



The Journal of Central Louisiana History and Preservation

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION OF CENTRAL LOUISIANA

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Welcome

CENTRAL LOUISIANA has a fascinating, yet critically important history, comparable to other areas in Louisiana, or even in the South. But Central Louisiana hasn't always made the necessary effort to preserve and protect its unique history like other communities have done successfully. We often lament the loss of such historic buildings as the old Alexandria City Hall and the Paramount Theatre, yet we did little to thwart the destruction of such irreplaceable edifices. But, we are now awakening in our efforts to preserve other threatened bastions of history including, but not limited to, the Shiloh Baptist Church, the "old" Dairy Barn and the "old" Rapides Cemetery.

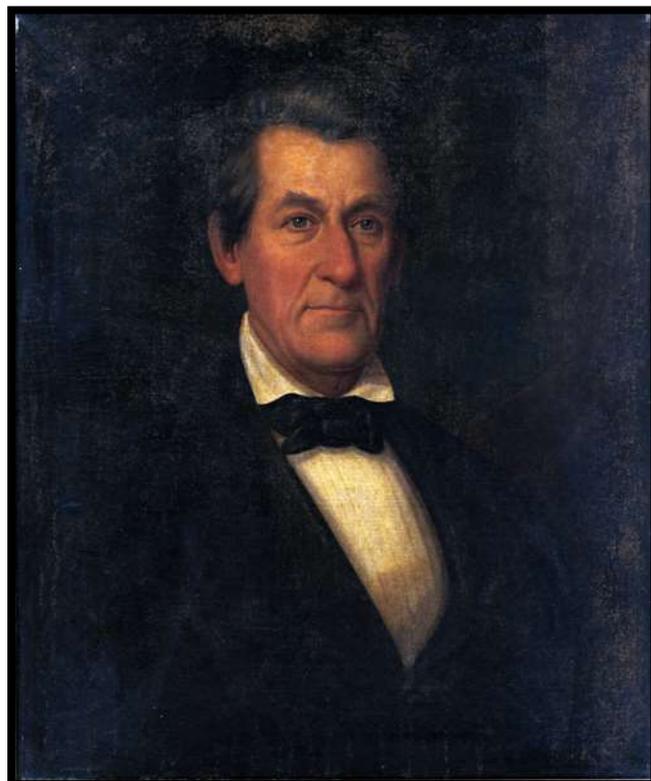
This free journal is devoted to all things historical (buildings, sites, objects and people) in Central Louisiana that need the all-important three "P"s: preservation, promotion and protection. Anyone can submit original articles and stories to the editors for consideration to publish, but will be subject to editorial and spatial requirements. The editors of this journal are happy to try to answer contributors' questions and work with them on their articles towards their potential publication as well as seek the answers to our unanswered questions about our local history.

The preservation of our history can be a success only through real action and awareness. This journal is just a beginning towards the goals of the three "P"s. But with your concerted help and mutual teamwork, we will make Central Louisiana together a role model for others towards the preservation of our unique and fascinating history!

Paul Price and Michael Wynne
Co-Editors

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Governor Joseph Marshall Walker
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THE 1870 RAPIDES PARISH COURTHOUSE

By Michael Wynne

MOST OF OUR EARLY ALEXANDRIA HISTORY was lost due to the three "great" fires of 1848, 1850, and 1864. We know almost nothing of what our town looked like from that period and earlier. One of the most talked about losses of the 1864 fire, a fire caused by the retreating Union soldiers during the Civil War, was our parish courthouse. We do know there was a courthouse building existing at least by 1818 due to surviving records from outside of the parish. But where the courthouse was then, what it looked like and how many different courthouses that have existed before 1864 has been lost to time.

After the 1864 fire, no formal courthouse existed until 1870. Likely, courthouse matters were held in one of the few surviving houses after the fire. But on March 16, 1870, Governor Henry Clay Warmouth approved legislative Act 85 "authorizing the assessment and collection of a special tax of \$25,000 to rebuild a Courthouse in the Parish of Rapides."

"After the 1864 fire, no formal courthouse existed until 1870."

