

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION OF CENTRAL LOUISIANA
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You are invited to the unveiling of the

Governor Jimmie Davis Historical Marker

*On the front campus of
Louisiana College*

*Friday, May 7, 2021
at 11:00 am*



**Historic Shiloh Baptist Church
Alexandria, LA**

Dr. Henry O. Robertson, Professor of History at Louisiana College, researched and assisted in the preparation of wording for this important historical marker, commemorating the graduation of Jimmie Davis from Louisiana College in May 1924.

Davis was a north Louisiana native who established a successful career in both country and gospel music beginning in the 1930s, most notably with the song often associated with him, *"You Are My Sunshine."* Later, he was elected to two separate terms as Governor of Louisiana, in 1944 and in 1960. Governor Davis died November 5, 2000 at the age of 101.

Dr. Rick Brewer, President of Louisiana College, directs the attendees to the front of Alexandria Hall on the Louisiana College campus for the unveiling ceremony.

On March 1, 2021 supporters of the Louisiana History Museum, now housed on the first floor of the Alexandria Genealogical Library saw one of their dreams come true. On that date, Shiloh Properties of Alexandria, LLC owner, James A. Hurst, sold the Shiloh Baptist Church building to the Alexandria Historical and Genealogical Library and Museum for \$65,000.00, all of which came from community contributions. The Louisiana History Museum has outgrown the current space for its collection of memorabilia, and now looks forward to the renovation of the former African American church building, which dates from 1904. The museum will continue to raise funds to accomplish the renovations, the cost of which may exceed one million dollars.



**Old Rapides Cemetery Sign
at Main Entrance**



**Visitor Center at Fort Randolph and Fort
Buhlow State Historic Site**

The Alexandria-Pineville Area Convention and Visitors Bureau (APACVB) and the Historical Association of Central Louisiana are collaborating on the production of a Visitor Guide Brochure for the Old Rapides Cemetery. It promises to be a multi-page booklet in tourist rack-card format which will feature photographs of the cemetery and a diagram showing the location of selected monuments of interest to visitors. One of their ideas calls for placing a small sign at each of the selected monuments to enable visitors to find them more easily. Then, as health restrictions are lifted in the foreseeable future, the APACVB staff will be reaching out to statewide convention and trade show organizers to resume plans to hold their meetings in Alexandria.

The new Tour Guide Brochure will be useful to those attending such meetings, especially those who are interested in our local history and wish to tour the cemetery with the aid of the brochure. For larger groups interested in local history tours,

the ABACVB intends to begin organizing guided tours, which may incorporate both the Fort Randolph and Fort Buhlow State Historic Site and the Old Rapides Cemetery. Cemetery volunteers may serve as docents for the tours, perhaps dressed in period costumes.

Selecting as his topic "*The Creation of a Louisiana Bungalow Court: Suburban Development in Louisiana, 1909-1930*", Dr. Henry O. Robertson delivered an online presentation to members of the Louisiana Historical Association on March 10, 2021. Dr. Robertson has researched the emergence of the bungalow as an important residential architectural type, particularly noting its development in New Orleans, Baton Rouge and Alexandria. He discovered that many of the houses along Thornton Court in Alexandria share that unique feature. His presentation is available on YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GMsUK5c2K8Q>

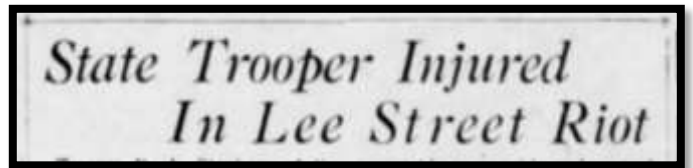


Lee Street Riot of 1942 Historical Marker

The City of Alexandria announced in late February the creation of a historic marker that was erected at 819 Lee Street, the site of the Lee Street Riot of 1942. The marker was displayed at Mayor Jeff Hall’s February "State of the Community" briefing on February 26th at the Randolph Riverfront Center.

“As we celebrate Black History Month, we are pleased to be able to place this historic marker and help tell the story of a significant event in the history of Alexandria’s African-American Community,” said Alexandria Mayor Jeff Hall. “The marker will be located at the site of the former Ritz Theater, which is where the incident reportedly took place on January 10, 1942.”

