

HURRICANE AUDREY

HURRICANE AUDREY

THE DEADLY STORM OF 1957

CATHY C. POST



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Maps by Cathy C. Post

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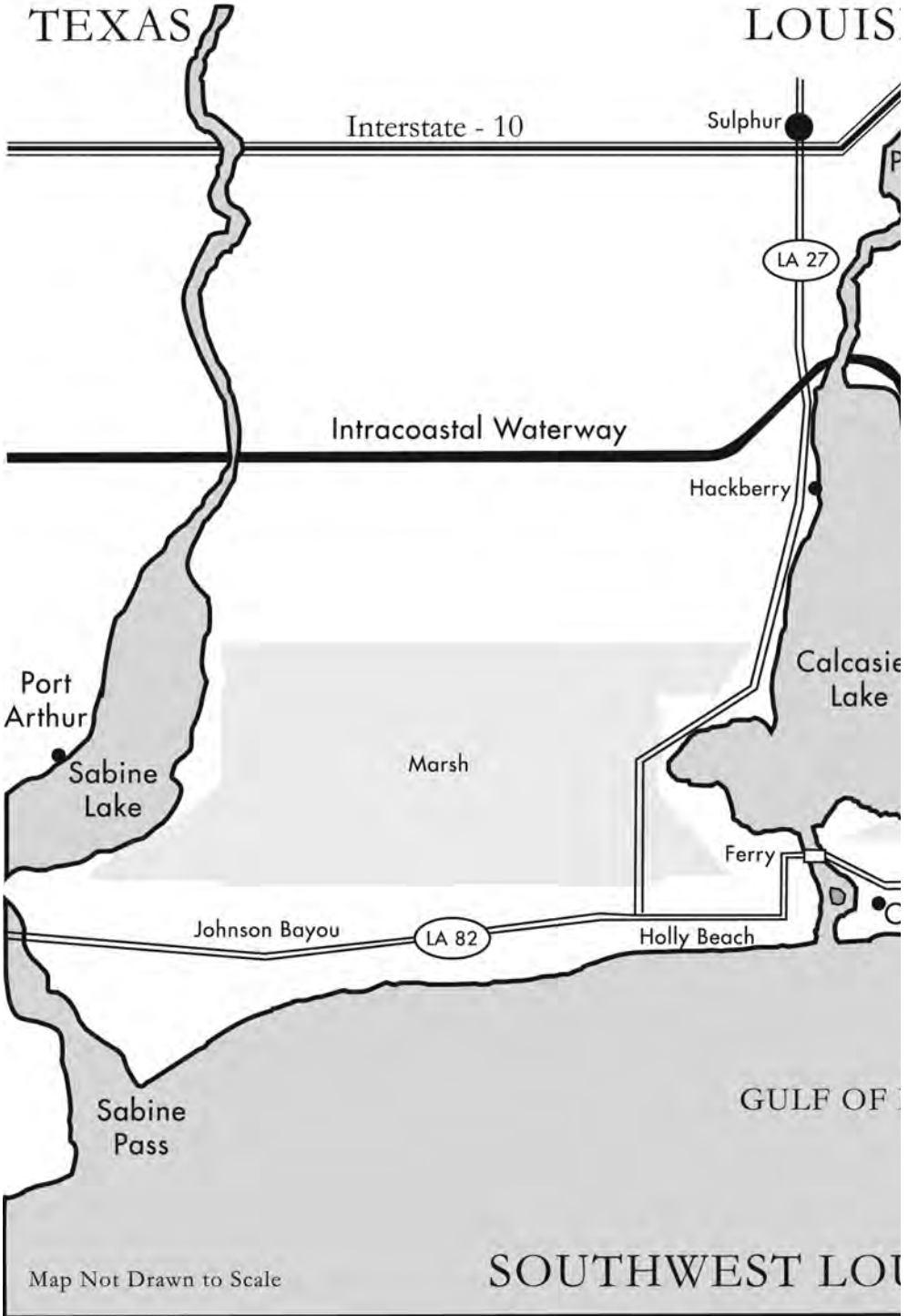
*To Cameron Parish
and to my friends, Geneva Griffith, Leslie Griffith,
and “The Ladies of the Storm”*

