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1D



A face mask reminds me of the lockdown days

I was in our laundry room the other day, lost in a trance of boredom as I cycled another load, when a bright patch of yellow caught my eye. It was the tip of an old face mask that had fallen into the corner, apparently hidden for years beneath a spare clothes hamper. Like the contents of a time machine, this little artifact of domestic life circa 2020 quickly took me back.

Along with many other Louisiana residents navigating the lockdown days of the pandemic, our family used a lot of fabric masks as we ventured out for necessities, and keeping them clean became a somber ritual. A dozen would hang from drying racks in the laundry room, their varied colors creating a macabre mobile that underscored the weirdness of the times.

Memories of other grim oddities from those days came rushing back as I fed a bundle of bed sheets into the dryer. I remembered the bizarre minutet as the deliveryman brought our groceries each week, both of us dancing around each other in a shared gesture of social distancing.

I thought about our national obsession with hand sanitizer, along with the supply chain woes that left once proud Americans scrambling for bathroom tissue. To support our neighborhood restaurants as their dining rooms closed and they relied on takeout orders to stay afloat, I’d pull into the parking lot of nearby eateries and nod to the waitstaff as they quickly passed packaged entrees through the car window.

The whole exchange seemed glancing and vaguely illicit, like buying diamonds on the black market.

That dark human comedy also came with devastating loss. Millions died from an unpredictable virus, and the economic hardship from the lockdowns was wide and deep. Students languished at home, and families and friends endured separations too painful to quantify. We’re still debating the best course if another pandemic comes our way.

Another vivid memory floated back to me as our dryer tumbled and rumbled through its hour of work. It occurred to me that amid the lockdowns, I’d struck one of those silly cosmic bargains so common among souls in distress.

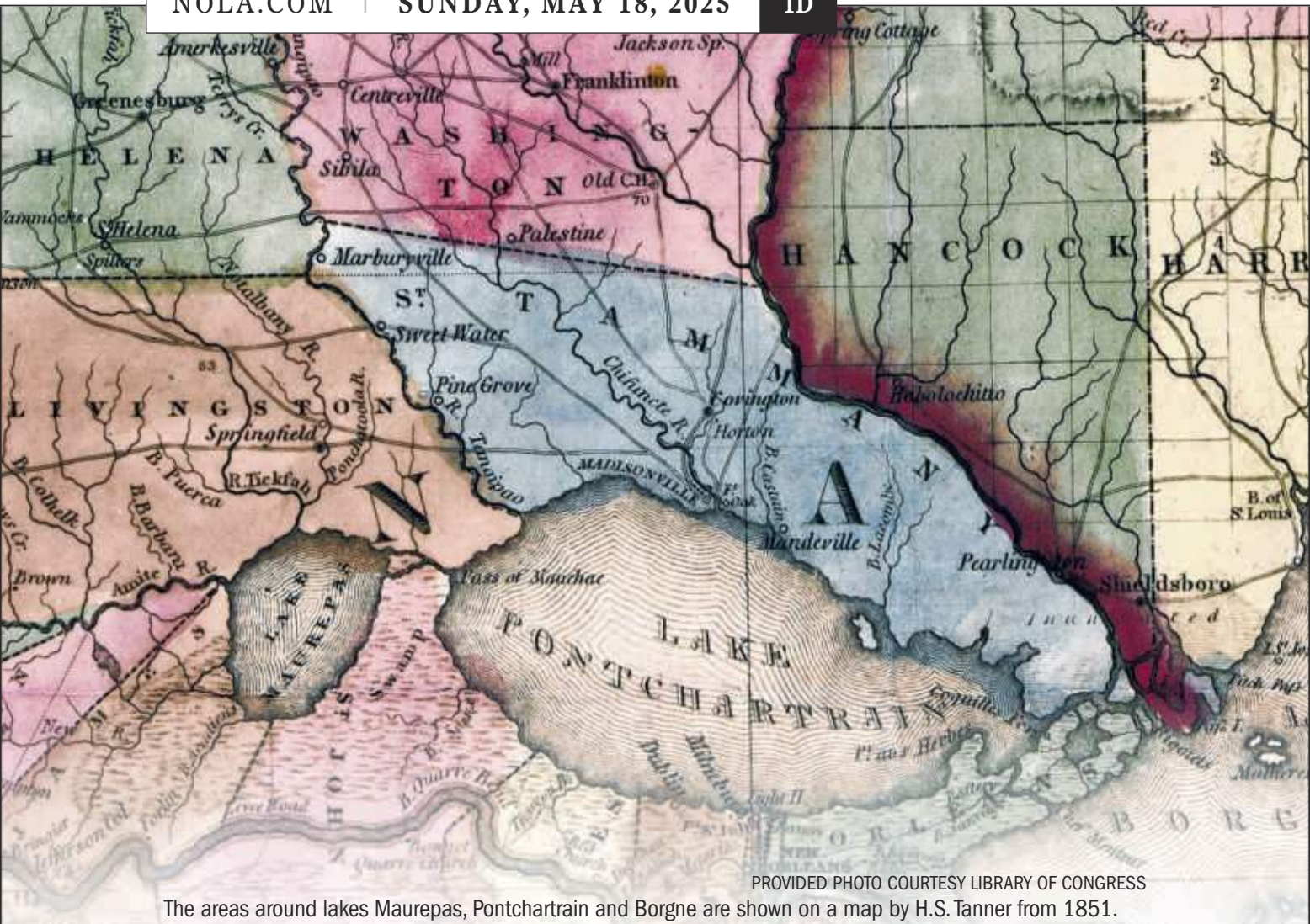
“Make the pandemic go away,” I’d promised back then, “and I won’t complain about anything again.”

