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entertainment
LIVING

NOLA.COM | SUNDAY, AUGUST 10, 2025

1D

GENTLE GIANTS

Devil ray season is back on the Gulf Coast

BY HANNAH LEVITAN
Staff writer

Louisiana's ongoing heat wave has sent residents racing to beaches along the Gulf Coast just in time for a lucky few to spot packs of mobula rays, also known as "devil rays," dappling the oceanfront.

Resembling a synchronized swimmer troupe, the diamond-shaped creatures often travel in schools — gliding together as they look for plankton.

With their graceful, wing-like fins, they often leap and skim just above the water's surface, making a ray sighting even more mesmerizing.

"These larger rays actually fly through water, and so they live more in a three-dimensional space, much like birds do," Dr. Deby Cassill, integrative biology professor at the University of South Florida, said.

Like sharks, Cassill said rays are constantly on the move looking for prey like crustaceans and are especially active near shores during the summer months.

"This is the season to be finding them," Cassill said, adding that it's not uncommon to see giant manta rays off the Gulf Coast near St. Petersburg, Honeymoon Island and St. Andrews Florida State Park.



PHOTO BY EMMA HICKERSON
A school of devil rays in Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary.

'Puppies of the sea'

The devil ray's name might be a little misleading, according to Dr. Prosanta Chakrabarty, director and fish curator of the LSU Museum of Natural Science, who instead likes to call them "the puppies of the sea."

There are two types of rays — the mobula birostris and mobula hypostoma.

The mobula birostris, widely known as the giant manta ray, is the largest ray in the Gulf, according to Chakrabarty, adding that they can grow up to be well over 20 feet long.

"They are famous for jumping out of the water and shocking people by their size, but they're completely harmless."

The mobula hypostoma is a considerably smaller ray, measuring approximately 5 feet in length.

"(The rays) are like an icon of gentle-natured fishes," Chakrabarty said, noting that

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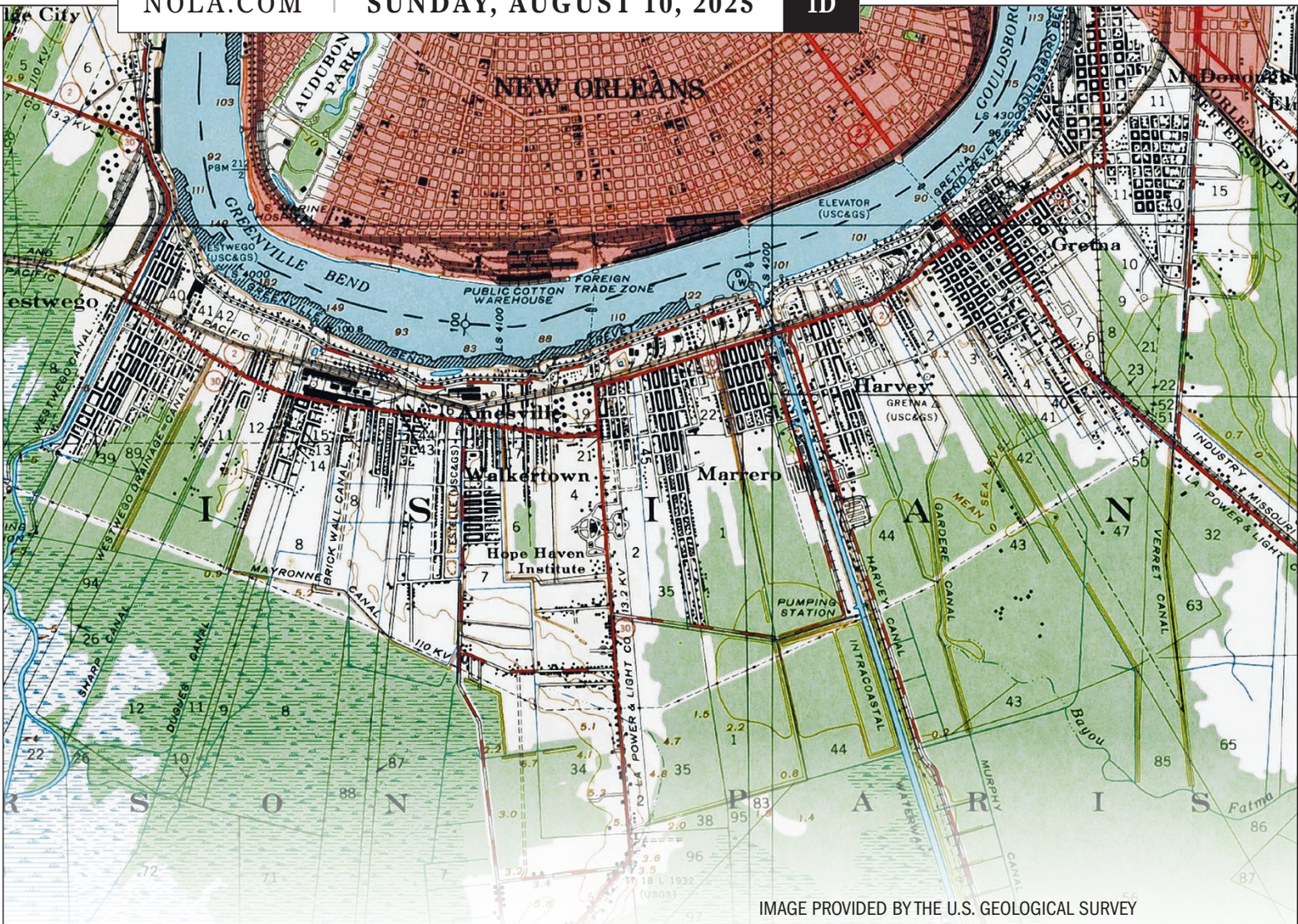


