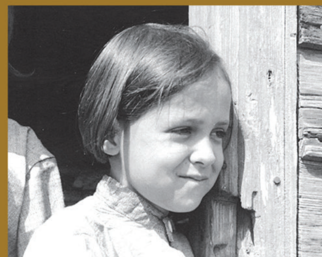
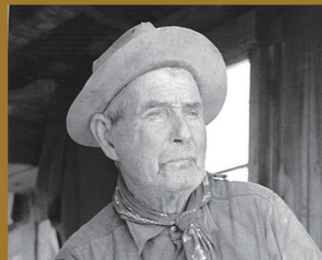
CAJUNS

and Other Characters





True Stories from South Louisiana

Jim Bradshaw

CAJUNS

and Other Characters

CAJUNS
AND OTHER CHARACTERS

TRUE STORIES FROM SOUTH LOUISIANA

JIM BRADSHAW

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About the cover

Photographer Russell Lee visited south Louisiana in the fall of 1938 as part of a Depression-era effort to document life in the rural South. The cover photos are among 18,665 he made between 1935 and December 1945 throughout the US. These and others are on the Web site http://photogrammar.yale.edu. Clockwise, from upper left, farmers rest on bags of rice at the Louisiana State mill in Abbeville in September 1938. The daughter of a sugarcane laborer, photographed in November 1938, holds onto the door frame of an Iberia Parish sharecropper's cabin. A sugarcane farmer near Delcambre looks from his temporary home during harvest in October 1938. Musicians entertain in a Cajun band contest at the National Rice Festival in Crowley in October 1938. A man looks glumly at the camera outside the Lafayette Parish courthouse.

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For all the wonderful readers who have been so supportive of me since I first started putting words on paper, and to Rose Marye, my wife and editor, who fixes more of what I write than I want to admit.

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Preface

According to a note on a desk calendar I found when I packed up my belongings to head into retirement at the end of 2008, I first began writing a daily column for the *Lafayette Advertiser* on January 4, 1971. The column was called, cleverly, I thought at the time, "Barbs and Gems," because I (Gem) was to share the writing with reporter Barbara Vorenkamp (Barbs)—making the idea of a daily column a bit less daunting than it might otherwise be.

The column was only a week old when Barbara announced that her husband had been transferred to his company's office in Texas, and I was left to supply both the Barbs and the Gems. As I look back at some of those columns, I am forced to admit the output was uneven, but it was of sufficient quality to win the first Hal Boyle Award, given by the Louisiana-Mississippi Associated Press to a columnist who mirrored the humor, whimsy, and everyday outlook of the AP writer whose wit and style I'd admired since I began reading newspapers as a kid.

The burden became a bit easier when I moved to the weekly *Morning Star*, the newspaper of the Diocese of Lafayette. In 1976, Barbs and Gems won first place in the national competition of the Catholic Press Association.

I put the column aside in the early 1980s when I took an untimely venture into the advertising business. It was just as the entire economy of south Louisiana was virtually wiped out by a slumping oil industry, plummeting real estate values, and all sorts of things that writers, and most economists, don't have a clue about.

That precipitated my return to the *Advertiser*, where I eventually became regional editor and inaugurated a new daily column about the history and culture of south Louisiana called "C'est Vrai," which means, "It's true."

This column immediately struck a responsive chord with the newspaper's readers and soon became one of the most rewarding things I've done in what's perilously near a half century in journalism. In many instances it evoked a back-and-forth between me and readers who mailed, e-mailed, or telephoned. It became a sort of ongoing community conversation, something of an oral history. In almost every instance it evoked a reminiscence from someone with a long memory that became the fodder for another column.

Since my retirement from the *Advertiser*, I have continued to write "C'est Vrai" once a week for members of the Louisiana State Newspapers group, mostly community papers scattered throughout south Louisiana.

The original columns come from a wide range of sources, and as they appeared in the popular press they were not annotated. Thus there are no footnotes in this book.

