that no longer exist. The marker for Galveztown reads: “Old Spanish town at junction of Amite River and Bayou Manchac. Settled by Anglo-Americans, seeking Spanish refuge from American Revolution, and by Canary Islanders (Isleños). Named for Spanish Governor Bernardo de Galvez. Town was abandoned by 1810.” This marker is located near Port Vincent on Highway 42 in Galvez.

The historical marker for Valenzuela is located on Bayou Lafourche on Highway 308 near Bell Alliance. This marker reads: “Founded under Spanish rule c. 1778 by Canary Islanders, later joined by Acadians and others. Post believed to have been on site of Belle Alliance Plantation, 841 acre grant to Don Juan Vives, early Spanish physician officer in Galvez expedition.”

The settlement that lasted the least amount of time was Barataria, and the one that lasted the longest was St. Bernard. Both have poor documentation. Barataria existed from 1779 to 1782 and started off with about 150 Isleños (Din 1988: 47). Hurricanes and
floods were detrimental to the settlement. Many of the Barataria settlers moved to St. Bernard in 1785 because of all the natural disasters (Pearson 1992: 2).

We begin to get information about St. Bernard in documents from 1782, and we find that it was fairly prosperous and self-sufficient by the mid-1780s. There were several Isleños who came to St. Bernard Parish via Cuba, and many even went to the Valenzuela settlement. By 1801, around 80 percent of people in St. Bernard was Isleños.

After Louisiana switched from Spanish hands in 1803, many of the Spaniards from the various settlements remained there, and were not bothered by American rule. Isleños actually had much more mobility after the end of Spanish rule than before. Many moved into Baton Rouge, forming Spanish Town. But over the years, there was an erosion of Isleño communities, with Isleños becoming gallicized (Holloway 1997: 42).

By the early 1900s, assimilation and illiteracy only meant further loss of the Spanish language and folk customs. In 1916, English was mandated in the schools, and in the following decades, Isleños went to work in industries (like oil) run by English speakers. They also fought in many of the country’s wars. According to Din, “the most disruptive force to affect the Canary Islanders and their way of life in 160 years of living in Louisiana was WWII” (Din 1988: 126) brought improved communications, better schools, and more job opportunities.

Gilbert Din, in The Canary Islanders of Louisiana, writes that, “of the four Isleño settlement, St. Bernard alone has retained its identity to the present” (Din 1988: 51). It is true that descendants of the first Canary Islanders in the area still live in St. Bernard, but I disagree with his statement that it is the only one that has retained its identity to the present. I believe that the descendants of the settlers of Galveztown and Valenzuela, although they may not still live by those settlements, also retain their Isleño identity.
The Isleños of St. Bernard Parish have had a lot more contact with other Spanish speaking groups than have the Galvez and Valenzuela Isleños (Holloway 1997: 140). Pearson writes that in contrast to the other Isleño settlements, the St. Bernard community has retained more of a distinctive Spanish identity, “although, like the ‘bruli’ dialect, the use of Isleño is steadily decreasing” (Pearson 1992: 3).

It is true that the St. Bernard Canary Islander descendants probably are the best known, although this is rapidly changing. They even have a museum in St. Bernard Parish dedicated to the Canary Islanders of Louisiana. Frank Fernandez, a school principal and the historian for St. Bernard parish in the late 1960s, emphasized the link of the, “Isleño community’s origins to the Canaries. To help preserve that link, Fernandez urged Irvan Perez and several others to form the Los Isleños Heritage and Cultural Society” in St. Bernard (Bourg 2001: 39). In the past decade or so, several other Canary Islander heritage societies have been formed. Internal strife has resulted in splinter groups, and there is almost a sense of competition among the societies for publicity and for the honor of hosting various events.

There had always been negative attitudes towards the Brule communities, that continued into the 20th century (Holloway 1997: 45). They were seen as backwards, illiterate, and poor. This mirrors the attitudes people have towards the residents of Zwolle. The brules, named after the slash and burn method used to clear the land, are pretty much abandoned today. People have moved out of the Brules into other areas like Donaldsonville and Baton Rouge. Charles Holloway has documented the lives of Brule dwellers and writes that, “for a variety of reasons . . . the Isleños of Ascension parish, or “Brule” dwellers, while not as completely isolated as the St. Bernard group, were able to
maintain their own community and language and culture until after the beginning of the 20th century” (Holloway 1997: 2).

As far as the Spanish language goes, just like in Zwolle, the Isleños are rapidly losing their language. There are a few older people who speak Spanish, and most are located in St. Bernard. You find loan words in Isleño lexicon from American Spanish, French, and English (Pearson 1992: iv).