THE 1870 RAPIDES PARISH COURTHOUSE

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THESE FUNDS WERE TO BE GENERATED by a special property tax "not to exceed one percent" of the total value of all moveable and immovable property in the parish. Revenue derived from that source, which was deposited in the state treasury, was devoted to erecting a courthouse and enclosing it with an iron fence; said courthouse to be erected within the town of Alexandria. In addition, the act required the district judge to appoint five "Commissioners of Construction" whose duties included selection of plans and specifications for the new structure, to determine the quality of the necessary building materials, and to negotiate with all interested contractors for construction of the new parochial building. In order to pay the builders for work on the structure, the Commissioners were to periodically withdraw parochial funds deposited in the state treasury.

This Reconstruction era courthouse was replaced in 1903 by a Romanesque style larger courthouse. (See photo at top right.) Both the 1870 and 1903 courthouses were located at the same location on the river before the eventual building of the levee would require the destruction of what was Front Street. The 1903 courthouse lasted till 1939 when the present seven story courthouse, built by the Works Progress Administration, was built on Murray Street. (See photo at bottom right.)

Several photographs of the magnificent 1903 courthouse still exist including one of the elegant courtroom, a rarity. But until recently, no photograph of the 1870 courthouse had ever been located.

On the previous page is an unusual, but unique photograph of the 1870 courthouse. Upon very close examination of the photo, it appears to have been taken at the time of its demolition in 1903. Several window casements have already been removed and there is a pile of used interior lumber on the far right side of the building. On the left side of the photo is likely what was Front Street, now under the current levee, with the river out of view on the far left. The building next to the courthouse with the sun shining on the wall is the parish jail with bars visible on very close inspection. The wooden building that is past the jail shows part of a sign on the side, "(Horse) Liniment," with photos of two horses just above the words, likely making this a store of some sort. Another business is also visible beyond this latter building. The street is likely blocked off due to the demolition of the courthouse and other buildings. In the rear of the building, a metal picket fence, as specified in the legislative act, is barely visible. Also visible is an electric pole with a primitive street light visible beneath.

It has been said that "History is not what happened, but what has survived of what happened." Here is an important building of our own history, sadly forgotten until now.



**Rapides Parish Courthouse
1903-1939**



**Rapides Parish Courthouse
1939-Present**

FATHER CHAD PARTAIN, PRESERVATIONIST

By Michael Wynne, reprinted from Cenla Focus Magazine February 2018



Father Chad is pictured at his church office in Alexandria standing before a picture of the burning of Alexandria during the Civil War.