One of the things a writer does when forced to come up with a column every day is to stash away all sorts of notes and clippings and pieces of information that may prove useful on those days when the muse and mind seem to be on vacation. I still do that, but quite often the only annotation I might be able to give is something like, "note on back of utility company envelope, halfway down third pile, right-hand side of desk."

Original typescripts and supporting data for many of these columns and for much of my other writing can be found in the James H. Bradshaw Collection 246, Special Collections and Archives, Edith Garland Dupré Library at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette.

I hope you enjoy these stories. Share yours with me at jimbradshaw4321@gmail.com

Jim Bradshaw
Washington, Louisiana
April 2016

Introduction

In the 1970s and 1980s, when everything Cajun became cool, and towns and tourist agencies discovered there was money to be made on the phenomenon, "authentic" Cajun legends began to pop up everywhere. A good many of them were only faintly based on facts, a lot of them were pure and simple fiction.

As historian Carl Brasseaux understates in his book, *The Founding of New Acadia* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), "Local government agencies, tourist bureaus, and business groups produced vast quantities of promotional material designed to lure outsiders to their particular corner of 'Cajun Country.' In the haste to get these brochures to market, public relations firms entrusted with the task of 'selling Acadiana' sacrificed historical detail and accuracy on the altar of marketability.

"The resulting legacy of confusion has given rise to a seeming parody of the 'Washington slept here' phenomenon, as every community of consequence in Acadiana began to proclaim itself the world capital . . . of things Cajun."

That was what led the Powers That Be in Baton Rouge to try to define the area of Acadiana by legislation (of course, so it could be properly packaged and marketed). The original legislation included just a handful of parishes where the original Acadians who came to Louisiana had actually settled, but by the time the bill got through the state legislature representatives from some twenty-two parishes—almost half the state—wanting to capitalize on the Cajun craze had tacked themselves onto the legislation.

Legislators, to their credit, did reject a semiserious attempt to include Port Arthur, Texas, even though a lot of Cajuns live there, mispronouncing their last names and adulterating their music with steel guitars instead of accordions. New Orleans was not included either. In those days, if asked

if they were Cajun the uppity city folks, replied, “Oh, no! We’re Creole!” Now, of course, that tune has changed, and you hear more zydeco than jazz when you walk through the French Quarter.

The phenomenon reached well beyond our borders. Half the restaurants in the world began to splash hot sauce on whatever was on their menu and label it Cajun. When Paul Hardy was lieutenant governor in the 1970s, he went to a baseball game in California and heard a vendor hawking “Cajun hotdogs.” He bought one just to see what in the world it might be. It was a Polish sausage on a bun.

It got so bad that we had to create an official sticker to put on products from south Louisiana that labeled them “authentic Cajun.” Even then half the stuff with the label might have been grown or made in Acadiana but had little to do with Cajuns or their culture.

The result has been that a lot of hogwash has stayed with us, and the made-up legends have become as authentic as the real ones that were their inspiration. That presents a bit of a problem as we try to revitalize and keep our unique culture in the face of the modern onslaught of information and misinformation from all sorts of media and technologies.

If we’re going to save the “authentic” culture, we have to know what it is. Unfortunately, there is a good chance that the authentic has become so entangled with the made-up we’ll never untangle one from the other. Complicating it further, a generation or two has grown up with the new versions and seems to like them better than the real ones.

1

Ah, Politics

Nothing Like Louisiana Politics

The story goes that in the early 1970s Louisiana sold some old voting machines to the city of Matamoras, Mexico. They were used for the first time in a local election in Mexico several months later, and former governor Edwin Edwards carried four precincts.

The story's not true, but it does capture the flavor of a place where rigging voting machines was not completely unheard of, and where political shenanigans were more or less openly acknowledged. Our colorful Governor Earl Long, for example, is reputed to have regularly told people, "When I die I want to be buried in Louisiana because I want to stay active in politics."