Recently, I attended six public gatherings in a week. Last month, my wife and I danced at a friend’s wedding, savoring the joy of the crowd. Meanwhile, my long-ago promise to stop my griping in exchange for better days has, as you might expect, been a bit of a bust.

I continue to quibble about little things — the twinge in my shoulder, the squirrels in our flower bed, the lawnmower that has, once again, failed to start.

Even so, I’m trying to tell myself that this anxious spring in the life of the country, whatever its challenges, has been the kind of season my pandemic self could only have hoped for.

Email Danny Heitman at danny@dannyheitman.com.



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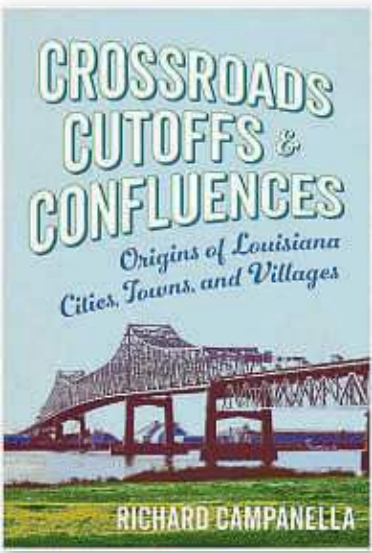
Origins of St. Tammany towns can be traced to old geographical advantages

BY RICHARD CAMPANELLA
Contributing writer

Editor’s Note: The following is a condensed excerpt from the latest book by Tulane geographer and Times-Picayune contributing writer Richard Campanella, “Crossroads, Cutoffs, and Confluences: Origins of Louisiana Cities, Towns, and Villages” (LSU Press). Please see original for sources and endnotes.

Few places offered better access to ecological resources than the basins of lakes Maurepas, Pontchartrain and Borgne.

By pirogue, portage and pluck, one could venture from timbered hills to tide-washed islands, traversing eco-zones from as high as 370 feet in elevation down to the level of the sea — all within 20 miles. Waterborne access led Native residents to call this region Balbanche, for the many dialects heard along crisscrossing trade



routes. Principal tribes north of Okwa-ta — “Big Water,” Lake Pontchartrain — were the Tangipahoa, Acolapissa (Colapissa), and Choctaw, each of which favored riverside perches as settlement sites.

One Acolapissa village was



located four leagues up the river named Talcatcha (Taleatcha, later Hatcha), meaning rock or stone. It was here where Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne, Sieur de Bienville visited in 1699 and found the water good to drink, suggesting this site was above the head of tides, a plausible rationale for the village.

Later, an English mapmaker translated talcatcha as “pearl,” for the calcium accretions Native Americans collected from the shells they used to scrape out dug-out canoes. “Pearl” got applied to the larger river to the east, which is where a branch of the Choctaw tribe lived into the twentieth century — likely on Indian Village Road in eastern Slidell, overlooking a secondary channel of the

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Is New Iberia the Padookie Capital of the World?

