WHAT'S COOKING: The hits, misses of the Michelin awards of New Orleans restaurants **2D**

entertainment
LIVING

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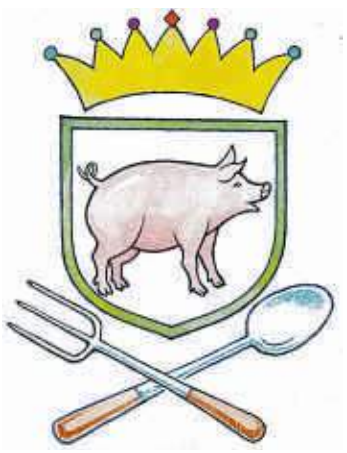
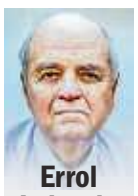


ILLUSTRATION BY ARTHUR NEAD

Boucherie a wellspring of Louisiana food

Early on a crisp Saturday morning many years ago, this city boy was awakened at my grandparents' country home in central Louisiana to go witness a winter ritual — a boucherie.

As has been customary at that time of the year, several families had joined together to make various foods from a freshly slaughtered pig. Culturally and anthropologically, it was a rich experience, but I knew nothing about either of those things as I watched the pig's carcass being lifted over a fire.



Errol Laborde
STREETCAR

Nearby were piles of swine innards plus organs, fat, the head, tail and feet. Blood dripped into a bowl. All would be made into something.

A certain cousin had a way of providing perspective about rural life of yore. In this season of the boucherie, I am reminded about something she told me that, in retrospect, rings true: "It was disgusting," she said.

She was not criticizing the purpose of the boucherie but the act itself, at least as seen from the vantage point of a kid for whom the chore of getting meat for supper simply meant going to the grocery store.

But, "these were poor people and they worked hard," the cousin said. "They needed to prepare food for the winter."

Sampling the wares

Women funneled meat through a grinder into a sausage casing. Men stood over a cauldron sizzling with boiling oil into which fatty strips of pigskin would be dropped to make cracklins. Once boiled and salted, samples were always subject to snatching. Hot cracklins on a cold morning were good for their crunchiness if not for the heart.

Another crew would stir stuff from the pig's head into a pot while adding seasoning and gelatin, all of which would be spooned into a bag and hung from a line to thicken into hog's head cheese.

At another spot, the blood was made into one of the more

➤ See **FOOD,** page **9D**

This 1851 map by H S Tanner shows the unsettled nature of eastern St. Tammany and Washington parishes.

IMAGE FROM THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS/STAFF ILLUSTRATION

Richard Campanella's
GEOGRAPHIES OF NEW ORLEANS

THE OZONE ROUTE

How the first European settlers ended up in Slidell, Pearl River and Bogalusa.

BY RICHARD CAMPANELLA | Contributing writer

One of the last areas of our region to undergo permanent settlement was eastern St. Tammany and Washington parishes, from Slidell to Bogalusa.

These woodlands were isolated from New Orleans by the Rigolets marshes, and from coastal Mississippi by the swampy Pearl River Basin, whose braided channels often clogged with "rafts of driftwood," and whose valley was "too subject to inundation to admit of extensive settlements," according to Samuel R. Brown writing in 1817.

➤ See **SETTLERS,** page **8D**

PHOTO BY RICHARD CAMPANELLA

Depiction of a historic railroad on Front and Maine streets in Olde Town Slidell

THE CHANCE OF RAIN IS ALWAYS 'NEVER.'

Why LSU fans say 'It never rains in Tiger Stadium'

Fans pack Tiger Stadium before kickoff between LSU and Alabama in 2024.

STAFF FILE PHOTO BY HILARY SCHEINUK

BY ETHAN STENGER
Contributing writer

curious LOUISIANA

It happens at every game in Tiger Stadium.

The public service announcer comes on over the loudspeakers: "Chance of rain," he says, as if waiting for a response.

A response that he receives.

"Never," the crowd yells back.

LSU fans understand the importance of the saying "It never rains in Tiger Stadium" and the weight that those words carry, almost without a second thought.

An overwhelming choice

When John Ed Bradley, a former LSU football center, finished his memoir, he struggled to come up with the perfect title.

"It was called 'August and the Smell of the Grass,'" Bradley said. "That was my working title. It was sort of this poetic attempt to describe the book."

His publisher disapproved, forcing Bradley back to the drawing board.

He came back with a list of 10 titles, with the first being "It Never Rains in Tiger Stadium." This title was the overwhelming choice by Bradley's friends and family. It took some convincing, but eventually, his publisher caved in.