The late Daley J. "Cat" Doucet, who was one of the most famous of a list of flamboyant sheriffs of St. Landry Parish, reportedly had a tried-and-true method for getting his vote to the polls. He'd visit the poorer districts of the parish before the election and distribute a new shoe to each of his supporters. Just one shoe. His voters didn't get the other shoe until after the election—and then only if Cat carried the precinct.

Dudley J. LeBlanc, the state senator and gubernatorial candidate from Vermilion Parish, used flattery. During one of his campaigns, he visited an influential fellow in south Louisiana, a staunch leader in the Catholic Church. Dudley had just been to visit the pope, or so he said.

LeBlanc talked politics about a half hour with the man, got up to leave, then snapped his fingers and turned back. "I almost forgot," he said. "You know, when I visited the pope, I thought about you." He went to his car and returned with a shoebox filled with identical religious medals. He fumbled through the box, picked up one, looked at it, picked up another, looked at it, and went through half a dozen or so.

Then his eyes lit up. "This is the one," he said, handing over a medal

exactly like every other one in the box. “This is the one I had the pope bless especially for you.”

Warren J. “Puggy” Moity was a classic campaigner; ask any television station manager who sat with his hand poised over the “bleep button” while Puggy was on the air. Moity once ran for four different offices, from state to local level, all in the same election, just so he could “campaign against” (ridicule, in sometimes salty terms) any of his numerous political enemies no matter what they were running for.

“What happens,” he was asked, “if you should actually win all four?”

“Oh,” he said. “I’ll just keep the highest one and quit the others.”

He never won an election and probably never expected to win one.

And then there were always tricks that could be played on election day—even before Uncle Earl told the world that with a proper mechanic he could make the old voting machines do anything he wanted them to do, including singing “Home, Sweet Home.”

In the days of paper ballots, for example, according to election rules a ballot was not valid if it had any extraneous marks on it. If I was a poll watcher and thought you voted against my candidate, I’d use the eraser end of my pencil to push it well down into the ballot box. The ink I’d smeared across the tip of my eraser made an illegal mark and spoiled the ballot. But you didn’t need to know that.

*****

Louisiana legislators formally created the region of Acadiana in 1971. It includes almost all south Louisiana from the Texas border on the west to the Mississippi River on the east. The name comes from the French-speaking Acadians who came to Louisiana after their exile from ancestral lands in Canada in 1755. According to most accounts, the name Acadiana was used first in 1963 after a New York typist added an extra “a” to an invoice sent to Lafayette’s Acadian Television Corporation. That caught the eye and fancy of the managers at KATC television, and they began to use it to describe their viewing area.

JFK Had Early Ties to Louisiana

President John F. Kennedy liked Louisiana, and with good cause.

Louisiana was one of the first states to support him on the national political stage, beginning with some old-time political machinations at the 1956 Democratic National Convention in Chicago.

Two of the people most instrumental in forming the Kennedy-Louisiana connection were Camille Gravel, an Alexandria attorney who for decades was a major force in Louisiana political affairs, and Edmund Reggie of Crowley, who later became Ted Kennedy's father-in-law and who even as a young man worked behind the scenes as well as anybody in politics.

"The Louisiana delegates to the 1956 convention sat across the aisle from the Massachusetts delegates," Reggie recalled. "Through conversation with some of them, Camille and I became impressed with the description of the young (thirty-seven years old) Senator John F. Kennedy, whom they wanted to try for vice president.

"Neither Camille nor I had ever heard of him, but without a candidate to support for V.P., and having long before pledged to Adlai Stevenson for President, we decided to make a courtesy call on Kennedy at his hotel."

Bobby Kennedy opened the door when the two Louisianans visited JFK's suite.

"We introduced ourselves and he invited us into the parlor of the suite. Nobody else was in it. We told him we thought we could get the Louisiana delegation to support his brother, whereupon he must have thought we were out of our minds. A Southern state for a Yankee senator?"

