



Around the Bayou



NEW GATORS - NEW HOME In October we completed our new 5.5-acre alligator eco-habitat. The new area for the alligators has a total of 6 ponds. Upon completion of the habitat, we purchased 30 new alligators of which we have caught and relocated 25. We've now got a total of 7 males and 18 females.

The alligators are all about 35 years old and this means they are perfect for breeding. The intent behind this exhibit is to restore the ecosystem at Alligator Bayou. We're hoping to get the new gators to breed so we can release the babies into Bluff Swamp. Although the gator population in the swamp is decent, we're hoping to increase bloodlines and numbers. Our gator exhibit is an excellent opportunity for visitors to get up-close and personal with these amazing ambassadors for Louisiana.

The alligators were purchased from the exhibit's designer Ron Whitaker and the exhibit is now open and future plans include a bird rookery and the introduction of deer.

WHAT CAME FIRST THE GATOR OR THE EGG? We'll in our case it was the egg. But lo and behold, we know have babies... baby gators that is.

As you know our mating and egg-laying seasons were successful and we are excited to announce that we are now the proud fathers of 29 baby gators. Upon hatching, we removed the babies from the alligator habitat because the threat of predation on baby gators is very high. There is a less than 10% survival rate in the wild. Egrets, herons, raccoons, opossums, bullfrogs, snakes, fish, eagles and other wildlife prey on the babies. We will raise the young for approximately a year or so until they reach 18" in length and they become predators themselves.



ALLIGATOR BAYOU - A CRADLE OF CULTURES



Native Americans The abundance of fish, wildlife, natural resources, and waterways for travel attracted early Native American people to the Spanish Lake Basin and Alligator Bayou areas. Evidence of native people extends back 8,000 years when migrating tribes collected clamshells from the salty Gulf of Mexico waters lapping at the ridge. At that time the area was on the southern coast of the North American continent; the Mississippi River had not yet created much of southeastern Louisiana. Native people were certainly present 3,500 years ago, as evidenced by pottery shards discovered on a ridge near Alligator Bayou.

Later, between 600 BC and 1,590 AD, native people developed a village on the banks of Bayou Manchac just across from Alligator Bayou. The village was a regional seat of government, just as Baton Rouge is today. The Spanish Lake Basin offered all the necessities of life: waterways for traveling and transportation, cane to build huts, cypress for canoes, ash trees for paddles, clay for cooking vessels, palmettos for baskets, and fish and wildlife for food. In the summertime, the people clothed themselves in festoons of moss. They planted maize, beans, squash, sunflowers, melons, tobacco, and gourds in the rich soil deposited by the Mississippi River. Native people named Alligator Bayou "fish place," or Anatamaha in Choctaw, and called the Basin's eastern bluff Ascantia, or "cane brake." The cane growing here was used to make baskets, flutes, duck calls, knives, spears, darts, shields, and arrow shafts. What the people did not find in the Basin, they obtained by paddling through creeks and bayous to Poverty Point, a bustling city and ceremonial center near Northeast Louisiana.

European Exploration The navigational skills of the native people proved to be their undoing in March of 1699, when the French explorer Pierre Le Moyne, Sieur d'Iberville explored the Mississippi River in search of a shortcut to the Gulf of Mexico. After sighting the Red Stick, or "baton rouge" festooned with bloody fish heads (thought to be a boundary marker between the Houma and Bayougoula tribes), an Indian guide showed Iberville the shortcut he sought. It was Bayou Manchac, Choctaw words for "slow."

European Settlement Early in the 1700's, French, Spanish and German families began settling in the Spanish Lake Basin. The five



From The Bayou



Message From Africa Frank, Jamie and I recently returned from a two-week visit to South Africa. We visited Kruger National Park and got a chance to see some of the most amazing animals in the world and got a true sense of nature.

Pet Adoption Beginning next issue, we will be posting photos and descriptions of a few of our four legged friends who could use a good home. **NO NOT THE GATORS!**

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Indian tribes living or hunting there (the Houma, Bayougoula, Chitimacha, Choctaw, and Alabama) taught them how to survive in the harsh wilderness. In 1755, French Acadians began to settle in the Basin. At the of the French and Indian War in 1763 the Acadians arrived in greater numbers when the British ousted the people from their farmlands in Acadie (present-day Nova Scotia). These imperial nations, struggling to control waterways that would define ownership of the land, fought for possession of the Bayou Manchac shortcut to the Gulf.

Throughout the 18th Century, colonizing countries fought for control of Bayou Manchac and the Spanish Lake Basin. The French ceded the "Isle of Orleans" (the territory South of Bayou Manchac to the Gulf of Mexico) to their allies, the Spanish. The British owned the lands north of Bayou Manchac to Canada, so the little bayou became the international boundary line between these historic foes. The Spanish build Fort St. Gabriel de Manchack on the south side of the Bayou Manchac, near the Mississippi River. The British countered by building two forts: Fort Bute on the bayou's north side and Fort Richmond upriver at what would become Baton Rouge. Each nation quickly dealt out defensive land grants. The Spanish welcomed French, Acadian, German and Creole families to lands below Bayou Manchac, while the British gave lands above it to people from England, Scotland, Ireland, Germany, and France. In 1779, the Spanish brought military farmers from the Canary Islands to help defend their territory.

Through these years of change, some native people continued to live in the Basin, but their way of life rapidly disappeared. Nearly one-fourth (and, by some estimates, up to 90%) of them died from smallpox and other diseases transmitted by the Europeans, who set one tribe against another and eventually assimilated the people. Most left their ancestral homes, with some joining confederacies and disappearing from the documentary record.

Trade Along Bayou Manchac Bayou Manchac grew much busier in the colonial years. Beginning in 1718, slaves were transported along the bayou to indigo, sugarcane, and cotton plantations spreading from Baton Rouge to Natchez. The famous pirate, Jean Lafitte, who reputedly had a store in Galveztown, was one of the slave traders. From the 1760's until 1779, merchant ships sailed up Bayou Manchac to Alligator Bayou. There they unloaded and stored their goods in warehouses or hauled them in wagons along a 10-mile carriage road leading to the Mississippi River. This was by far the preferred supply route. The bayou route saved 10 days of rowing or warping (pulling the boat upriver, latching on tree by tree) cargo-laden boats against the swift currents of the Mississippi River.

Battles For The Bayou William Bartram, the famous naturalist, paddled along Bayou Manchac past Iberville's landing in 1775 and wrote about the small vessels loading and unloading at warehouses there. He admired the grand forest with "trees of the first order in magnitude and beauty." However, shortly after Bartram's visit, tensions sparked between England and Spain. British merchants selling goods and supplies to the Spanish colonists in "floating warehouses" enraged Galvez, the governor of Spanish Louisiana. He convinced the crown to declare war on England. The people of the Spanish Lake Basin joined in a triumphant attack on the British Forts Bute and New Richmond. In 1779, the Spanish gained control of both British forts and the West Florida territory extending from Baton Rouge to present-day Florida. During a second battle in 1810, Americans seized Baton Rouge and the Isle of Orleans below Manchac, the last enclave of Latin control in the United States.

After the American seizure of the area, Bayou Manchac was no longer needed as a trade route; America was importing goods from Europe by way of East Coast ports. Even though Bayou Manchac was no longer an international stronghold, the lazy bayou and its basin had been the cradle of cultures that would populate Baton Rouge and South Louisiana. During the next two centuries, the Basin's rich, fertile lands and waters would undergo even greater changes.