In many of the reading I have done about the Canary Islanders, they are not classified as Spanish. Maria Elena Vega wrote her thesis “Cultural Continuity Among the Isleños of Louisiana.” At the beginning, she writes, “The Canary Islanders of Louisiana…are not well known in Louisiana history. Only slight interest has been taken in this ethnic group partly because their numbers were small in comparison with the numerous French, Spanish, and Americans who settled in Louisiana” (Vega 1998: 1). So, Isleños are different from the mainland Spaniards.

While the Louisiana Canary Islanders I have spoken with emphasize that they are Isleños, but they will also claim their Spanishness. A lot of people do not even know that a place called the Canary Islands exists, so perhaps using the word Spanish will trigger some kind of more familiar connection. Many of the Isleños are enthusiastic about telling people about their background (historical, ethnic, etc.) perhaps because they have a lot more documentation than do the people from Zwolle. They have access to passenger lists from the late 1700s, photographs, maps, diaries, and books, and there are formal organizations that facilitate access to the information.
4.2 Canary Islanders Heritage Society of Louisiana

Figure 4.3: Canary Islanders Heritage Society of Louisiana logo

In the United States, there are seven formal Canarian Heritage Organizations, three of which are in Louisiana: the Canary Islanders Heritage Society of Louisiana (LA) (Figure 4.3), the Canary Islands Home at Miami (FL), the Canary Islands Descendants Association of San Antonio (TX), the Canary Islands Descendants Association of St. Bernard (LA), the Los Isleños Heritage and Cultural Society of St. Bernard (LA), the Friends of the Canary Islands (TX), and The Society of Hispanic Historical and Ancestral Research (CA).

In 1996, the Canary Islanders Heritage Society of Louisiana, a non-profit organization, was created. As a formal organization, its main research interests are genealogy and history. The society works with universities, museums, and other institutions to gain public recognition. Members of this society trace their family names to those who settled in Ascension Parish, and many still live nearby. On the first Saturday of every month, they all meet in one of the rooms at the State Archives building in Baton Rouge. Each meeting deals with a different topic, and guest speakers are very frequent.

I became a member of the group in 1999, and have attended most of the meetings through 2003. From January of 2003 to August of 2003, I was a board member.
Elections for president, vice-president, treasurer, secretary, and several board members have taken place every November, and during the December Christmas party, the new officers have been inducted. However, this practice will change in 2003, members have become uncomfortable combining a holiday party with election tensions.

The Canary Islanders Heritage Society was established by a group of people with Isleño background (from the Galveztown and Valenzuela settlements) who decided to “preserve the history and culture of Canarian ancestors.” The Canary Islanders Heritage Society of Louisiana includes the history of all the Canarian settlements, but there is a focus on the Galveztown and Valenzuela settlements. As of April 2003, there are 78 members in the group, most of whom live in Louisiana. As opposed to other Isleño heritage groups in the United States, Canarian kinship is not a requirement for the Canary Islanders Heritage Society of Louisiana. All it takes to become a member is interest in the society and its objectives.

The mission statement for the society reads:

The Canary Islanders Heritage Society of Louisiana, founded in 1996, exists to document, preserve, and celebrate the heritage of our Spanish ancestors from the Canary Islands who immigrated to Louisiana in the 18th century. We focus on the original Canarian settlements founded in Galveztown, Valenzuela, and St. Bernard, and on later Canarian resettlements within the state. We also promote friendship and cultural exchanges between Louisiana and the Canary Islands. (printed on society newsletters and available on their website: www.canaryislanders.org)

So, if a person supports what the group is expressing in their mission statement, then all one has to do is become a member and pay fifteen dollars annual dues. Members receive a newsletter (Figure 4.4) several times a year, e-mail updates, and a membership card (Figures 4.5 and 4.6). Each newsletter contains a preview calendar of upcoming
talks and articles on previous events, the president’s message, web sites of interest, photos, and other articles.

Figure 4.4: Sample newsletter for the Canary Islanders Heritage Society of Louisiana

Figure 4.5: Front of card for members of the Canary Islanders Heritage Society of Louisiana
The list of objectives and activities of the Canary Islanders Heritage Society of Louisiana continues to grow. The most important items of interest are genealogy and history, like the Adaeseños Foundation in Robeline. The Canary Islanders Heritage Society of Louisiana has participated in numerous programs and exhibitions at the Baton Rouge State Archives, the International Heritage Festival in downtown Baton Rouge, the Isleño Fiesta in St. Bernard, the Historic Donaldsonville Museum, and the East Ascension Library in Gonzales. Last summer, a group of members presented a talk about the society at Louisiana State University during the Summer Institute for Teachers entitled, “The Hispanic Presence in Louisiana.”