John F. Kennedy was the guest of honor at the 1959 International Rice Festival in Crowley, at the invitation of Judge Reggie, at left in dark suit. (Photo courtesy of Reggie Family Archives.)

Nonetheless, Bobby asked them to wait a minute and went into another room of the suite.

"In less than two minutes, he called Camille and me into the small bedroom which had a double bed and one chair," Reggie recalled. "In the chair was Governor Abe Ribicoff of Connecticut and the man himself was on the bed. He greeted us and, since there was no place to sit, he invited us to sit on the bed with him. We did. All three of us on his bed."

Reggie and Gravel explained to the Kennedy brothers that the Louisiana delegation was bound to vote in a bloc under what was called the "unit rule," and that Governor Earl Long expected the delegation to support Tennessee Senator Estes Kefauver. But, they said, that could be dealt with.

> We told him, "Governor Long is a big-time horse-race bettor who loves the ponies and he and Mrs. Long will leave the hotel about 10 o'clock to go to the race track." We thought that if JFK came to the hotel where our delegates were staying while Governor and Mrs. Long were away at the races, we might be able to get the delegation to support him. That night, Camille and I worked closely with the Louisiana delegation, many of whom . . . were anti-Long. Everyone kept mum about our meeting, but every delegate but the Longs attended it.

Kennedy spoke for about twenty minutes, after which the delegation voted unanimously to support him for vice president.

"When Earl Long returned and found out what we did during his trek to the track, he ranted and raved and never spoke another word to either Camille or me during the convention," Reggie said. "Tension prevailed because in the convention hall we sat in a row next to each other: Camille on the aisle, then Governor Long, then Mrs. Long, and then me. The fury of the Longs could be felt by everyone in the delegation, but everyone stood pat. The delegation remained Kennedy's throughout the convention."

Louisiana was in the minority in that vote, and Kefauver was selected as Stevenson's running mate, but JFK remembered the early support.

"Leaving the convention hall after the proceedings, it just happened that Doris [Mrs. Reggie] and I were walking next to JFK," Reggie recalled. "We talked about where he was going [after the convention] and he told me [he was going] to meet his father in the south of France. I had no idea who JFK's family was.

"When we split, he told me, 'Let's stay in touch.' I agreed. We stayed in touch the rest of his life."

Reggie was a leader in Kennedy's presidential campaign in Louisiana, starting with an invitation for JFK and Jackie to be honored guests at the 1959 International Rice Festival in Crowley. More than 130,000 people showed up to hear Kennedy speak.

In 1961, following his inauguration, President Kennedy sent Reggie on a State Department cultural exchange mission to the Middle East, during which Reggie was given a hero's welcome in his parents' hometown of Ihden, Lebanon.

Judge Reggie continued to serve JFK as liaison with Governor Jimmy Davis from 1961 until Kennedy's assassination in 1963.

Judge Reggie's daughter, Victoria, married JFK's youngest brother, Ted Kennedy, in 1992 and the long-standing family relationship continued. Judge Reggie continued to be active in national Democratic politics until only months before his death in 2013.

The Judge Who Turned Elections Dry

Talk about ruining a perfectly good election.

With Louisiana politics being what they generally are, electioneering was at a fever pitch in February 1951 when District Attorney (and, later, federal judge) Richard Putnam threw his big monkey wrench into things.

He ruled it was illegal to get people stinking drunk, haul them to the polls, and then cast their vote for them if they couldn't do it themselves.

Can you imagine? Even the saloons had to close, according to the law.

He passed out mimeographed sheets to politically influential people in Lafayette, Vermilion, and Acadia parishes (where he had jurisdiction) with a long list of what could and could not be done on election day.