New Iberia artist Paul Schexnayder sold a T-shirt that simply read, ‘PADOOKIE: It’s a New Iberia thing.’



PROVIDED PHOTO

BY JAN RISHER
Staff writer



Missy Andrade, from Lafayette, says she first heard the term “padookie” when she was in the sixth grade and met a group of dancers from New Iberia who joined her Lafayette dance studio.

“Britney Sonnier asked me one day if I had a padookie,” Andrade said.

Over the years, whenever

Andrade heard the word again, she’d ask, “Where are you from?”

The answer was always the same: New Iberia.

Earlier this year, Andrade asked a co-worker if she had a ponytail holder. The co-worker’s blank stare prompted her to say, “Hold up — you’re from New Iberia. What do you call it?”

The answer: “Padookie.”

“It got me thinking, where does that term come from?” Andrade said. “It’s not a Cajun French word. Why is it only isolated to the boundaries of New Iberia? Where did it come from, and why did it stick?”

A regional riddle

The question sparked what may be the most

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LAKE

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Pearl River.

Under the colonial regime, a few French settlers in what is now St. Tammany Parish made their livelihoods from the pine derivatives of charcoal, tar, pitch and resin, used as sealant for roofs and ship hulls.

“It is usually towards the mouths of the river, and along the sea-coasts, that they make tar,” colonist La Page du Pratz pointed out, “because it is in those places that the pines chiefly grow,” and where the tar could be shipped across Lake Pontchartrain.

As early as 1722, a Frenchman named Rouseau et La Combe established an operation presumably at the mouth of Bayou Lacombe, where he and enslaved workers sent wood, charcoal and bricks by schooner to help build New Orleans. By 1727, a census recorded 16 colonists and 13 enslaved workers living north of the lake. Three or four tar works operated elsewhere along the lakeshore by the 1730s, including up Bayou Liberty and the Tchefuncte River, where Antoine Aufere had up to 40 slaves laboring on the largest tar works. But these rustic industries never really spurred town formation, probably on account of their arboreal nature, as well as the entrepreneurs’ lack of title to the land.

A defeat and a surrender

The slow pace of land-titling reflected the limited fecundity of the region’s hard clays soils.

French authorities prioritized instead the rich alluvial soils along the Mississippi River and its distributaries, where arpenters laid out elongated lots for concessionaries to create plantations. Before the French could turn their attention to less-fertile areas, their devastating defeat in the French and Indian War (1763) incurred the surrender of the lands across the lake to the British.

In 1766, English authorities inventoried their new colony and found “a Town



An 1835 map of St. Tammany Parish, courtesy of the U.S. Geological Survey

on Lake Pontchartrain call’ed Tangipahou ... inhabited by frenchmen & Choctaws,” probably the first of its size in this area. A smuggler’s paradise, Tangipahou saw deer pelts harvested by Natives come in on pack horses led by English traders which, instead of getting exported through Mobile to Great Britain, instead went south illegally to enemy New Orleans, “where they sell for as much as they do in London.”

Also shipped southward were pitch, tar, lumber, charcoal, lime and cattle, all “contrary to Act of Parliament.” Imported from New Orleans were contraband “Liquor &c,” to which the French added “Rum, Powder, Ball & Blankets” to pay off their Choctaw trading allies.

Worse yet, from the British perspective, “the French give them bad talks and poison their Minds against the English,” a reminder of the lingering animus from the recent war.

It is unclear where the rambunctious trafficking outpost of Tangipahou was located. Local historian Frederick S. Ellis put it on Bayou Bonfouca, Bayou Liberty, or Bayou Lacombe, making it an antecedent of Slidell or Lacombe; it may have also been at the mouth of the Tchefuncte or Tan-

gipahou, making it a fore-runner of Madisonville.

What all these sites had in common was their head-of-lake setting: Each was at or near the mouth of a navigable river emptying into a lake or bay, enabling trade with communities rimming the basin.

In recognition of this siting advantage, British land grants in this region were all made “at the head of Lake Pontchartrain,” wrote Jacob Blackwell in 1766. They started with the “Tanchipaho Plantation” grant made for Francis DuPlanly (a.k.a. François Hery); continued with a grant “on a creek named Chefuncte” for John Jones; and proceeded as far east as the Rigolets into the 1770s. French travelers had given the lower Tchefuncte River area the name Coquille (“little shell”) for its many rangia clams and oysters, which Anglophones shortened to “Cokie.”