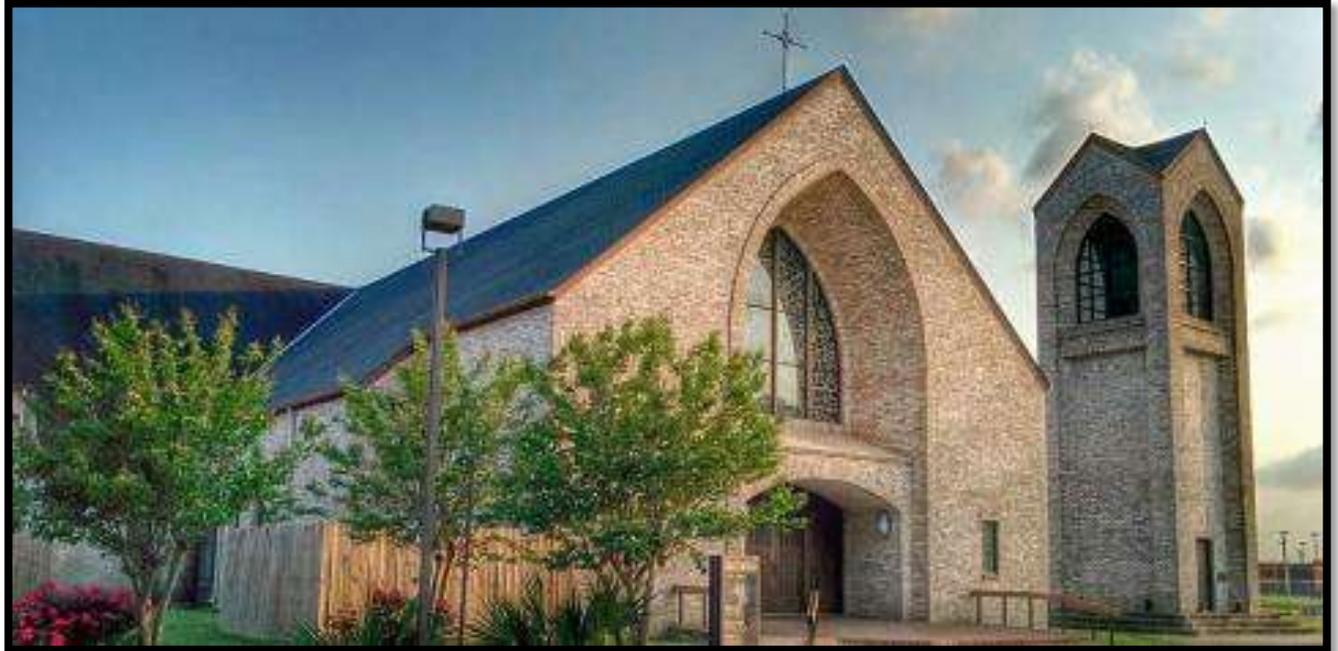
A LARGE CONCRETE CROSS now marks the spot where the first Catholic Missionary proclaimed the Gospel in 1682; a bronze plaque now commemorates the Franciscan Friars who served at the Los Adaes Mission; a marker now stands as a memorial to an unsung pioneer priest of Natchitoches; a tablet now records the names of the men who fought in the American Revolution. All of these memorials, and many more, came about through the work and passion of one man who wants to remind us that we are all part of one great narrative that is being written. Preservation of our history is the telling and retelling of our own story and that story is rediscovered by each and every generation and is then passed on to the next to enrich all of us.

Catholic Priest, Father Chad Partain, a native of Alexandria, is the man described above. The son of a machinist and a receptionist, he has now written twelve books highlighting our history, the most notable of which is a biography of Father Auguste Martin, an early priest of the historic Immaculate Conception Church in Natchitoches. This book, which Father Chad worked on for seven years, is more than a biography of a single man, but is a comprehensive history of the Catholic Church in north Louisiana from 1682-1875. As a young boy, Father Chad was taken into the Immaculate Conception Church by his grandmother where he first saw the resting place of Father Martin. This visit, as well as many readings in local history, inspired Father Chad into a lifelong dedication towards the preservation of our local history. His first act of historic preservation was his Eagle Scout project in 1992 in which he restored the stone staircase at Fort Buhlow.

FATHER CHAD PARTAIN, PRESERVATIONIST

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"**MY FOCUS ON HISTORY** is only narrowed by my love of place," Father Chad says, "My passion is rooted here in central Louisiana." Along with his passion for history is his passion for the Lord's work as he notes. A graduate of Alexandria Senior High School in 1994, he worked for and obtained his PhD in Philosophy and his Masters of Divinity before being ordained a priest in 2003.



ST. FRANCES CABRINI CHURCH

Since being stationed at St. Frances Cabrini Church on Texas Avenue five years ago, he oversees a large congregation and a school, yet somehow finds time to research and write about our local fascinating history. "I chose to become a Diocesan Priest because I wanted to serve the people of central Louisiana, the place that I call home." Two of his planned books will include a book on the life of the late Bishop Greco (whose 100th anniversary of his ordination is this year-2018) and a book celebrating the history of 125 years old Menard High School.