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TEXAS

LOUISIANA



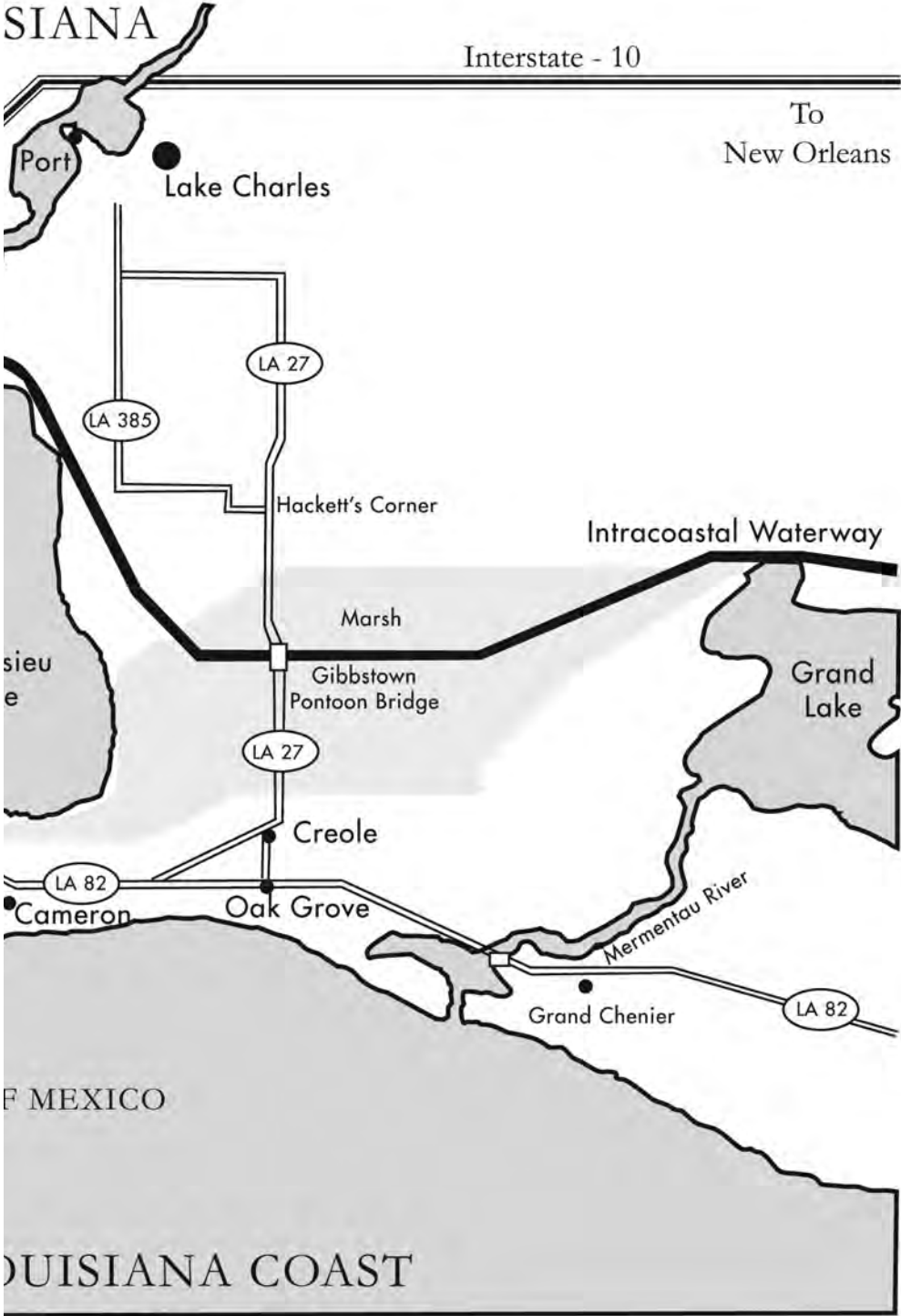
Map Not Drawn to Scale

SOUTHWEST LOUISIANA

SIANA

Interstate - 10

To
New Orleans



sieu
e

Intracoastal Waterway

Marsh

Gibbstown
Pontoon Bridge

Grand
Lake

Creole

Mermentau River

Grand Chenier

GULF OF MEXICO

LOUISIANA COAST

Index of Families Discussed in This Book

<p>Bartie: Raymond Bartie, Sr. Maybell Bartie Eugene Bartie, age 14 Leda Mae Bartie, 13 Rose Lee Bartie, 11 Robert Lee Bartie, 10 Raymond Bartie, Jr., 8 Walter Bartie, 2</p>	<p>For many years, the Bartie family lived and worked on the Johnny Meaux farm in Oak Grove. The farm was about a mile away from the Griffith residence.</p>
<p>Broussard: Whitney J. Broussard, Sr. Clara Ellender Broussard Whitney Broussard, Jr., 18 Mary Ann Broussard, 15 Ethel Broussard, 13 Elaine Broussard, 10 David Broussard, 5 Richard Broussard, 3 Helen Broussard, 18 months</p>	<p>The Broussard family lived in Cameron, where Whitney was the principal at Cameron Elementary School. Clara and Whitney were both teachers. The Broussard family also owned a motel near their home.</p> <p>Mr. Broussard's parents, Numa and Helen Conner Broussard, lived 15 miles to the east in Creole.</p>