Focus on seaports, land

Yet the British land grants never amounted to much; indeed, only seven in this area would be later recognized by American authorities, and none developed directly into modern towns.

British authorities focused instead on the fertile loess bluffs by the Mississippi River to the west, or

the seaports of Mobile and Pensacola to the east.

As for the lands in between, the British, like the French prior, got distracted by a distant war, this one with American revolutionaries. After Spain declared war on Britain in 1779, the conflict came home to West Florida, resulting in the expulsion of the British. Now Spain would control West Florida, plus New Orleans and all of Louisiana, not to mention most of the hemisphere to the west and south.

From 1779 to 1810, Spanish authorities increased the number of land grants 11-fold within the Distrito de Chifoncte, today’s Washington and St. Tammany parishes. There was good reason: With New Orleans constantly rebuilding after six hurricanes and two fires from 1776 to 1794, resources across the lake took on new value.

“The wild lands are finely timbered with pine, live oak, cypress, magnolia, plum, gum, bay, cottonwood, ash, (and) willow,” wrote one observer. “(They) will furnish an inexhaustible supply” of lumber, tar and pitch “for a century to come.” The underlying Pleistocene Terrace also provided fine clay for brick-making.

One land grant went to Jean Baptiste Baham

in 1783 for 1,000 arpents along the Tchefuncte River. Another went in 1785 to district commandant Charles Parent, where he would amass a herd of 1,500 cattle along the lower Tchefuncte. Being at the head of a lake by the mouth of a navigable river above the tidal line, this site, formerly Coquille or Cokie and now Chifoncte, was ideal for boat-building, with a harbor-like setting and timber and tar nearby. It would eventually become Madisonville.

Ten river miles up the Tchefuncte, a French Creole named Jacques Dreux (Drieux) attained a Spanish land grant on the west bank of the Bogue Falaya, at its head-of-navigation above the two rivers’ confluence.

It made an ideal site for an interior landing, dubbed the Barrio de Buck Falia, working in tandem with the lake port of Chifoncte.

Around 1805, Dreux laid out four squares along the Bogue Falaya River, intending to build a town he would call St. Jacques. Although Dreux never followed through on the project, his intent signaled the promise many saw in this pleasant and resource-rich region.

Rural settlers gather

Geopolitical changes helped cluster rural settlers into lasting communities.

First came the secret retrocession of Louisiana by Spain to France in 1800, followed by the subsequent sale of Louisiana by France to the United States in 1803. Seven years later, discontented Anglo colonists in West Florida rebelled against the Spanish, launched the Republic of West Florida, and ended up under the dominion of the United States.

Spain and the U.S. eventually signed the Adams-Onís Treaty of 1819, which, after ratification in 1821, officially gave Louisiana its boot shape.

It was during those interregnum years that colonial-era settlers dispersed along the Lake Pontchartrain shore began to cluster into bona fide towns — namely Barrio de Buck Falia at a river confluence and head-of-navigation site (today’s

Covington), and Chifoncte at a head-of-lake site (today’s Madisonville).

The creation of Covington involved an Anglo-American family originally from Philadelphia, starting with Captain William Wharton Collins, who shipped mail from New Orleans up the Tchefuncte River into Spanish territory.

Recognizing the region’s opportunities, William urged his brother John Wharton Collins to come to Louisiana and open a mercantile firm in New Orleans. Their two sisters came as well, and as the newcomers sailed across the lake on William’s schooner, they apparently liked what they saw — in more ways than one.

Both sisters eventually married members of the Badon family, who owned land on the Bogue Falaya just down from Jacques Dreux’s stalled St. Jacques town project at Barrio de Buck Falia.

John Wharton Collins, meanwhile, set his eyes on land adjacent to the Dreux tract, for which he obtained a Spanish grant.

A few years later, under American governance, he purchased 1,600 acres from Dreux and designated a section as the Town of Wharton. Collins then hired New Orleans surveyor-engineer Joseph Pilié to lay out a street plan.

In 1816, the state Legislature incorporated the town but changed its name to honor Leonard Covington, the late brigadier general who had helped get the short-lived West Florida Republic annexed into the United States.

Following a century of ad-hoc settlement, the town of Covington finally blossomed, and with compelling rationales: a landing among multiple confluences at the head-of-navigation in a region ripe for resource extraction as well as resort opportunities.

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