EVANGELINE PARISH HISTORY

THE OPELOUSAS COUNTRY

In 1807 Louisiana was divided into nineteen separate division called Parishes. Opelousas Country later became St. Landry Parish. EVANGELINE PARISH was originally a part of the old Spanish Opelousas Country.

THE BIRTH OF A PARISH

In the early days all the people that lived in the northern part of old St. Landry Parish lived far from the Parish seat. Some having to travel as far 40 or 50 miles to pay their taxes, attend court or tend to other legal business. There were almost no roads, few bridges, and the distance to Opelousas was a hadrship to the people. They decided they needed to be in a separate parish. They believed they were being left out of politics and jobs. Talk of a creating a new parish first begun in the year 1890. When nothing happen it was again brought up in 1904. It gained strength but those living in Opelousas opposed the division. Than the fight began among each community that wanted the new parish seat located in their town. May 13, 1908 the bill providing for the creation of Evangeline Parish was introduced by P.L. Fontenot. May 21 it passed the House, June 11 passed the Senate, and June 15 was signed by Governor J.Y. Sanders. Three days later on June 19, it became a law. The new parish was placed in the Seventh Congressional District, and in the First Circuit Court of Appeals. The location of the parish seat was left up to the voters of the parish. On April 12, 1909 the voters picked Ville Platte as the Parish seat. The town of Eunice feeling bitter over not being selected declared her desire to remain in St. Landry Parish. The new parish was given one representative in the State Legislature. This act was contested in the courts case Sandoz et al v. Governor Sanders. The act was said to be unconstitutional, the set number of representatives for the state was one hundred and sixteen. To add one more would be a violation of the Constitution of 1898. On May 12, 1910 P.L. Fontenot introduced another bill providing for the creation of Evangeline Parish. He was real careful this time that all legal stipulations were complied with. One amendment was added to change the boundary lines so that Eunice could remain in St. Landry Parish. On June 20, 1910 it was signed by Governor J.Y. Sanders and became Law. The new parish was described as comprising of more than six hundred twenty-five square Miles, and more than seven thousand inhabitants.
THE EARLY PIONEERS

The first settlers who wandered from the mother post of Opelousas to the Evangeline area kept no records. Evidence indicates that the Opelousas Country was settled in the early part of the eighteenth century by both the French and the Spanish. It would be difficult to determine who were the first settlers of the Evangeline Territory. There were no records of the original date of occupancy of all Land Grants patented before 1811. It is evident that most of this section was first settled by the French and Irish. However, the area comprising of present Evangeline Parish was settled mainly by people from France and Canada. Some of the Irish names were the O'Connors, Mc Cauleys and McDaniels. Many of the Irish people came from Spain not from Ireland. They had emigrated to Spain to escape British rule and persecution. Their descendants, through absorption by the French, have lost their Irish traits, custom, and dialects. Most of the older generation would speak only French and had adopted all the French custom and traditions. The Fontenots, Guillorys, Soileaus, Veillons, Bertrands, and Bouttes seem to have been the first French settlers in what is now Evangeline Parish. Although some of them were not landowners, their names appear in the court records as early as 1781. Most identified as residents of that section of Opelousas which later became Evangeline Parish.

IT'S INDIAN TRIBES

On these hills, prairies and marsh lands once dwelled the tribes of the Alabamon, the fierce Attakapas, the quiet Choctaw and the friendly Opelousas Indians. Of these tribes the Attakapas were considered the most feared because they were reputed to be cannibals. According to a legend the Alabamons, Choctaws and Opelousas tribes got together and formed an alliance to resist their attacks. In a battle fought three miles west of St. Martinsville the Attakapas were almost totally destroyed. The few remaining tribes members of the once fierce nation either joined the victorious tribes or were allowed to remain in the district unharmed. Their lands and goods were divided among the victors. The Opelousas Indians received that portion of land which later became the Opelousas country and Old St. Landry parish. These Indians were friendly and very few conflicts occurred between them and the white settlers. My Great-Grandmother was full-blooded Indian, I never found out which tribe. I hope she wasn't of the Attakapas.