IMAGE PROVIDED BY THE U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY
Marrero emerged in a lateral fashion, without any one nucleus having been established at any one moment.

BECOMING
MARRERO

Once a land of truck farms, West Bank community urbanized over time in its own way — laterally

BY RICHARD CAMPANELLA
Contributing writer

IN the historical geography of our metropolis, various spatial patterns have shaped urban expansion.

Some neighborhoods grew outwardly from an initial nucleus. Others expanded linearly along an axis or artery. Still others urbanized laterally, weaving together adjacent communities like fabric. Many exhibited all three processes in sequence.

Places like the French Quarter, Gretna and Kenner all developed from a nucleus. In the case of the French Quarter, the nucleus was the Jackson Square area, starting in 1718; in the case of Gretna, it was a ferry landing, where service began in 1836; and in the case of Kenner, it was a railroad station, opened in 1855.

Places like Metairie and Gentilly began along linear arteries, namely a ridgetop pathway that became today's Metairie Road and Gentilly Boulevard. Many older riverfront communities emerged from stops or landings along the public road,



PHOTO BY RICHARD CAMPANELLA
Originally Amesville, Marrero formed as streets and were patched in laterally south of the 4th Street tracks.

including today's Tchoupitoulas Street and River Road.

Carrollton is an example of a neighborhood that germinated at a nucleus (today's Riverbend) and expanded along St. Charles and South Carrollton avenues. The lower faubourgs germinated at the junction of Esplanade and Elysian Fields avenues and expanded down Chartres and St. Claude and



then lakeward, forming today's 7th, 8th and 9th wards.

Then there are those areas with no discernible nucleus or axis. Rather, they took shape as developers "patched in" lateral streets from abutting settlements.

Perhaps the best example is Marrero.

No downtown, no founding date

Identified by the federal government as a Census Designated Place, this unincorporated West Jefferson community of approximately 32,000 residents has an older section closer to the Mississippi, and straddles a central artery (Ames Boulevard) extending away from the river. But Marrero has no historic "downtown" — no iconic core, no central square, no Main Street. Relatedly, Marrero has no agreed-upon foundation date.

Marrero traces its colonial origins to a French long-lot

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What was the capital city's first movie theater?

BY ROBIN MILLER
Staff writer



Long before the Marvel Universe, Baton Rouge moviegoers flocked to silent adventures starring Clara Bow, Buster Keaton and Rudolph Valentino during the Louisiana Theatre's reign on Third Street.

Though its movie screen is long gone, the Louisiana Theatre building, at 336 Third St.,

still stands — home to Baton Rouge's first cinema, opened in 1913.

The building is better known these days as the Basin Music Room.

That's the short answer to Mark Jeffers' question about Baton Rouge's first movie theater.

"I was thinking about all of the theaters I've watched movies in during the years," the Baton

Rouge movie buff said. "I remember going to movies at the old Gordon and Hart theaters when I was a kid. I even went to the Paramount, which started showing movies in the 1920s."

But Jeffers knows the movie palace, which opened at 215 Third St. in 1920, wasn't the city's first movie house. And he's right.

The Paramount once stood on



The Louisiana Theatre opened in July 1913 at 366 Third St. in Baton Rouge as the first movie theater in the capital city. Though movies had been shown in other venues, the Louisiana was the city's first building specifically designed as a cinema.

PROVIDED PHOTO BY EAST BATON ROUGE PARISH LIBRARY ARCHIVES

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Show compassion for roommate moody

Dear Harriette: My best friend and I are roommates. No one told me this might be a risky decision, but I guess I'm learning the hard way. Sometimes she can be moody, and when she gets that way, everyone is subject to her heavy, somber, icy energy. It can be draining. If she has a bad day, she can't conceal it. Maybe she thinks she is hiding it because she doesn't exactly share or burden anyone with details, but her responses become short in a frustrated kind of way and she huffs, slams doors and sulks about. I don't want her to suppress her emotions when something is wrong, but I wish she didn't feel the need to wear them so proudly — and I especially wish she wouldn't punish everyone around her when she's in a mood. What can I say to her about this?