➤ See **CURIOUS,** page **9D**

SETTLERS

Continued from page 1D

PHOTO BY WILLAM BLACKWELL/COURTESY OF WIKIPEDIA COMMONS

A historic train station in Slidell

That was the European perspective, and it held sway for decades to come. Indigenous people held a different view, having built mounds at the mouth of that basin over three millennia prior.

Through the 1600s, bands of Choctaw, Tangipahoa and Acolapissa (Colapissa) lived north of Okwa-ta ("Big Water," Lake Pontchartrain), one of which established a riverside village named Talcatcha, meaning rock or stone.

Mapmakers took that reference to mean "pearl," the calcium accretion found in some oysters. By the early colonial era, some 700 Acolapissa occupied six Pearl River settlements near present-day Indian Village Road in Slidell, while a few hundred Tangipahoa lived near present-day Madisonville.

European settlement ensued tepidly, as colonists found little of the soil fertility and waterborne accessibility that characterized the deltaic region to the south. What they did find were extensive pine forests where useful by-products such as tar, pitch, resin, charcoal and lumber could be extracted.

A census in 1727 recorded 16 French colonists and 13 enslaved West Africans living on what we now call the northshore, most of them working in pine products. By the 1730s, a hundred or so Europeans and Africans lived and worked from Bayou Liberty over to the Tchefuncte River.

'A Town on Lake Pontchartrain'

When the British seized the region in 1763, they found what one Englishman described as "a Town on Lake Pontchartrain call'ed Tangipahou ... inhabited by frenchmen & Choctaws," who transshipped deer pelts to sell (illegally) at Spanish-held New Orleans.

After Britain lost the American Revolution, the area north of the lake became Spanish West Florida, and could now tap into the urban and agricultural regions of the Spanish colony of Louisiana to the south and west.

In the late 1700s, Spanish authorities greatly increased the number of land grants made throughout what they called the Distrito de Chifoncte, today's St. Tammany and Washington parishes. Two such grants would lead to the foundation of Madisonville near the mouth of the Tchefuncte River, and of Covington upstream by the confluence with the Bogue Falaya and Abita rivers.

The piney woods to the east, meanwhile, remained largely unsettled, on account of their inaccessibility.

After the Louisiana Purchase and the disputed shift of Spanish West Florida to the U.S., incoming American administrators designated lands up to the 31st parallel as St. Tammany Parish, in honor of Chief Tamanend, the legendary Delaware peacemaker who had become a popular namesake.

Subsequent population growth called for Washington Parish to be carved out of St. Tammany in 1819, which led to the establishment of Franklinton as its centralized parish seat.

In the 1830s through 1850s, Mandeville and Abita Springs developed as health and recreational resorts for urbanites visiting from across the lake. In 1855, the New Orleans, Jackson & Great Northern (NOJ&GN) Railroad began service along the western shore of Lake Pontchartrain, catalyzing the formation of Ponchatoula, Hammond and Amite City in what would later become Tangipahoa Parish.

The map of "across the lake" was coming into a form we would recognize today — except for the dense woodlands to the east.

The train from Press Street

In 1870, Mandeville-based investor George Ingram envisioned that a railroad curving eastward around Lake Pontchartrain might replicate the success of the NOJ&GN to the west. After years of delays, administrative changes and construction challenges, the New Orleans & Northeastern (NO&NE) Railroad began service in 1883 with a city station on Press Street in the Faubourg Marigny.

Now, urbanites could board a comfortable train, head up Peoples Avenue and along present-day Hayne Boulevard to Pointe Aux Herbes, and cross a 6-mile lake trestle into St. Tammany Parish.

The first outpost on the other side was the Guzman "flag stop," meaning a settlement so small that trains had to be flagged down to exchange passengers or packages.

Situated on low terrain near today's Eden Isle, Guzman eventually disappeared, and its residents moved inland to a more viable site on higher ground. That site marked the head of navigation of Bayou Bonfouca, aligned with the lakeshore communities of Lacombe and Mandeville to the west, and abounded in tall timber and fine clay for brickmaking.

Known as Robert, this enclave boasted a sawmill, creosote works, grocery store and a sturdy lodge known locally as "the Robert brick house." During the track-laying phase of the NO&NE, company officials housed their workers at Robert, and in 1882, erected a train station amid the tent encampment.

The following year, surveyors laid out an adjacent street grid and called the town Slidell Station, in honor of the late Louisiana politician and Confederate ambassador John Slidell, whose daughter had married the French baron Frédéric d'Erlanger, an NO&NE investor.