You could read the incredulity between the lines when a newspaper reported, "In the first such known advance stipulation against privately dispensed free liquor, Putnam listed No. 1 on his list of possible election violations that 'no person shall sell or give away any liquor from midnight to midnight on election day . . . [including] private individuals and semi-private gatherings.'" He said it was also against the rules to show up at the polls drunk or to bring booze to the polling place itself.

Putnam also ruled that election commissioners couldn't "assist" voters

unless the voters asked for assistance and swore they could not read or write or had some disability that made assistance necessary. He went on to rule that it would be regarded as a crime if you swore to such things and they turned out not to be true.

Besides that, he ruled it was against the law for anyone to attempt to intimidate a voter, to signal how someone voted or, for goodness' sake, to vote more than once. Despite Earl Long's wish, Putnam said you had to be alive at the time your ballot was cast and actually cast it yourself.

Vote buying was out. In fact, the first person who turned in a vote buyer was immune from prosecution and eligible to receive $500 to $1,000 from the fine imposed if the vote buyer was convicted. And, just to make doubly sure that everything was on the up-and-up, he ruled that election officials couldn't take bribes.

It may seem incredible today but election practices were such in those days that taking a stance as Putnam did was a pretty courageous thing to do. In most places, prosecutors did little about election day chicanery, especially when their political cronies were involved.

Putnam's stance apparently did him no harm. He was elected as a state district judge in 1954 without opposition. He served on the 15th District bench until 1961, when he was made a federal judge. He then served for more than forty years on the federal bench, again taking some unpopular positions, particularly during desegregation disputes in the 1960s, when his court mandated federal oversight of school systems throughout south Louisiana. Some of the orders he handed down were challenged by school boards for decades. None were overturned

Judge Putnam died in 2002 at the age of eighty-nine, a man respected for the courage he displayed early in his career.

Shootout at the Ballot Box

Practically everyone's heard of the long-running feud between the Hatfields and McCoys in the Appalachian back country, but we've had a few bloody family encounters in Acadiana too.

One of them came to a head in September 1924 in what became known as the Gunfight at Plaquemine Point, an undefined area named in French for the persimmon trees that were once abundant in the area, which is

more or less between the old towns of Church Point and Lewisburg, near the St. Landry-Acadia parish line.

The bad blood began eight years earlier in 1916 when Tom Childs, who was thirteen years old, slapped Joseph Cormier, who was about the same age. Over the years, the families forgot what brought on the slapping, but they didn't forget the slap itself. The feud apparently heated up during bitter election campaigning in 1924 (the first time Huey Long ran for governor). Things turned really nasty three weeks before the infamous gun battle.

According to old news reports, sixty-year-old John B. Childs and his sons, Getty, twenty-three, and Tom, twenty-one, attacked Joseph Cormier, patriarch of the other feuding family, in mid-August at the Charles Bourque Store in Lewisburg, slashing him badly with knives.

Cormier was released from the hospital three weeks later. He was serving as an election official at the Joseph DeJean garage, the polling place for the Plaquemine Point area about four miles from Church Point, when about midmorning he saw John Childs and his son Tom approaching.

Some say he acted in revenge, some say he acted from fear, but according to one account, Cormier "whipped out his gun and fired, killing the elder Childs instantly. The younger Childs then pulled out his gun and prepared to shoot, when he was cut down by Cormier . . . [before] the other son of John Childs, Getty, engaged in a battle with Cormier."

Another report says that "no one could say who fired the first shot."

Whoever started it, the result was "a desperate battle" with "free for all shooting" in "one of the fiercest gun battles fought in St. Landry Parish in many years," according to the press account.

When the smoke cleared, John Childs and Thomas Childs were dead at the scene. Cormier died about twenty minutes after the shooting. Getty Childs lived a little more than an hour. Three bystanders, Arville and Jean-Baptiste Richard and Joseph Castille, were wounded but survived.

Arville took a glancing shot to the face; Jean-Baptiste was seriously wounded in the back, according to the newspaper report. Castille's life was probably saved because he had two half dollars in his pocket and "these changed the course and somewhat impeded the force of the bullet." He was shot in the stomach.