The group would like to work with state historical archaeologists to find out more about the Valenzuela and Galveztown settlements. Also, they would like to put together a program having to do with Hispanic trails and markers in Louisiana. At one of the recent board meetings, some of the members expressed interest in setting up a formal speakers’ bureau, so when people (at a library or school, for example) want a speaker, the society will have someone already on hand to speak.

John and Janelle Hickey have already given many public talks about the Canary Islanders. They recently came up with a skit in which they take on the personas of
Isleños from the 18th/19th century, and talk about their daily life and contributions to society. In their skit, they wear Canary Islander historical costumes. Members are often encouraged to wear folk attire to meetings and public events, and a lot of thought and work go into putting the costumes together (Figure 4.7). Earlier this year, John gave a talk at a local Louisiana Archaeological Society talk at Bluebonnet Library on Galveztown.

John Hickey is an honorary Isleño. He does not have Canary Islander background, but since he has done so much work writing and speaking about the Canary Islanders in Louisiana, he has been granted honorary status. His wife, Janelle, is from Galvez (about half a mile from where Galveztown was), and is a descendant of Canary Islander. She was at the very first society meeting. When asked what the society means to her, Janelle explains that it helps “make people aware of their Canary Heritage.” She feels that the movement of people on ships from the Canary Islands to here and the

Figure 4.7: Photo from the Canary Islanders Heritage Society of Louisiana 2002 Christmas party.
connection to the rest of the world, “is a very vast thing. Most people know nothing of this.”

Other ongoing projects for the Canary Islanders Heritage Society of Louisiana are to develop family genealogy for any interested Isleño, documenting and publishing articles related to the Canarian militiamen who came to Louisiana, searching archival resources for maps and other information related to the settlements and their inhabitants, collecting old photographs, publishing information on the society, and fostering communication and creating bonds between the society and other heritage groups and people from the Canary Islands.

A fair number of the Canary Islanders Heritage Society of Louisiana members have had the opportunity to go to the Canary Islands. They have, over the years, established a relationship with the government there and rapport with individuals. Jean Nauman, fluent in Spanish and an expert in native dress, is the correspondent for the Canary Island Affairs panel. Jean carries out all of the correspondence between the Canary Islanders Heritage Society of Louisiana and the representatives of the Gobierno de Canarias. The society also has an advisory council to C.I.F.E.C. (Canary Islands Foundation for Education and Culture).

Many of those who have gone to the Canary Islands have said how at home they feel there, and that there is a strong connection between themselves and the land and people. One member who went on a trip in 1998 said, “It heightened and strengthened my ties to the people. I saw people there that looked just like my cousins, just like me.” Another member, who went last year, told me that the trip, “Gave a feel of layout, to go back on our own.” She went on to say, “I never felt I lost so much not speaking the language before.”
Overall, there is a sense of kinship throughout the group, both real and fictive. Joan calls Paul her “cousin” because she traced their family history and found a connection several generations back. Many of the groups’ women take on the role of an older aunt for me, so I have metaphorical kinship ties to them as well even though I cannot trace my family tree back to the Canary Islands. The metaphor of kinship can be applied to travel too. Nezar AlSayyad uses the kinship metaphor, “as a model of the relationship between past and present, alliance and descent, inheritance and appropriation” (AlSayyad 2001: 69).

4.3 Heritage Festivals that Were and the One that Was Not

In the picturesque downtown area of Donaldsonville stands B. Lemann & Bro. Building, once the oldest family-owned and operated department store in Louisiana; it now houses the Historic Donaldsonville Museum (Figure 4.8). The Lemann & Bro. Building is also a vestige of the large Jewish community that used to be in Donaldsonville.

Figure 4.8: Historic Donaldsonville Museum (photo by Richard Sexton from Vestiges of Grandeur)

On the last weekend of March, the Museum holds its annual Heritage Day celebration. Every year, the museum and the city of Donaldsonville honors and
celebrates one of the many cultural groups that helped shape the area. One year, it had an Italian festival and another year it had an African-American festival. During the last three days of March of 2001, the museum sponsored the event “Heritage Days: A Salute to the Canary Islander Settlements of Valenzuela and Galveztown.”

As noted in chapter 2, heritage can take on various forms, including material ones. These cultural markers announce individual and collective memories and identity. When cultural markers do take material form, representations of heritage take on an active role as well.