<p>Cagle: Alice Cagle Marshall, 61 Brown (“Tootie”) Marshall, 57—Alice’s husband</p> <p>Regina Davis Phillips— Alice’s daughter; married to Walter Phillips; the Phillipses lived in Lake Charles with their chil- dren</p> <p>Joseph Maxwell Cagle, 38— Alice’s nephew; married to Mary Belle Cagle; the Cagles lived in Lake Charles with their eight children; Joe owned and operated Cagle Chevrolet</p> <p>Theda Cagle Heath— Alice’s niece; married to Charles C. Heath; the Heaths lived in Lake Charles</p>	<p>Alice Cagle Jeffries, a widow and retired schoolteacher, mar- ried Brown Marshall, a cattle- man from Cameron. They lived along the coast at Daigle’s Corner, between Cameron and Creole.</p> <p>Alice remained close to her daughter, Regina, and numer- ous relatives in the large Cagle family, who lived 35 miles due north in Lake Charles.</p>
<p>Carter: O. B. Carter, 55—sheriff of Cameron Parish</p>	<p>A lifelong resident of Cameron Parish, Sheriff Carter and his wife had many relatives in the area. Those mentioned briefly in this book were two promi- nent physicians in Creole— retired physician Dr. S. O. Carter (the sheriff’s father); and the doctor’s grandson, Dr. Stephen Carter, and his wife, Ducie (Geneva Griffith’s friend).</p>