Dr. R. M. Littell, the St. Landry Parish coroner, "accompanied by a large crowd" from Opelousas went to Plaquemine Point to hold an inquest. He

apparently found nobody to charge in the shootings. Everyone who had been involved was dead.

Huey Under the Evangeline Oak

Even his worst critics will admit that Huey Long was a spellbinding orator. It may have been a bit overboard when one of his admirers called him “the most persuasive man living,” but it wasn’t too far off the mark.

Long delivered one of his most memorable speeches during the 1928 campaign for governor when he summed up his political philosophy beneath the Evangeline Oak in St. Martinville.

> It is here under this oak where Evangeline waited for her lover, Gabriel, who never came. This oak is an immortal spot, made so by Longfellow’s poem, but Evangeline is not the only one who has waited here in disappointment. Where are the schools that you have waited for your children to have, that have never come? Where are the roads and highways that you send your money to build, that are no nearer now than before? Where are the institutions to care for the sick and disabled? Evangeline wept bitter tears in her disappointment, but it lasted only through one lifetime. Your tears in this country, around this oak, have lasted for generations. Give me the chance to dry the eyes of those who still weep here.

Long’s 1928 campaign changed Louisiana politics forever. He covered 25,000 miles on Louisiana’s dirt roads, delivering more than 600 speeches, mostly to poor country folks in small towns where no candidate for governor had ever bothered to visit. He told these people that he was a country boy just like them, and that he remembered his roots.

And, of course, Huey was Huey and there was also a touch of humbug in his campaigning. For example, the first time he campaigned in south Louisiana the local politicians reminded the north Louisiana Baptists that there were a lot of Catholics down here.

That’s why he told the story about how as a boy he would each Sunday “get up at six in the morning and hitch up our horse and buggy and . . . take my Catholic grandparents to Mass. I would bring them home, and then at ten o’clock I would hitch up the old horse and take my Baptist grandparents to church.”

After he told that story, one of the local leaders remarked, “Why Huey,

I didn't know you had Catholic grandparents."

"Don't be a doggone fool," Huey replied. "We didn't even have a horse."

An Election to Remember

Even by Louisiana standards, the election for Louisiana governor in 1896 was a doozy. The incumbent was Democrat Murphy J. Foster, a rich planter from St. Mary Parish. His opponent was John Pharr, a richer planter from St. Mary Parish.

Foster won but didn't even try to deny that there might have been some shenanigans at the polls. That would have been hard to do in the face of results such as those from West Feliciana Parish, where "official" returns gave Foster 9,499 votes to just 1 vote for Pharr.

Democratic newspapers suggested it was necessary to fix the election because Foster represented plantation owners and other people with property, and their opinions were more important than those of the "corrupt masses" represented by Pharr.

The "corrupt masses" disagreed. Taylor Cade, who a newspaper report said lived in Texas "and draws his salary as sheriff of Iberia Parish," chartered a steamboat and "loaded it down with provisions and munitions of war." He then headed to Baton Rouge "with the expressed intention of seating Pharr."

Along the way, "Cade would tie up at every telegraph station . . . long enough to send a truculent dispatch [to the Baton Rouge newspapers] announcing the progress of his boat and the determination of his passengers to see that 'Fosterism' should be ended."

The Baton Rouge *Advocate*, which supported Foster, said that Cade's "absurd and bombastic pronouncements created no end of amusement among . . . Democrats," who were gathering in the capital to call the bluff of "Admiral Cade and his holy terrors."

If the *Advocate's* pro-Democratic reporting can be relied upon, when Cade's boat finally reached Baton Rouge "and [he] looked over the situation, they were as meek as Mary's little lamb, and not finding the capital congenial . . . they cut their visit very short."