In addition to the permanent exhibits, museum staff opened other areas of the spacious Lemann building for the Canary Islands displays. Strewn about the rooms were artwork and handcrafts from both the Canary Islands and Louisiana. Palmetto leaves and hand-drawn murals depicting rural scenes from early Louisiana decorated the walls. Some of the displays featured maps of Louisiana, maps of the individual Canary Islands, historic documents written in Spanish, French and English, and books offering information on the history of Louisiana during the Spanish Period. Another display included a vast collection of photos, reproductions of nineteenth and early twentieth century portraits of Isleño families and the places they lived in Louisiana (Figure 4.9). There were also live performances and demonstrations for both children and adults by local artisans. Traditional pirogue and boat builders, Choctaw and Houma basket weavers, storytellers, woodcarvers, and regional vintners were among the many that performed for the visitors.
Prior to *Heritage Days*, the Donaldsonville Museum had a display in the main room on the Isleño communities in anticipation of the March festival. The display at the museum and a former display of customary ways of celebrating Christmas in Louisiana at the State Archives the previous fall accentuated the concentration on the Canary Island folkways. Folkloric costumes, maps, lace work, and other cultural artifacts made the journey to the islands an instant and immediate one. All these markers are a form of travel. The idea of travel conjures up thoughts of great geographical distances, but this travel is also one across ethnic boundaries and between groups, travel in time (to the past), and travel between the public and private realms of the groups involved.

One of the members of the Canary Islanders Heritage Society of Louisiana, a former president, told me one day over a calzone lunch how the group seeks “stamps of approval”. Such stamps come from universities or grant sponsors and give them the hope and comfort that the public recognition they are working for will in fact be obtained. As a result of the work of many heritage societies and Isleños, the current edition of the textbook for Louisiana History for eighth-grade students devotes a section to the Isleños.
Perhaps the museum also provided a stamp for the group, through the festival. Newspapers in Ascension, Assumption, East Baton Rouge, and West Baton Rouge all invited the public to attend the *Heritage Days*. While the group assigns a certain responsibility to the museum and to the public, the public assigns responsibility to the group, to the museum, and to the festival.

I was able to meet with Joan Aleman, one of the members of the Canary Islanders Heritage Society of Louisiana, the museums’ director, Lewis Savoie, and another staff member, Kay, the February right before the event. It was a “behind the scenes” look at how a festival is planned. It was already in the late stages, but I got to hear about it before the general public did. Every year, as explained to me by Lewis, “One of eight heritages of Donaldsonville is observed. We’ve had French, Jewish, and Italian. There are also Germans, Lebanese, Isleños, African-Americans, and Anglo-Americans.”

He went on to explain that the annual event is usually two days, but that year it would be three. “The first two days are for the schools in Ascension and Assumption parishes and we want about 1200 students, plus the overflow of parents and elderly. Saturday is ‘Market Day’ and that’s a relaxed day for the artists. People will get to meet the artists and we’ll feature Canary Islander dancers. Saturday at the museum is gathering for the Isleños and families and we’ll have educational exhibits with photos, maps, and articles.”

The museum had received a Decentralized Arts Funding grant through the Arts Council of Greater Baton Rouge, a program funded by the State Legislature through the Louisiana Division of the Arts. There were to be various “stages” – one for the storytellers, another for the moss doll-maker, another for the boat-carver, etc.
During the first two days, the children would come in groups of 50 and go through the stages every 20 minutes (Figure 4.10). On Saturday, there would be Market Day for the grownups and visitors. They had planned to have a wine-making competition and a cook-off, but those events never happened. Instead, the cheerleaders from Ascension Catholic School sold jambalaya and dessert and local wineries held wine-tasting demonstrations and sold bottles of their wine.

While buying a bottle of muscadine wine from the St. Amant winery on Market Day, I looked over and noticed a model of what an early Canary Islander village might have looked like (Figure 4.11). There was a sign explaining how the model indicated “How the Isleños lived, worked, and played.” Just a room away, a group of teenagers in traditional Canarian dress were dancing.
Museums are “temple[s] of authenticity” for a nation or a culture. (Richard Handler in Shaffer 2001: 122) A shared national consciousness depends upon the collection, preservation, and display of this culture. At the Historic Donaldsonville Museum, the building provided an atmosphere where the authenticity of the Canary Islands and Louisiana could be displayed. The event, like the building, also was a temple.

Myriad simultaneous journeys, travels, and places were experienced by many at the Historic Donaldsonville Museum’s Heritage Days: A Salute to the Canary Islander Settlements of Valenzuela and Galveztown. The Canary Islanders Heritage Society of Louisiana not only gained public recognition, but was able to take visitors to the museum and back in time, back on the boats, and back to the Canary Islands. They were both Louisianans and Isleños. Through performances and demonstrations by artists, and by way of the displays on those last three days in March, the artists were able to express their identities, whether Native American, Cajun or Isleño. The festival was in fact a vehicle for travel and a place where nebulous concepts such as ethnicity, heritage, and homeland were performed.
On March 27, 2002, a large group of people congregated in the Ascension of our Lord Catholic Cemetery in Donaldsonville. It was at the cemetery where members of the Canary Islanders Heritage Society of Louisiana gathered with their guests from overseas, from the Canary Islands. Several government officials, musicians, students, friends, and a dance troop had arrived the previous week for the St. Bernard Isleño festival. That day, they were touring the old Isleño settlements in Ascension Parish.

