

Why Study Louisiana and Pointe Coupee Parish History?

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You may be asking yourself—Why should I study people, places, and events in the past? What does it mean for me today? What benefit does it have to my future? What is the significance, if any, of Louisiana history and my local history to American history and the world? How do I see my community?

History has two meanings. One is simply what happened; that is, the events, the developments, the circumstances, and thoughts of the past, as they actually occurred. The other is history as knowledge of what happened and the record or expression of what occurred.

History itself should be studied because it is a necessary look at all of human experience. It's a way of going beyond the boundaries of one's own life and culture. It helps us to see more of what humans have experienced. Studying history is the unique way of understanding the present moment and how it relates to the past. Knowing where we are and where we have come from allows us to see the past as it really was. Accurate historical knowledge is essential for social sanity.³ Studying history will prepare you for a career. It will help you understand others. It will help you to become an active American citizen and to safeguard liberty and justice. It will help you with your private pursuit of happiness and personal fulfillment.⁴

Louisiana and Pointe Coupée history are important pieces of the whole picture—including American and world history. Studying your own local history will give you a “sense of self.” It will help you understand better your “sense of place” in Louisiana, America, and the world. History always seems first to be something of the past about other people and other things. Studying Pointe Coupée history will help you see how each piece of history fits into the larger picture. You will see how your history has an effect on you and others—past, present, and future.

History is about being curious and asking why. Studying history includes discussion. History is about reading and studying the past to understand where we have all come from. History is knowing about the past and learning a lesson from it for our lives today. History helps us put problems into perspective. From history we learn that not every difficulty is a problem and that not every problem is a crisis. In other words, problems may not be as serious as we may think they are. History teaches the human experience. Just as we learn from our elders, we can learn from studying history.

The culture in Pointe Coupée maintains the value of family and respect for elders. We all benefit from this. We can extract the knowledge of the past in two ways: written history and oral history. Both are very important to understanding the whole picture.

Historians are people who study and convey history through various media such as books and film. Historians are also people like our family members who tell historical stories of past generations. This is known as “oral history.” Each day we all are making a difference in history. We need to remember that our actions are affecting what is happening currently. Our actions will also affect the future. We are all an integral part of history.

When studying history we can keep a few things in mind. From historical records, we can compile events of the past. From all the sources, we can put the pieces of history together like a puzzle. This puzzle will bring the story alive. Because we were not there, we cannot completely re-create the past. It is important to remember that the perspective of the history we read in historical writings will be that of the author. In the case of personal journals, we must consider how close in time to the event the journal was written. If something was written much later, it can be difficult to verify dates and places. We are relying on someone’s memory to be exact. This is also true for histories we hear in oral interpretations. The person telling about history is relaying that history from memory.

As historians, we know how it all turned out. The people of the time did not know how it would all come out. That uncertainty is a profound element in the past. The historian can only try to understand the past. We were not there, so we can only imagine what the people felt or were thinking.

To put the pieces of history together, we look to many sources. Primary sources include original records and maps at the parish courthouse, information at the local library, documents at the church, the local newspaper archives, and cemeteries. We can also find primary information from historic landmarks, monuments or homes, historical or preservation societies, schools, colleges, universities, museums and galleries, Web sites, journals, diaries, and people. Secondary sources include published and non-published accounts of history. These sources have been researched and written by others. They have been published or are waiting for publication at a later date.

In this course, each of you will become both students and historians of Louisiana and Pointe Coupée history. As students, you will be studying the history already compiled. As historians, you will be engaging in projects where each of you will be researching and compiling new information for Pointe Coupée history. In addition, you will have access to a customized history Web site unique to you to enhance this class. Through this Web site, you will be able to communicate with experts, download information and documents for your assignments and projects, and work with others to discover the history of Pointe Coupée.

The events that tell the history of Louisiana and Pointe Coupée include the horror of war, social conflict, and difficult economic times. Other experiences brought change and progress. Louisiana’s history is complex and unique. It all began with the Mississippi River and the original landscape. It evolved with the variety of people who settled the area over the centuries. The rich heritage of Louisiana includes a fascinating variety of people. You will learn about the original cultures before recorded history. You will

become very familiar with the many groups of people who came to Louisiana in the hundreds of years since those ancient civilizations. You will see how the river, landscape, natural species, and various people cohabited over time. The history of Louisiana and Pointe Coupée reveals the strength of the culture that still exists today. The natural environment continues to add a special element to life. The need to protect the environment will affect the future.

Pointe Coupée Parish, Louisiana: A Unique Place, People & Culture will expose you to many areas of study. You will not only learn about the history of your community, but also its geography, economics, civics, languages, and culture. You will learn more about Louisiana as you study all these elements about Pointe Coupée. You will explore, research, discover, think, analyze, evaluate, create, and communicate as you learn more about Louisiana and Pointe Coupée. You will see the significance of their places in the history of the United States and the world. You, too, have an impact on history. It continues with you.

The importance of Pointe Coupée is not only its initial impact on the early settlement of Louisiana during the formative years, but its prominence later in the 18th century as a *carrefour* for traffic and commerce. After the massacre in 1729, it became a refuge for settlers not only from Fort Rosalie, but from Ouachita, Yazoo, and Arkansas as well. Descendants of the early families of the area, when land became scarce, helped populate and establish the posts at Opelousas and, later, at Avoyelles. As the mother of these posts, the study of Pointe Coupée history is essential to a thorough understanding of a very large portion of the entire state.

Winston Deville (Taken from the introduction in Bill Barron. *Census of Pointe Coupée Louisiana 1745*. New Orleans, LA: Polyanthos, 1978. De Ville is an acclaimed historian, genealogist, author, publisher, and descendant of early Louisiana families.)

Your journey into the history of Pointe Coupée Parish begins with the following pages. Absorb each bite, remembering it is my recipe, as a historian, of the Pointe Coupée story. I invite you to think and analyze along the journey, developing your own “gumbo” as you explore, research, and evaluate what you experience with each step on this historical voyage.

Julie Eshelman-Lee, author

Vive la Louisiane . . . Vive la Pointe Coupée!