	<p>The two Creole doctors were also friends with Dr. Cecil Clark and his wife, Sybil, in the nearby town of Cameron.</p>
<p>Clark: Dr. Cecil Clark, 32 Sybil Baccigalopi Clark John Clark, 8 Joe Clark, 7 Elizabeth Dianne Clark, 3 Celia Marie Clark, 18 months Jack Benjamin Clark, 3 months</p> <p>Zulmae Dubois, 53—nanny to the Clarks' five chil- dren</p>	<p>Young Dr. Cecil Clark was the only physician in the town of Cameron. His wife, Sybil, a nurse, worked alongside him at their small medical center.</p> <p>There were two other physi- cians in nearby towns in the parish (Dr. Carter and Dr. Dix).</p>
<p>DeBarge: Tommy DeBarge, 84 Sidney DeBarge, 85</p>	<p>Elderly brothers Tommy and Sidney DeBarge shared a home in Cameron. Tommy's preferred mode of transportation was his sturdy, dependable bicycle.</p>
<p>Griffith: D. W. Griffith, 36 Geneva Ellerbe Griffith, 35 Leslie Griffith, 11 Cherie Griffith, 5</p>	<p>The Griffiths lived in Oak Grove, east of Cameron. Geneva worked in the Cameron Parish Courthouse. D.W. was a boat captain for Pure Oil Company, servicing the offshore oilrigs.</p>

<p>Papa and Nannie Griffith— D.W.'s parents; lived in Port Arthur, Texas</p>	<p>The Ellerbee family—Geneva's parents—like D.W.'s lived in Port Arthur, Texas.</p>
<p>Marshall (see also Cagle): Brown ("Tootie") Marshall, 57 Alice Cagle Marshall, 61 Regina Phillips—Alice's daughter; lived in Lake Charles Joseph M. Cagle—Alice's nephew; lived in Lake Charles</p>	<p>Brown Marshall, a longtime cattleman in Cameron Parish, also operated a meat-processing plant near their home at Daigle's Corner, between Cameron and Creole. Alice's large Cagle family of sis- ters, brothers, nieces, and nephews lived in Lake Charles.</p>
<p>Meaux: Johnny Meaux Esther Nunez Meaux</p>	<p>Johnny Meaux, politician and country farmer, was a relative of the Griffith and Welch fami- lies. A Louisiana state represen- tative for almost 30 years, he always maintained his home and farm in Oak Grove (near Geneva and D. W. Griffith's home). For several decades, the large Bartie family lived and worked on the Meaux farm.</p>

<p>Welch: Wynona (“Nona”) Welch</p>	<p>Miss Nona Welch, D. W. Griffith’s aunt, was the registrar of voters in Cameron Parish. She and Geneva Griffith both worked at the courthouse.</p> <p>Miss Nona was also related to the Davis family (of the historic Austin Davis House).</p>
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Preface

In all of recorded United States history, only one hurricane has taken a direct path, an unwavering, head-on course, before it struck the coastline of the United States. In June of 1957 Hurricane Audrey formed deep in the Gulf of Mexico in the Bay of Campeche, along the twenty-first parallel, 460 miles south of Cameron, Louisiana. It took direct aim at the small towns along this coast and moved due north for four days.

The populace was poised to evacuate, but then something went horribly wrong for the people along the Louisiana coast, resulting in a massive death toll. Despite its unwavering course, Audrey left over five hundred dead in its wake—almost two hundred of them children—making it one of the worst natural disasters in Louisiana history.

Why did so many people die in that enlightened, modern age of weather forecasting? While the world did not have weather satellite technology in 1957 for photographs, Audrey was the first hurricane to be tracked by radar. The country also had maritime reporting from ships at sea, as well as precise aerial reconnaissance. These U.S. Navy airplanes, the Storm Trackers, flew into storm systems and gathered all the necessary data for the National Weather Bureau—the exact wind speed, the barometric pressure, the precise location, and also the forward movement of the hurricane.

In the aftermath of the huge storm, Cameron Parish Assistant District Attorney Jennings B. Jones filed a lawsuit in U.S. Federal Court on behalf of numerous families against the Weather Bureau—*Whitney*

Bartie v. United States of America. It was the first case of its kind.

This book is a historical account, a memoir of the Griffith, Clark, Bartie, Marshall, Cagle, and Broussard families, and a chronicle of their battle for survival during Hurricane Audrey as well as their struggle to rebuild their lives in the aftermath of the deadly storm.

This is their story.