The year before, on the 7th of October, a permanent monument was placed in the cemetery, near the entrance. The handcrafted monument (Figure 4.13) was described by the project chairman Catherine Prokop as, "a tangible symbol of our humble attempt to honor the lives (of the Isleños)- not their deaths." The marker would, "speak out as a voice from yesterday, dedicated today, with the hope that those who live tomorrow will be inspired to search out their rich heritage as a Canary Islander descendant." While Prokop's statement hinted at the challenges that the process of cultural survival faces, that
day those from the Canary Islands are simply amazed to learn of their own ancestor's survival half-way across the world.

Figure 4.13: Canary Islander marker in Donaldsonville cemetery (photograph by author)

After walking around, looking at the many names on the gravestones in the cemetery, the group moved on towards a church hall in Belle Rose, just ten minutes away. There, they were introduced to more South Louisiana cooking.

Members of the Canary Islanders Heritage group had taken care selecting the menu to serve the visitors, before settling on jambalaya, sweet potatoes, salad, and dinner rolls. To many Louisianans, jambalaya was the Louisiana equivalent of Spanish paella, but to the Canarians it was just too spicy. Several people left generous portions of peppery rice with meat and whipped sweet potatoes on their plates. One of the musicians sitting next to me at one of the lunch table, a guitarist in his twenties, asked me, "Why does everything have to be so spicy here? I can't eat anything!"

Regardless of whether they enjoyed the meal or not, they enjoyed their visit. Home addresses and e-mails were exchanged between the society members and the visitors from the Canary Islands without hesitation and with smiles and much excitement.

To the Canary Islanders Heritage Society of Louisiana, the gathering was another event
for sharing their historical and cultural preservation and educational work with the public. They pointed out similar surnames and practiced their Spanish. For the Isleños, it was a chance to teach Canarians more about the Louisiana aspect and, in turn, to learn more from the Canarians about the Islands.

As noted in other sections, the society has participated in the St. Bernard Isleño festival. In 2002, the heritage society of St. Bernard held their 27th festival and over 50 people from the island of Gran Canaria went. The Canary Islanders Heritage Society of Louisiana newsletter afterwards noted that, “the fiesta provided a great opportunity for members of our Society to meet “cousins” from Gran Canaria.” Here, as it often is, kinship is highlighted.

For the 2003 St. Bernard festival, the expected visitors were not able to come to Louisiana for various reasons, but in 2002, the Canary Islanders Heritage Society of Louisiana was able to spend time with them. On Friday evening of March 22, 2002 the Los Isleños Heritage and Cultural Society of St. Bernard had a special program for the Canarians. At that program, with wining, dining, and dancing involved, the Canary Islanders Heritage Society of Louisiana members participated in the event. Every time the society is able to get together with the public, it’s like a high for them.

Every year, the society represents the Canary Islands at the International Festival in Baton Rouge. During the parade, a member of the society carries the flag of the Canarian Archipelago. In 2002, I volunteered with Joan and others to set up the booth and talk to people. The morning of the festival, Baton Rouge was practically flooded. The rain was pouring downtown when I met Joan and we went in search of the coordinator since they had not canceled the event. She seemed surprised that we would even think that the event should be canceled even though we were the only people setting
up something. Other people setting up decided to call it quits and called us brave for putting up with the high winds and cold rain. After an hour of struggling with the booth, we gave up. There was no reason to ruin all the displays and artifacts. We found out later on that they did cancel the event. Since I have known them, the Canary Islander Heritage Society of Louisiana has participated in numerous public events around the state. They now have exhibit boards ready-to-go and they have prepared talks on certain subjects. Perhaps some people around Zwolle, in addition to some of the Native American groups and the Adaeseños, will get a chance to put something together. Maybe the Canarians could even have something at the Tamale Fiesta.