Foster was ultimately seated peacefully for a second term and in 1898 promoted the adoption of a new Louisiana constitution, "to disenfranchise blacks, Republicans, and white Populists" (all of whom had voted

overwhelmingly for Pharr). Because of provisions in that constitution, Foster was the last Democratic gubernatorial nominee to face a serious challenge from a Republican until 1963 when Charlton Lyons ran a strong campaign against John McKeithen.

In 1900, when Foster could not run because of term limits, Cade found some backing for his own shot at the governor's mansion. He was described in one newspaper report, as "not a speaker, but . . . a man of much courage." Democrat William Heard carried the general election with 60,206 votes out of 76,870 cast. Heard had been a colleague of Foster's in the Louisiana Senate and had been state auditor during Foster's tenure.

On the day after that election, the *New Orleans Picayune* reported, "The rooster [symbol of the Louisiana Democratic Party] began crowing in the hills of north Louisiana yesterday, and down to the gulf his melodious music, the song of an overwhelming victory, re-echoed through the state."

In those days, US senators were named by the state legislature, and Foster got that appointment. He served in the Senate until 1913, when he lost the Democratic nomination. He was then appointed by President Woodrow Wilson as the customs collector in New Orleans.

Foster died in 1921 on Dixie Plantation near Franklin, some nine years before his grandson and namesake was born. That Murphy Foster served as governor from 1996 to 2004. Grandpa might well have been dismayed that the second Governor Foster was elected as a Republican.

Fistfight Didn't Amount to Much

On November 16, 1927, J. Y. Sanders, Sr., a lawyer from the St. Mary Parish seat of Franklin who was governor from 1908 through 1912, had a fistfight with governor-to-be Huey Long in the lobby of the Roosevelt Hotel in New Orleans. Huey tried to run away after hitting Sanders, but he didn't make it to the elevator.

The fifty-nine-year-old Sanders, a burly 200-pounder, caught the Kingfish after chasing him across the hotel lobby. Then, according to a newspaper account of the day, "the popular decision of the lobbyhounds gave Mr. Sanders both rounds and the intermission."

A fistfight with a political opponent was not uncharacteristic of the former governor. Sanders had seen hard times before getting to the

governor's mansion, and that might have been part of what formed his character. He was born January 29, 1869, near Morgan City, by then a bustling little port at the mouth of the Atchafalaya River, but spent his youth on Inglewood Plantation near Franklin.

His father died during the Civil War when the future governor was only thirteen. A huge flood wiped out Inglewood in 1882, but the family was able to salvage enough money to purchase a home on the outskirts of Franklin, where Jared worked as a water boy, clerk, sawmill hand, store clerk, and newspaper typesetter.

He earned enough to study law at Tulane and became a partner in the firm of Foster, Milling & Sanders. The Foster in the firm was Murphy J. Foster, who was Sanders's cousin. Foster, Milling & Sanders may be the only law firm to send two partners to the governor's mansion.

Not untypically, a political feud between two prominent St. Mary families also played a part in Sanders's race for governor. Sanders, a Democrat, defeated Republican Henry N. Pharr to win the election in 1908. Henry was the son of J. N. Pharr, whom Foster defeated in the 1896 election. Robert E. Milling, the third partner in the firm, never ran for governor but was district attorney in Winn Parish before moving to Franklin.

In 1928 Sanders's son, J. Y. Sanders Jr., was elected to the state legislature and became one of the leaders pushing for Huey Long's impeachment. Son and father were virulent anti-Long men, which was one of the reasons for the New Orleans fisticuffs. Sanders accused Long of being a "damned liar."

"After striking the first blow," the *New Orleans Morning Tribune* reported, "Mr. Long ran through the crowded lobby to an elevator while a crowd held Mr. Sanders, but the . . . former governor broke away from those who were holding him and succeeded in reaching the elevator, where a second encounter was staged. The commotion was ended only when friends separated the two men and conducted Mr. Long to another elevator which took him safely to his room."

Sanders died in 1944 at seventy-five in Baton Rouge and is buried in Franklin. He outlived nemesis Huey by nine years.