Father Chad has volumes to say about our history and on local preservation. He is excited about the current revitalization of downtown highlighting especially the reopening of the Hotel Bentley, the new community college, and the revitalization of Third Street. He notes the success of the same ventures in river cities like San Antonio and Shreveport. But, he feels that we are still without a true "city center", a focus point for our people to gather. With the continued development of the Highway 28 area, we run the risk of losing our civic identity. Father Chad further notes that you cannot expand downtown development without the continued revitalization of Bolton Avenue. Even with the successes of the Red Cross and Pill Box Pharmacy buildings, still more needs to be done, such as saving the old Don Theater. But, he does applaud the Mayor and the Alexandria City Council for their many recent accomplishments, especially along the riverfront. Father Chad also feels that Alexandria and Pineville is home to a wonderful architectural heritage. He would love for us to imitate what was done in Marksville by placing historic markers in front of many of the historic homes for anyone to tour and see.

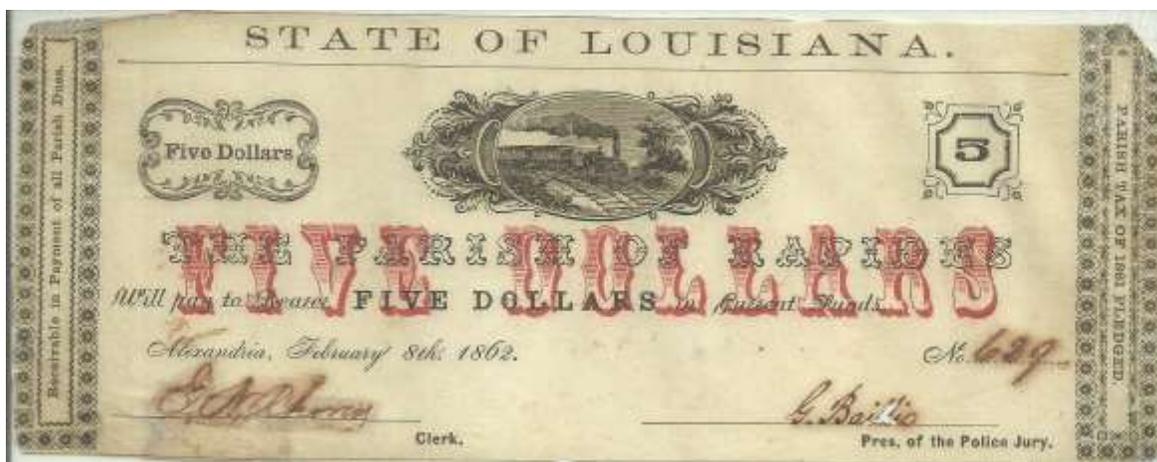
Father Chad Partain is a preservationist hero to this writer and to many others for his many monumental works on history and activities on preservation.

ALEXANDRIA'S PAPER MONEY

By Michael Wynne, reprinted from Cenla Focus, June 2020

WHETHER YOU LIVE IN ALASKA OR IN FLORIDA, when you open up your purse or billfold, everyone sees the same United States currency. These days our notes, if you haven't noticed before, are all "Federal Reserve Notes". In past years, we could have been carrying "Silver Certificates", "Gold Certificates", or "United States Notes", or variations thereof. But the common denominator to what all Americans carry and spend these days are uniform-looking United States currency.

But that always hasn't been so. We know in our earliest years of the republic and before that people bartered, or traded, their products and valuables in business dealings. We can remember reading back in school about the significant trade in fur skins by the early pioneers, but early Americans also traded in all sorts of goods. But depending upon what country controlled an area, such as Spain and France at one time having "owned" large parts of Louisiana, Louisiana's provincial citizens also used the coinage and paper money of their native country, such as Francs during the French regime here in Louisiana in the early 1800's.