4.4 Conclusion

During this summer of 2003, I interviewed some of the Society’s member for an oral history project. After joining the Canary Islanders Heritage Society of Louisiana, the T.Harry Williams Center for Oral History gave a workshop on how to conduct oral histories. Several months later, I brought up the idea of an oral history project to them again. For some people, the idea didn’t even faze them. They were there for genealogy and genealogy alone. Others wanted to get more information and wrote their names on a project sign up sheet. I had addressed one of the meetings to urge them to participate in the project, and it was even put on the official Society’s goals sheet. Several months went by and nothing happened. Even after the director and assistant director from L.S.U.’s Oral History Center had come to talk at one of the meetings attended a sort of Oral History party at the former president’s house, the enthusiasm would quickly peak only to fade in a matter of days. Although collecting oral histories was a goal of the group, it clearly was not a top priority.
Earlier this year, I made the decision that I was going to just give them a deadline, which got the project moving, to start interviewing, and to start sharing their stories. This is a group made up mostly of retired people with only a few young individuals. Besides age, internal tensions are also a problem.

Whenever I brought up the oral history project, the other members would refer to it as my project. I wanted them to realize it was not mine, and I wondered if they confused it with my thesis research. This is something for the group. At times, the whole process was disheartening and it still surprises me how long the idea floated around before someone made a one-hour commitment to sit down with a person and talk.

In *From Memory to History*, Barbara Allen and William Montell write that, “When the local history topic one chooses to research deals with a subject or a group of people about which very little information exists in written records, the past must be reconstructed almost entirely from oral sources” (Allen 1981: 73) For the Canary Islanders Heritage Society, the past had been partially reconstructed from genealogies and settlement histories. Oral histories would complement family trees and add depth to dates and names. It was only after some members participated in oral histories that they began to appreciate the value of the interview, and the fact that it would be available for others to listen to.

One of the group members I interviewed was Dennis Delaney. He, along with Deanna Corbo, founded the Heritage Society. He had been a History major at Tulane and had aspirations of being an actor when he was younger. When I asked him what kind of hobbies he enjoyed, he immediately said, “One big hobby right now is genealogical history.” He became interested, “…because after twelve years of acting, I married my wife and moved to Mississippi. There wasn’t a type of theater that I was interested in
over there…I had to find something that was not as time-consuming…At least I could do it at the house.” It was Delaney’s father who first ignited his desire for history. That love for history would lead him to dive into genealogy and learn about his Isleño background. He told me, “The more I do genealogy, the more I can clearly see that there are a massive amount of Canary Island descendants in southern Louisiana.”

In 1995, he went to the Canary Islands with one of the St. Bernard groups (at that time, they had split into two because of their own internal problems). There on the island of Tenerife he was approached by a man who asked what he was up to and why he was there. Delaney explained that he was looking for information on one of his ancestors. It turned out that the stranger had just the papers he was looking for and they ended up eating dinner together later on that night at his brother’s house. Not only did the two men know about the ancestor Delaney was researching, but they also knew about the St. Bernard Heritage group Delaney belonged to and the problems it was experiencing. One of the brothers asked why the two St. Bernard groups couldn’t work together. Delaney said, “the only way you could do that is if you formed another group somewhere else.” And that is just what Delaney did. When he went back to Louisiana, he formed that other group.

Through Delaney, I learned that the group was initially called Los Isleños de Galvez. His reason was that Los Isleños means Islanders and no other islanders go by that name. He threw in de Galvez because, “without Galvez, you wouldn’t have the Canary Islanders here.” Delaney left the Canary Islanders Heritage Society of Louisiana years ago…because of internal problems but he feels that the awareness for the group is evolving. Every year, a little information about the society more gets out.
Mary Domingue was also at the first meeting of the Canary Islanders Heritage Society of Louisiana. She is still with the group, and she has taken a great interest in participating in and continuing the oral history project. Like the others, her main hobbies are genealogy research and Canary Islander research. Mary and fellow “member-since-the-start” Bill Carmena sat down one morning at Mary’s house in Brusly to interview each other. When Bill asked her about growing up in White Castle she said, “I grew up believing that my heritage was Acadian.” Later on she added, “I’m very excited about my Hispanic heritage. I enjoy learning more about it and…I guess to me, it was such a great discovery when I grew up for so many years thinking I was Acadian French and found out, of course, that I’m Hispanic. And I have always had a special place in my heart for Spanish people.” All of the members express this sentiment – this feeling of connection to Spanish people. Through the Society, they want others to feel this too. When Bill Carmena went to the Canary Islands in 1998, he said, “You get to see people that look like people you are kin to” that “it’s good-to-be-home” kind of feeling.”

Since July, five interviews have been completed. The Canary Islanders Heritage Society of Louisiana has spent about seven years working with the public, and plans to continue with their ambition to document the history of the Canary Islands and of the Canary Islanders in Louisiana.

