

Louisiana Facts



Compiled by

LOUISIANA

S E C R E T A R Y O F S T A T E



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Louisiana has the most vivid history and diverse culture of any state in the country. From its beginning as a French colony in the New World, Louisiana has developed a unique passion for music, festivals, food and politics.

This booklet provides a capsule history of the Bayou State, the flags that have flown over it and our official state emblems.

We are pleased to share this information with you. We hope this booklet will benefit your study of our state and its customs. If you would like additional information about Louisiana, please visit the secretary of state's website at www.sos.la.gov or call 225.922.2880.

Louisiana GOVERNMENT

Louisiana has three branches of government: legislative, executive and judicial.

Louisiana's Legislature is composed of a Senate with 39 members and a House of Representatives with 105 members. Members of both houses are elected to four-year terms. The Legislature meets in regular session in even-numbered years on the last Monday in March for not more than 60 legislative days out of 85 calendar days. In odd-numbered years, the Legislature convenes fiscal sessions on the last Monday in April for 45 legislative days out of 60 calendar days. The Legislature may be convened at other times by the governor, and shall be convened by the presiding officers of both houses upon written petition of a majority of the elected members of each house. Parliamentary procedure and committee organization resemble that used throughout the nation.

Executive power is vested in the statewide elected officials: governor, lieutenant governor, secretary of state, attorney general, treasurer, commissioner of agriculture & forestry and commissioner of insurance. All of these officials are elected to four-year terms.

The present judicial system, originally established by the Louisiana Constitution of 1921, affords judicial power in a state Supreme Court, Courts of Appeal, District Courts and other lesser tribunals as provided by law. The Supreme Court has general supervisory jurisdiction over all other courts. Courts of Appeal have appellate jurisdiction over five circuits in the state. District Courts have original jurisdiction over appeals from justices of the peace and certain minor courts. Judges in Louisiana are elected except when they are temporarily appointed to fill vacancies.

State Capitol

The new Louisiana State Capitol was completed in March of 1932, in a mere 14 months and stands on a 27-acre tract.

As the tallest state capitol in the United States, the building is 450 feet high with 34 floors. Twenty-five hundred rail cars were needed to bring in the limestone for the exterior and the marble for the interior. The cost to complete the building was a modest \$5 million.

The architects used symbolism throughout the design of the building. As the square tower rises, it cuts away to an octagon at the 22nd floor. Here, four allegorical winged figures guard the corners, representing law, science, philosophy and art.





Origin of Name: Louisiana was named by Robert de LaSalle, an early French explorer, for Louis XIV, King of France.

Admitted to the Union: April 30, 1812 making it the 18th state

State Nickname: The Pelican State and Sportsman's Paradise

State Motto: Union, Justice, Confidence

State Colors: Gold, White and Blue

State Fossil: Petrified Palmwood

State Boat: Pirogue

State Gemstone: Cabochon cut gemstone

State Cuisine: Gumbo

State Drink: Milk

State Musical Instrument: Diatonic Accordion (commonly known as the "Cajun" accordion)

State Amphibian: Green Tree Frog

State Freshwater Fish: White Perch (also called sac-au-lait and white crappie)

State Songs: "Give Me Louisiana," by Doralice Fontane and "You Are My Sunshine," by former Louisiana Gov. Jimmie Davis and Charles Mitchell

Earliest Explorers: Spanish: Alvarez de Pineda (1519), Cabeza de Vaca (1528), Hernando DeSoto (1541); French: LaSalle (1682), Iberville and Bienville (1699)

LOUISIANA'S HISTORY

The first inhabitants of what is now Louisiana were Native American tribes such as the Natchez, Bayougoula and Chitamacha. The Europeans appeared in 1682 when the French explorer LaSalle descended the Mississippi River and claimed the land for the French Monarch, Louis XIV. It was not until 1699 that D'Iberville was to establish a permanent French presence in the lower Mississippi Valley. Louis Juchereau de St. Denis founded the first permanent settlement in Louisiana in 1714 with the construction of Fort St. Jean Baptiste near present day Natchitoches. D'Iberville's brother, Bienville, solidified the French claim to Louisiana in 1718 with the founding of New Orleans. France controlled the Louisiana colony until 1762 when the colony was ceded to Spain under the Treaty of Fontainebleau. Britain acquired France's Louisiana holdings east of the Mississippi River the following year in the Treaty of Paris. Spain ruled the colony until 1800 when the lands west of the Mississippi River were returned to the French in the Treaty of San Ildefonso. The British maintained control of the territory east of the river.