As the marker notes, Lee Street in Alexandria was once a thriving African-American community in the 1940s. The area included churches, eating establishments, grocery stores, entertainment venues, a



Captions from the January 12, 1942

Alexandria Daily Town Talk

sporting arena, an Army-YMCA-USA building and the Ritz Theater.

The area was a popular destination for African-American soldiers when they were on leave from the area military bases. Quoting from the marker, “A tragic incident occurred in front of the Ritz Theater on Saturday night, January 10, 1942, shortly after the bombing of Pearl Harbor and American entry into World War II, that included unarmed African-American soldiers and the predominantly white, armed Military Police. The War Department’s official report indicates that three African-American soldiers were critically wounded and 29 others required medical treatment as a result of the ‘Riot.’ Civilian witnesses, however, indicated that more than 20 soldiers were killed, others wounded, and numerous civilians were killed or wounded.”

Michael Wynne, a local historian, assisted in the research for the marker’s text.

“Everyone should be reminded that in 1942 the famed *Louisiana Maneuvers* was happening all around central Louisiana,” Wynne said. “These soldiers, both black and white, would come to Alexandria during their off-duty hours to shop and for entertainment.”

Wynne noted records are not clear on what exactly happened that day as official military records, newspaper coverage and stories told by survivors all tell different stories.

“Many say a riot occurred, but others actually say a massacre occurred in a battle that lasted reportedly between 2 and 6 hours,” Wynne said. “The Town Talk reported that 30 gas bombs were used that night by the Alexandria Police Department to quell the disturbance among the reported 3,000 African-Americans present.”

In the 79 years since the incident took place, Wynne said there has been an undercurrent in the African-American community that many African-American soldiers died that night and their deaths were covered-up.

“Hopefully, the full truth of what actually happened on that never-to-be-forgotten night will come out one day,” Wynne said. “With this bronze marker, we are both remembering and honoring the soldiers injured and the soldiers who may have died that night so long ago as well as now committing ourselves to be a better people and to tell our children and our children's children of this tragedy.”

Hall said, “I would like to thank Michael Wynne for his work to help create this historic marker.

I would also like to thank Oday Lavergne, Dr. Robert Rush and the Lee Gateway Development Company for their assistance in getting the marker erected at the historically accurate site of the incident where the Ritz Theater once stood.”

Historical Association of Central Louisiana announces its **ANNUAL MEETING** Sunday, June 6, 2021



Former Lecompte High School

Mark your calendars now for the Historical Association of Central Louisiana **Annual Meeting** to be held at the former Lecompte High School building located at 2204 St. Charles Avenue in Lecompte, LA. It will be held from 2:00 – 4:00 PM on Sunday, June 6, 2021. Tours of the building and its museum will be offered, and some informative history presentations are planned. Come and bring some friends!

With the recent great success of the creation and unveiling of new historical markers, most notably, the Lee Street Riot marker, the Donahue Ferry Road marker, and the P. B. S. Pinchback marker, Rapides Parish and Central Louisiana are now recognizing long forgotten and important areas of our great history. Rapides Parish is now moving to the forefront in the state of honoring and remembering our remarkable history. But there is still so much more to do to fully realize all areas of our fascinating history.

There are several historical marker projects in various stages of development. One covers two of the greatest nearly-forgotten aviation heroes of Louisiana, Charles Frederick Page of Pineville and Paul Leo Ortego of Alexandria. Their stories are too lengthy to share here, but Page received his airship patent before the

Wright Brothers received theirs, and Ortego was instrumental in the creation of the first usable helicopter.

Other markers currently under consideration include the prominent Wells Family of Central Louisiana, a family that produced former Governor James Madison Wells (1808-1899) of Lecompte, and the Holly Oak Cemetery of Pineville, one of our community's most important African American cemeteries.

We would like to hear about your ideas for future historical markers. Please send us your nomination along with your reasons for doing so. We will be discussing the best nominations at our Annual Meeting in June **(see the announcement on page 4)** and also publishing them in future editions.

Email your nominations to:
theHACL@suddenlink.net

ATTENTION READERS

Please consider becoming a member of the
Historical Association of Central Louisiana.

The Historical Association of Central Louisiana is a partnership of members who share a common interest in preserving our local history for future generations.

Mission: HACL strives to advance the preservation, appreciation, and understanding of things of historical value in the central Louisiana community.

Visit our website for details on becoming a member:
theHACL.org