Many of the members have spent time tracing their family tree back as far as possible. Many of the members are older and retired and although they still lead busy lives, they find the time to indulge in meticulous genealogical research. While there used to be more emphasis placed on the Canary Islands than the Isleños in Louisiana, that is now changing. Every year, the society participates in more and more events around the state. They want people to be aware that Canary Islanders were in Louisiana and are an
important group. In October of 2002, The Canarian Islanders Heritage Society of Louisiana participated in “Hispanic Heritage Week” at L.S.U. During the weeklong event, a series leading up to the Bicentennial celebration of the Louisiana Purchase, three members spoke at the International Student Center on campus. Joan Aleman, Jean Nauman, and John Hickey wore traditional folkloric dress and talked to university students and faculty about the society and how it, “promotes Canarian heritage as a visible and tangible examples of the enduring presence of Spain in Louisiana.”
CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION: TRAVEL LOG

“Travel is useful, it exercises the imagination. All the rest is disappointment and fatigue. Our journey is entirely imaginary. That is its strength.” (Céline)

“The past is a foreign country.” (David Lowenthal)

"The analysis of culture into traits or elements and their subsequent treatment often violated principles of historical method by robbing them of their context." (Eggan 1975: 199)

I’m sitting at my desk at home again, looking up at that map of Louisiana and once again I think about the people I have met and the travels we have all undertaken. More light is being shed on the under documented groups in and around Zwolle and the Isleños from settlements other than St. Bernard. Neither of these two groups are easily defined, and even though they are separated by hours of car travel, they share many things in common. They are both a part of Spanish colonial settlements and they are both tied to a rural atmosphere (see Table 5.1). Today, they are also electronically connected to the entire world. The town of Zwolle and the Canary Islanders Heritage Society of Louisiana have their own websites (www.zwollela.net and www.canaryislanders.org) and they encourage involvement from the public in their quest for recognition.

Along with the travels people made to Louisiana centuries ago, whether to Los Adaes or Zwolle or Valenzuela or Galveztown, people today take journeys when they bring the past into the present, when they try to learn more about their history, and heritage and into the future when they decide what they want to do with their knowledge. As one member of the Canary Islanders Heritage Society of Louisiana commented, “I’m very excited about my heritage. It’s a whole new adventure to find out who you are and
also to realize that you aren’t Cajun French.” This same member sees the society as “a vehicle by which I can learn more about who I am. It’s access to an extended family.”

Table 5.1: Comparison chart of the two Hispanic communities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Zwolle</th>
<th>The Canary Islanders Heritage Society of Louisiana</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Origins and History</strong></td>
<td>Early 18th century settlements - Northwest Louisiana - Settlers from Spain and Mexico - Some genealogy - Lack of documents</td>
<td>Late 18th century settlements - Southeast Louisiana - Settlers from Spain, specifically the Canary Islands - Focus on genealogy - Access to genealogical documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Residence</strong></td>
<td>People live in rural areas. People from Spanish settlements in area still live in the same area, but focus is in Zwolle</td>
<td>People from the Canary Islander settlements have dispersed and now mostly live in cities. The Society is based in Baton Rouge, but the members have ancestors from old, rural settlements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Public/Private</strong></td>
<td>Annual Zwolle Tamale Festival Hard for outsiders to join community, especially if for brief moments Not eager(?) to talk to the public</td>
<td>Attend and participate in a wide-range of festivals and events, but no event specifically for group Easy to become a member of the Society Group eager to talk to public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organizations</strong></td>
<td>Adaeseños Foundation Community does not work with a major/specific organization</td>
<td>Canary Islanders Heritage Society Society works with universities, libraries, and museums</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Identities</strong></td>
<td>Identities are fraught No real homeland focus other than Spain in the distant past Mexican and Native American</td>
<td>Many Society members have been to the Canary Islands Pilgrimage to and focus on the Canary Islands Cajun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Perceptions by Outsiders</strong></td>
<td>Zwolle has a bad reputation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It is interesting to note that there are many society members that do not have Spanish surnames. Instead, they have French surnames and their grandparents probably spoke Cajun French at home.

People may not sit down during the day and say to themselves, “Hey, I need to take a journey and figure out who I am and where I came from.” But they may do so during an event such as the Zwolle Tamale Fiesta or a meeting of the Canary Islanders Heritage Society of Louisiana at the State Archives in Baton Rouge.

The Isleño Heritage Days festival in Donaldsonville, and its related material culture are vehicles used for travel. In this case, it was travel by the public to the Canary Islands and the diaspora. Although the Isleños have been in Louisiana since the late 1700s, there has been great emphasis placed on displaying what is traditional and authentic in the Canary Islands while the experience of the immigrants in Louisiana has often downplayed in the past.