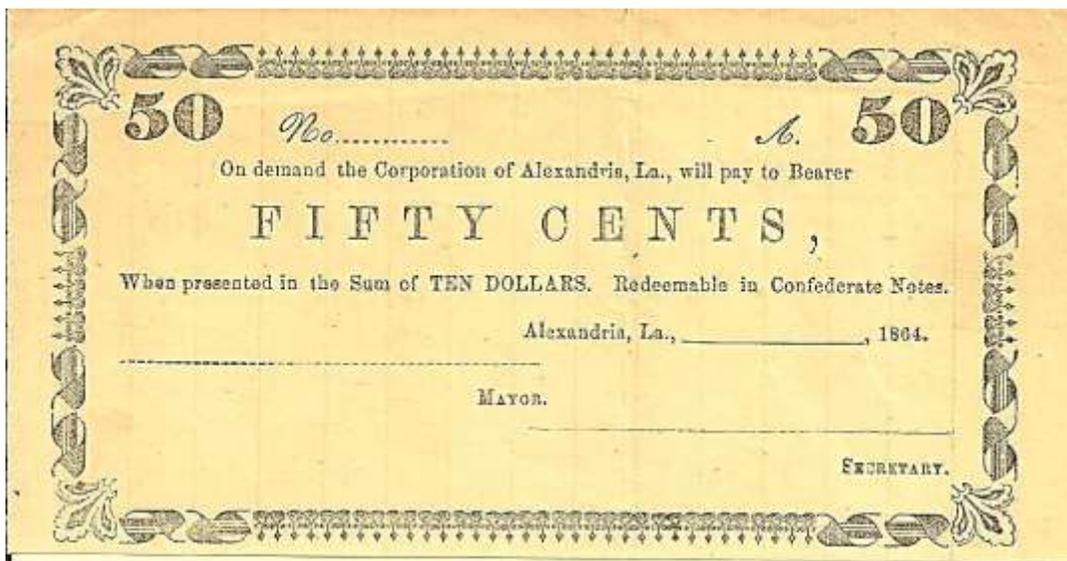
By the time that Louisiana became a state in 1812, the United States was regularly issuing coinage, from "half cents" all the way to \$20 Gold coins ("double eagles"), beginning in the mid 1790's. But the United States didn't regularly issue paper money till the 1860's. Why? There are many reasons for this that whole books have been written about, not the least of which was American's distrust of nationalized paper money in the time of financial instability. So back then, there existed two forms of large-value currency: United States gold coins, ranging from the \$1 to \$20 gold pieces, and locally-issued paper money currency. The locally-issued paper money reached a peak in the South during the Civil War when U.S. currency was not only unavailable, but was considered illegal. This war created a temporary major industry of the issuance of local paper money. Yes, the "Confederate States of America" did issue their own series of currency, but in Louisiana, as well as elsewhere in the South, every state, parish (in Louisiana), city, private bank, and business seemingly issued their own individual currency! Very little was required to issue your own currency; just the issuing business being able to redeem (exchange) their currency on demand by people for silver, gold, or some other publicly acceptable valuable.

So, I finally arrive at Rapides Parish and Alexandria. Rapides Parish was quite poor and sparsely populated in 1862, so the only entity that initially issued money in Rapides Parish was the Rapides Parish Police Jury who issued various denominations ranging from the \$1 to the \$10 note between February and June of 1862.

ALEXANDRIA'S PAPER MONEY

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THE POLICE JURY PAPER MONEY then was signed by Gervais Baillio, President of the Police Jury and the son of the founder of Kent House plantation. All of the varying notes indicated that they were, "Receivable in Payment of all Parish Dues," meaning parish taxes.



But the rarest of all local currency in Louisiana is the City of Alexandria currency, of which only two known 50 cent examples still survive. The 1862 notes were signed by the mayor and the city council secretary. The 1862 notes were hand-signed by the mayor and city council secretary. It states, among other things, "When presented in the Sum of TEN DOLLARS, (it is) Redeemable in Confederate Notes...". By 1864, the real value of Confederate Notes was so low that this currency was virtually valueless. For that reason, likely few notes were ever issued and only two have survived 160 years passage of time. This likely makes the surviving notes the rarest and most sought after items that exist in Central Louisiana!

Here are a couple of Town Talk articles mentioning the currency:

January 25, 1905 - "Mr. Willie Wilson of Welchton showed the Town Talk yesterday some old scrip issued by the town of Alexandria in 1862. The denomination was \$3 and it was signed by Isaac N. Toy Jr., Secretary, and R. Legras, Mayor. Mr. Wilson has \$10,000 of old Confederate currency."