Willis Had Views On What Was Un-American

As a member of the Committee on Un-American Activities of the US

House of Representatives Edwin Edward Willis took on the Ku Klux Klan, wrestled with thorny issues roused by the Vietnam War and the civil rights movement, and threw a popular folk singer out of his house.

Willis was elected from south Louisiana to the US Congress in 1949 when incumbent Jimmy Domengeaux, who had served since 1941 (with an interruption for service during World War II), decided to run for the Senate seat held by Russell Long.

That proved to be a mistake for Domengeaux but a boon for Willis. Jimmy lost to Long, but Willis won and kept winning, becoming one of the most powerful men in Congress in those days when seniority counted for practically everything.

Willis set a record for the number of committees he chaired but is remembered most as a member and chairman of the Un-American Activities Committee during some of the most turbulent times in the history of the United States and American politics.

Willis was born in 1904 in Arnaudville, the Bayou Teche community that sprang up at the site of an old Attakapas Indian village on the border of what are now St. Landry and St. Martin parishes, He was the son of Olanda Willis and Julia Hardy, who moved down the bayou to St. Martinville some time before 1926 when Ed graduated from high school. After attending Loyola University, he began practicing law in New Orleans and moved back to St. Martinville in 1936. He was elected to the Louisiana Senate in 1948 as a member of the pro-Long faction, then resigned that seat to run for Congress.

He sat as chairman of the powerful Committee on Un-American Activities from 1963 to 1969 and took the stand not uncommon at that time that elements within the civil rights movement and some opponents to the Vietnam War were at least unpatriotic if not outright Communists.

But he just as adamantly opposed the Ku Klux Klan during those years, beginning a probe that resulted in a contempt of Congress citation against imperial wizard Robert Shelton, who served a jail term for refusing to testify before Congress.

During congressional breaks Willis retired to a thousand-acre farm near Arnaudville; it was there that he had a run-in with folk music legend Pete Seeger.

In the summer of 1955, according to Seeger biographer David

Dunaway, when Willis was a member of the un-American committee but not yet chairman, Seeger appeared at a south Louisiana music festival and was invited to a house "outside of town" to learn some Cajun songs.

Seeger was dismayed when he found that the house belonged to the congressman who was part of the hearings into Communist infiltration of the entertainment industry. Seeger had refused to cooperate with the committee.

Willis was apparently equally dismayed when he found Seeger in his house.

"They met me at the door saying, 'Mr. Seeger, meet Congressman Willis,'" Seeger said. "You could have knocked me over with a feather. Willis didn't bat an eyelash, but I was there sitting in his house; we were singing songs, having a good time, and I could see him growing more and more uncomfortable, watching me sip his liquor."

According to the Dunaway story, Willis's wife was singing merrily along as Seeger mastered a few Cajun tunes, when the congressman steered Seeger into the kitchen. Willis told him to leave.

Willis was considered liberal by Louisiana standards. He was challenged three times by conservative Republicans in the days when the GOP was just beginning to get a bit of life in the state. The first of them was New Iberia businessman Jean Paulin Duhe who ran in 1948. Newspaperman Bob Angers challenged Willis as a Goldwater Republican in 1964. Duhe and Angers each lost by about a 60–40 margin.

In 1966 Willis was in poor health after a series of strokes but was still able to hold on to his seat in Congress (again, 60–40) against Lafayette oil man Hall Lyons, son of Charlton Lyons who was the first serious Louisiana Republican gubernatorial candidate in modern times.

That was Willis's last victory. He ran again in 1968, but Pat Caffery, a conservative Democrat from New Iberia, won the party's nomination and was unopposed in the general election. Caffery was unopposed in 1970 and chose not to run in 1972, when the congressional seat finally went to a Republican, Dave Treen.

Willis died that year, which coincidentally was the same year that his near namesake and former congressional colleague Edwin Edwards became governor.