Recently, more people are interested and involved in presenting the experiences of the Isleños in Louisiana. Proximity with the Canary Islands and with the past is achieved through displays and presentations. The first Canary Islanders may have stepped off the boat in Louisiana in 1778, but they continue to arrive today through cultural performances. In addition, trips to the Canary Islands are made by Isleños through those same performances. The festival is transformed into an arena for cognitive pilgrimages and it allows the concept of the idealized homeland to be performed.

While most of the Isleños focus on Canary Islander (and sometimes battle (?) with Cajun) identity, the people in Zwolle struggle with various identities. Shoemaker writes that, “the people from the Zwolle-Ebarb-Noble area do form a distinct group geographically,
linguistically, genetically, and culturally, but an awareness of this entity does not answer the opening question – who these people are – in a convenient one-word label” (Shoemaker 1988: 71). In Zwolle, there are people like Mike Waters and his family, who have also taken great interest in their family backgrounds but, to my knowledge, there is no significant organization in the area for people to gather and share their findings. The Adaeseno Foundation is the closest thing, but it is limited to a specific group of people and can be exclusive.

Native Americans are more active in events in the area and more residents are actively asserting their Native American-ness. The Mexican vs. Spanish vs. Indian is much more complicated, though. The term Spanish seems to be the safest term. Watch out if you bring up Mexican. It might be some time before people stop attaching a negative stigma to the term Mexican. And it also may be a while before they realize that some things they think are Spanish (from Spain) are really Mexican.

The Tamale Fiesta is a good example of how ethnic labels can change frequently with one event. The “white guys” who set up the festival wanted to celebrate the Spanish history of the area, as in Spanish from Spain. They chose, by way of light-hearted humor, the tamale as a symbol of this; a food that is not Spanish. Images chosen to represent the festival started out being things like Mexican men with big sombreros. Slowly, Native American symbolism crept in and strangely, once a Spanish conquistador popped up in a poster.

Since there is so much confusion over what is or is not Mexican, some people in Zwolle dislike the whole idea of the event itself. I remember on one of the first visits I made to Zwolle, the woman who was the secretary of St. Joseph’s Catholic Church said angrily, “They (the people who organize the festival) are going the wrong way – to
Mexico.” Shoemaker noticed that, “community members who find the Mexican imagery of the Fiesta distasteful point out that it is the whitefaces who put it on” (Shoemaker 1988: 110). But then, “many residents who perceive no slight in the Fiesta symbols seem to interpret them as generic Hispanic” (Shoemaker 1988: 111).

*Hispanic* still puzzles people too. *Hispanic* is still to close to *Mexican* for some. Paul Brass writes that, “ethnicity is an alternative form of social organization and identification to class, but it is a contingent and changeable status that, like class, may or may not be articulated in particular contexts of particular times” (Hutchinson 1996: 86). One woman from Zwolle checks off the box for Native American on records and forms while claiming to be Spanish. A member of the Canary Islanders Heritage Society of Louisiana began checking off the Hispanic box on records a few years ago after she discovered Spanish surnames in her family tree. To this person, Spanish means that you are, “a descendant of Spain” and Hispanic means you are, “anyone who believes they are…who speaks Spanish.”

While dealing with the complex issues of ethnicity and heritage, representation occurs. Gleach, in the article “Powehatan Identity in Anthropology and Popular Culture (and Vice Versa)” explains that representation is how you appear as someone in the public eye. “Representation may be seen as doing the work of identity [and] they are often consciously deployed to effect a particular end. Image seems potentially much more complex than identity” (Lefler 2002: 7). Again, representations differ among the two groups. The Canary Islanders Heritage Society of Louisiana focuses on documented facts and displays the Isleño culture. The people in and around Zwolle don’t necessarily have an easily identifiable direct link to Spain and Native American and Mexican histories are added to the mix.
Ethnicity may no longer be considered a liability. All over, people are claiming to be something. The problem lies in the difference between what you claim and what others claim for you. Heritage, tied to ethnicity, has also become a good thing now, and something just as marketable. People want to experience their heritage and other people’s heritage as tourists, at a safe distance.

While Louisiana continues to celebrate the Louisiana Purchase, we should reflect on who and what helped shape the Louisiana state we know. We should realize that in order to create, one has to travel (whether physically or mentally). As Paul Stoller reflects in *The Taste of Ethnographic Things*, “in language and life, human beings are meanderers; we continually take detours” (Stoller 1989: 142).
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VITA

Dominica Ramirez was born in Palo Alto, California, in 1979. She has lived in New York, Louisiana, and Virginia. She received her bachelor of arts in anthropology from Louisiana State University in 2000 and will complete her master of arts in anthropology in May, 2004.