February 13, 1911 - "Mr. S. N. Thomas of Winnfield, La., was a business visitor in this city today. He called at the Town Talk office and showed a collection of the old money or scrip which had been collected by his father, Mr. J. N. Thomas of Winnfield. In the collection was a piece of Alexandria scrip which reads: 'The corporation of the Town of Alexandria will pay to bearer Fifty cents, redeemable on presentation in Confederate notes, in the sums of Twenty Dollars. Signed by Isaac N. Toy, secretary; R. Legras, mayor.' It is numbered 1116 and is dated September, 1862."

GOVERNOR JOSEPH MARSHALL WALKER

By Paul Price

JOSEPH MARSHALL WALKER was born in the French Quarter of New Orleans in 1784, the son of Peter Walker, a precision watchmaker and engineer from Sheffield, England and Charlotte Constant Revoil, born in France. His family moved to Natchez not long after Joseph's birth, and there his father became a merchant and was named the first Clerk of Court for Adams County.

While his formal education was lacking, Joseph proved to be an avid learner by gaining fluency in English, French and Spanish. His language skills were very useful in the multicultural colonial times in which he lived.

In the early 1800s he married Catherine Carter of Natchez, and they had eight children, the youngest of whom was their daughter Catherine, named after her mother. By 1817, Joseph had acquired farm land between Bayou Rapides and Bayou Boeuf, and his family developed a plantation there.

Joseph became interested in politics and was elected to the Louisiana House of Representatives several times beginning in 1820, and later to the state senate in 1836. He served as president of the Constitutional Convention of 1844-45 and as state treasurer from 1846-1850. Joseph ran successfully for the office of Governor in 1849, narrowly defeating Judge McWhorter.

In 1850, he began serving as the first governor to occupy the brand new capitol building in Baton Rouge. He distinguished himself while in office by efforts to establish a public school system and to improve the infrastructure.

Joseph retired in 1853 to his plantation home in Rapides Parish and lived there until he died in 1856. His wife Catherine had predeceased him, as had his grandson, John Holt, Jr., the infant child of his daughter Catherine and her husband, John Holt.

Governor Walker was buried in the family cemetery on his plantation, as was his grandson, John Holt, Jr. His family erected a magnificent white marble monument for Joseph, just as they had already done for John Holt, Jr. **(See photographs at right.)** Both of those monuments are still extant, although disassembled for some reason. It is suspected that both monuments have been moved. They now reside on property owned by the descendants of the Cooper family, distant relatives of Governor Walker.

On April 4, 1976, the Town Talk published an article by Verdis Dowdy on Page D-14 which featured a photograph of the gravestones in an unkept storage area. The monuments were visibly dark with mildew. Ms. Dowdy's article lamented the seeming lack of concern shown to the former governor.

Later, on January 8, 1989, the Town Talk printed a photo article by Hope Norman on pages C-1 and C-2, this one relying on extensive research by Dr. Rosie Ann Walker, the wife of Richard Walker, one of Governor Walker's many descendants.

The current property owners were contacted recently, and were offered assistance from the Historical Association of Central Louisiana to reassemble and restore the monuments, but no resolution has been reached.



**Governor Walker
Monument**



**John Holt, Jr.
Monument**

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

Our Sources:

The 1870 Rapides Parish Courthouse

The Courthouses of Louisiana, Carl A. Brasseaux, Glenn R. Conrad, R. Warren Robison, University of Louisiana at Lafayette Press, 1998
Photograph from the collection of the author.

Father Chad Partain

Personal interview of Father Chad Partain by the author
Photograph of Father Chad Partain by the author

Alexandria's Paper Money

Photographs from the collection of the author
Knowledge base from the author's currency collection hobby

Governor Joseph Marshall Walker

Above the Falls and Historic Cotile, pp. 183-191, Dr. Patsy K. Barber, Bayou Boeuf Publishing, 1994
Alexandria Town Talk article , Verdis Dowdy, April 4, 1976, p. D-14
Alexandria Town Talk article, Hope Norman, January 8, 1989, pp. C-1 and C-2
Photographs by the author