— **Moody Roomie**

Dear Moody Roomie: Although your roommate's moods are difficult for you, at least you can see that her behavior is not personal. She is dealing with something separate from you. If possible, be compassionate. Tell her you love her and hope she can find peace. You can also acknowledge that it is hard for you to be around her when she is in a dark place. You don't have a sense of when these moods are going to hit her, and her behavior does impact you and everyone else around her. Ask her if she has the awareness to tell you that she's having a hard day. If she could

do that, it would help you to know how to be with her.

Dear Harriette: I have fallen in love with a guy at work. I love the way he solves problems and how he pays attention to me, even when others do not. He is so kind, and I find myself deeply attracted to him. I recently learned that he is gay. He hadn't told me before. It came up when I asked him out. I was bold enough to say that I thought there might be something special between us, and I asked if he would like to go out with me. He thanked me for the invitation and then informed that he is gay. I am so disappointed. How can I dial back my feelings since they are not reciprocated?

— **Just a Friend**

Dear Just a Friend: Treat this situation as you would any time you are interested in someone who isn't interested in you in the same way. It's not that this man doesn't like you. It is that he is not romantically attracted to you. Sure, it can be hard to accept, but you can do it. Be willing to see the truth for what it is. If you can allow yourself to release your heart from your feelings of attraction and learn to be just friends, who knows what kind of delightful bond you two can form?

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Harriette Cole

SENSE AND SENSITIVITY



STAFF PHOTO BY JAN RISHER

On Navarre Beach, Jan Risher watched small rays called devil rays swim up and down the water's edge at the beach, like butterflies flapping their wings in the water.

WAYS

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rays belong in the same family as sharks. But without a top fin, rays can bit more difficult to spot in the water, unless you see them jumping.

What to know if you spot them

Rays will wander throughout different habitats and ocean depths, but Chakrabarty said sightings are more common in the Gulf's deeper waters and further east from the end of the Mis-

issippi River. "They sort of prefer clean water, so what's pouring out of the Mississippi into the Gulf is generally not that," Chakrabarty said. That's because of the Dead Zone, a low-oxygen area that develops along the coast every summer that often forces animals to venture into deeper waters. It's not uncommon for boaters to encounter the sleek animals, but it's best to leave them alone, Chakrabarty said. Their size may be intimidating, but these rays don't sting. "They are gentle giants," Chakrabarty said.

MARRERO

Continued from page 1D

plantation that fronted the river and extended 80 arpents (roughly 3 miles) back to today's aptly named Eighty Arpent Road, beyond which lay swamplands. One record from 1732 indicates a man of mixed race named Simon came into possession of a section of this land, partly by working it, and partly by purchasing it from a free man of color named Scipion. By the late 1700s, much of future Marrero came into the possession of the Villars and later the Boulogny family, the latter of which would operate one of the largest plantations in the vicinity, using enslaved labor. By the 1830s, the Harang, Fazende and Millaudon plantations dominated the area. They were bounded on the west by the Barataria & Lafourche (B&L) Canal dug along the Zeringue Plantation, and on the east by the plantation of Nicholas Noël Destrehan, who in 1840 had a similar navigation canal dug on his holding. In time, the B&L Canal would become known as the Company Canal and serve as the main axis for Westwego, while Destrehan's waterway would become the Harvey Canal, the main axis of Harvey — or "Cosmopolite City," as Destrehan grandly envisioned it.

A Jefferson Parish tycoon

The main holding in between pertained to Laurent Millaudon, a Frenchman born in Avignon in 1786, who became one of the richest men in Louisiana. Millaudon lorded over 3,700 acres on both banks of Jefferson Parish, including 1,800 acres in what is now Marrero. In 1850 alone, his workforce of over 400 enslaved persons produced 272 hogsheads (barrels) of sugar, 12,500 gallons of molasses, 10,500 bushels of corn and grazed \$3,800 worth of livestock. Millaudon was also an amateur scientist who tinkered with better ways to refine sugar and distill rum. His operation became all the more valuable in 1853 when workers built the New Orleans, Opelousas & Great Western Railroad along what is now Fourth Street, providing freight and passenger transportation to the plantation. In April 1858, a sluice gate in the levee of the adjacent Bell Plantation ruptured, creating an epic deluge that swamped nearly the entire West Bank for months. The crevasse scoured a half-mile-long trench between what is now Avenue A to Avenue E in Marrero, 5 to 40 feet deep, leaving a bankside indentation for years to come. The Bell Crevasse may have dissuaded or delayed urban development in what would eventually become Old Marrero. After the Civil War, emancipation forced planters to seek new ways and means to extract value from their land. All around New Orleans, landowners subdivided their holdings into small vegetable farms to be leased out, usually to formerly enslaved families or immigrant workers. People called them "truck" farms, from the French *troc*, meaning barter.