An economic catalyst

As George Ingram had envisaged, the NO&NE economically activated the woodlands east and north of Lake Pontchartrain. By 1890, Slidell had 364 residents and became the gateway into eastern St. Tammany Parish.

When workers extended the railroad 7 miles to the north, it catalyzed a place called Halloo, which became a junction for additional tracks laid westward. Hallo was renamed Pearl, Pearlville and finally today's town of Pearl River.

In 1887, the East Louisiana Railroad opened to connect with Abita Springs, followed in 1888 by a line to Covington, and in 1892, to Mandeville. Now, passengers traveling the southern tier of the United States could arrive comfortably into the heart of St. Tammany Parish.

In 1913, historian Alcée Fortier described Slidell, now with 2,500 people, as "one of the largest towns in the southeastern part of the state since the railroad was built." Abundant in sawmills, factories, brickyards and stores, Slidell served a "shipping and banking town for the large lumber district (at) the junction of two lines."

Rail access to virgin timber brought national attention to the region. In 1904, the Buffalo-based Goodyear family bought up vast acreages of yellow pine forests, while affiliated investors launched the Great Southern Lumber Company and extended the NO&NE further northward.

Later called the New Orleans Great Northern (NOGN), this line spawned a sequence of stations that would become the communities of Florenville, Talisheek, Bush and Sun in St. Tammany Parish, and Varnado and Angie in Washington Parish.

Bogalusa, the 'Magic City'

On the river called Bogue Lusa ("Black Water"), timber investors in 1906 erected a tent encampment for their workers to construct an enormous saw mill and company town to be called Bogalusa.

Built so swiftly it was nicknamed the Magic City, Bogalusa incorporated in 1914 and boasted over 8,200 residents by 1920, most of them employed in what was said to be the largest wood mill in the world.

Others worked at the magnificent Great Southern Hotel, built by the same corporate interests and described in a 1909 Picayune advertisement as an "ideally situated home for Winter Tourists ... in the heart of the Ozone Belt, the healthiest spot in the whole world."

The term "Ozone Belt" referenced yet another economic sector abetted by railroads, so much so that one line was dubbed "the Ozone Route." It implied the widespread belief that pine trees charged the atmosphere with balsam, a fragrant resin used as a salve (balm) said to produce an electrical property understood to be ozone, which people thought cleansed the air of malignant organisms.

Combined with artesian springs and refreshing lake breezes, St. Tammany Parish's pine forests became health-tourism destinations for those seeking reprieve from pestilential New Orleans. Boarding at 6 a.m. on Press Street, city dwellers could arrive at Slidell by 7 a.m. and at Abita Springs by 8:40 a.m.; enjoy a full day at a resort; and return by nightfall.

Why rush? Tourists could stay a spell at Covington's luxurious Claiborne Hotel, the physician-owned Ozonia Rest Cure Inn, or the sumptuous Southern Hotel, built in 1907 and reopened in 2012.

Those seeking relief for "consumption" convalesced at the Louisiana Tuberculosis Sanitarium in Covington, while Slidell offered Sabrier's Resort right by the railroad station, and Lacombe boasted the Oaklawn Inn, "A Piney Woods Resort without a Peer," positioned along the NOGN. Abita Springs was the epitome of an Ozone Belt health resort, offering quaint cabins and bucolic activities around its namesake spring.

New highways, fancier locales

In 1916, the Southern Railway acquired the NO&NE, and in 1929, the Gulf, Mobile & Northern took over the NOGN line. By then, people of means were increasingly traveling by automobile. New highways took them to fancier destinations farther afield, and the Ozone Belt faded from memory.

As for the Indigenous population, some Choctaw persevered in remote corners of St. Tammany Parish long enough for ethnologist David I. Bushnell Jr. to record their folkways for the Smithsonian Institution. But "by an act of Congress on July 1, 1902," wrote Bushnell in 1909, "they were persuaded to remove to the Indian Territory and receive an allotment of land."

The virgin stands of yellow pine also disappeared, leaving sawmills to fold or convert to paper or wood byproducts. Economies shifted from those relying on rails and natural resources to those moving on interstates and based in commerce and services.

While few Louisianians still travel by train, some 60,000 residents now live in the communities born along the 140-year-old railroad corridors that transformed these remote woodlands into the periphery of a metropolis.

Richard Campanella, a geographer with the Tulane School of Architecture and Built Environment, is the author of "Crossroads, Cutoffs, and Confluences;" "Draining New Orleans;" "Bourbon Street: A History;" and other books from LSU Press. He may be reached at richcampanella.com, rcampane@tulane.edu, or @nolacampanella on X.