Enter the Chinese laborers

The Millaudon Plantation by



PHOTO BY RICHARD CAMPANELLA
Former Bank of Marrero building in Old Marrero

now had come into the hands of A.B. Merrill, who planned to use it for commercial vegetable production. Toward that end, he hired Chinese laborers from San Francisco, the largest group of which (141 men) arrived via St. Louis in 1870. When the laborers felt they were being short-changed, they initiated what one journalist described as "The Cabbage Revolt." Soon, most of the Chinese workers abandoned Merrill for new opportunities in downtown New Orleans, or to start their own farm in today's Terrytown. In 1873, Merrill sold his plantation to Oak A. Ames for \$180,000. Scion of a Boston tool-making family, Ames was also a major investor in Union Pacific, which in 1869 had completed part of the nation's first transcontinental railroad. Oak Ames had been instructed to buy up key properties for an envisioned southern transcontinental line. That effort became the Texas & Pacific Railroad, whose officials decided to establish a major railyard just west of Ames' property. They named it "West-We-Go," and along with the Company Canal, the railyard would help trigger the founding of Westwego. That left Oak Ames to team up with his brothers Oliver and Frank to return other parcels to sugar cane production, this time with a hired Black workforce. They then subdivided their remaining land to lease as truck farms, under the names of Southside, Front Place and Estelle Farms. This put more families on Ames' land, which gave rise to new houses, stores, and services.

Cane juice becomes sugar

Soon, people were calling the place "Amesville," and by 1894, wrote a reporter for the Daily Item, "some three and a half miles of truck farms fill the space" near the river, while "the big mill" turned cane juice into sugar. "Ames is a big place and a busy one." At around this time, Louis Herman Marrero, an Isleño-Anglo-American born in 1847 who had risen to prominence in Jefferson Parish, purchased part of Amesville. He established the Marrero Land and Improvement Corporation, which proceeded to develop the riverfront for industrial use, while laterally extending the street grids already established in Harvey and Westwego. In 1909, the lower-lying lands to the rear of Louis Marrero's holdings were organized into the Second Jefferson Drainage District, and in the years ahead, drainage canals and pumps would be installed for additional truck farms to be laid out southward. Now, folks began to refer to

parts of Amesville as "Marrero" or "the village of Marrero," especially after the post office was so named in 1916. Louis H. Marrero died in 1921, having served 24 years as Jefferson Parish sheriff and other positions. He and his family's company succeeded in transforming this area from agrarian to residential land use. Industry boomed along the Marrero riverfront, and economic activity augmented further with the 1935 opening of the Huey P. Long Bridge. In this manner, Marrero emerged in a lateral fashion, without any one nucleus having been established at any one moment. Because of this informal origin, where we understand Marrero to be today had three names a century ago. According to a 1939 U.S. Geological Survey map, the toponym "Marrero" implied the Avenues A, B, C and D subdivisions west of Harvey and east of Barataria Boulevard, whereas the names "Amesville" and "Walkertown" were ascribed to areas to the west, closer to Westwego.

Community of African Americans

Walkertown began when "Corrine Degree Walker, a widowed mother of 12 ... purchased land in the area in 1921 to raise her family," said local historian Diane Coleman in a 2009 interview with The Times-Picayune. "Walker's children eventually purchased property around her own, and they slowly built a community of African American professionals, entrepreneurs and laborers." After the Greater New Orleans Mississippi River Bridge opened in 1958, the West Bank Expressway became a pipeline for east-bank urbanites to seek new suburban lifestyles in places like Marrero. Truck farms became tract housing, and by 1966, according to an updated USGS map, the name "Amesville" had disappeared entirely in favor of Marrero. "Walkertown" has seen a recent revival, thanks to a "Welcome to Walkertown" sign installed across from a street renamed Walkertown Way. Despite its lack of a historical nucleus, Marrero retains relics of its past. The name "Ames" remains for the community's central boulevard (and you can still buy Ames shovels at home-improvement stores). Fourth Street still hosts that circa-1853 railroad corridor, and some old train cars may be seen among historic structures in and around Old Marrero. The Marrero Land & Improvement Company remains active in the community from its office on the West Bank Expressway. There's even one last family-owned truck farm in the heart of Marrero, on Berger Street, while the name "Estelle," formerly Estelle Farms, still graces the map to the south.

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