The Mississippi River, which had defined so much of Louisiana's early history, was recognized by President Thomas Jefferson as being the key to the control of the North American interior. He dispatched Robert Livingston to Paris in 1803 to negotiate with the French the purchase of New Orleans, which Jefferson believed would guarantee the United States free navigation of the river. Napoleon startled the American representatives by offering the entire Louisiana territory for a paltry \$15 million. Thus began a new era in the already colorful history of Louisiana. Spain held on to its holdings east of the river until 1810 when residents of the West Florida Republic revolted against their rule. In 1812, Louisiana was admitted to the United States as the 18th state.

Louisiana's relationship with the Union was to be tested by the issues of slavery and states' rights. In January of 1861, the state's secessionist convention met at the statehouse in Baton Rouge and formally seceded from the Union. During the ensuing Civil War, numerous engagements were held in Louisiana, most notably at Port Hudson, where the longest siege campaign of the war took place. The state endured 12 years of reconstruction after the war, a period in which P.B.S. Pinchback served as the state's only African-American governor to date.

The 20th century saw Louisiana emerge as one of the nation's leading producers of oil, sulphur, sugar and cotton. The petrochemical industry also developed along the Mississippi River in the period following World War II. The past eight decades have also showcased Louisiana's passion for politics, beginning with the election of Gov. Huey P. Long in 1928. In September of 1935, Long was assassinated in the State Capitol, which was built under his direction. The post-Long era was to be dominated by three major political figures: the fiery Earl Long, Huey's brother; John McKeithen, the first 20th century governor to succeed himself and the driving force behind the Superdome; and the flamboyant Edwin Edwards, who served an unprecedented four terms as governor.



Climate: Louisiana has a mild, sub-tropical climate. The Gulf of Mexico is an important factor in determining the weather, as it helps moderate temperatures and serves as a primary source for the state's frequent rains.

The statewide average annual temperature is 66 degrees. Overnight low temperatures in the winter range from the upper 30s to lower 40s. During the summer, daytime high temperatures average in the mid 90s, and when combined with the Gulf Coast's humidity, the summertime Heat Index (what it "feels like") can top 100 degrees.

Annual rainfall averages 58 inches for the state as a whole. Snow is rare in southern Louisiana, but accumulations do occur occasionally over northern parishes. Tropical storms and hurricanes are a common threat during hurricane season (June 1-Nov. 30), with the state averaging roughly two landfalling storms every three years. (Source: Louisiana Office of State Climatology)

Geography: One of the South Central states, Louisiana is bound on the north by Arkansas and Mississippi; east, by Mississippi and the Gulf of Mexico; south, by the Gulf of Mexico; and west, by Texas. The Mississippi River flows along part of the eastern boundary, then enters the state and creates the rich delta region, center of fertile agriculture lands. Coastal marshes, alluvial plains and rolling pine hills are a part of the varied topography.

Agriculture: Louisiana is one of the nation's largest producers of cotton, sugar cane, rice, sweet potatoes and pecans. The state is also a major producer of soybeans and corn. The top land-based industry in the state is forestry with an economic impact from papermaking and wood products greater than all other crops combined. Poultry is the largest livestock industry, followed by dairy and beef cattle. Louisiana is also the nation's largest producer of alligator hides and crawfish. (Source: Louisiana Department of Agriculture & Forestry)

Industry and Employment: In 2007, Louisiana's 120,414 units employed 1,869,965 workers whose annual earnings totaled \$71,490,767,577. Average weekly wages statewide increased by \$31.21 between 2006 and 2007. (Source: Louisiana Workforce Commission)

Tourism: As Louisiana's fourth largest employment sector, tourism-related jobs employ more than 231,500 people. The tourism industry takes immense pride in the state's historic places, unique arts and crafts, natural resources and rich heritage as part of its efforts to accommodate the 46.7 million visitors traveling to Louisiana in 2016, spending \$16.8 billion and generating \$1.04 billion in tax revenue for the state. (Source: Lieutenant Governor's Office)

Mineral Production: Principal mineral products are petroleum, natural gas, salt, sulphur, carbon black and gravel. Louisiana ranks second in the nation in oil production.



In Louisiana, local government units, known elsewhere as counties, are called parishes. Originally they were church units set up by the Spanish provisional governor of Louisiana in 1769, in conjunction with 11 administrative districts. As Louisiana developed, it was found that the districts were too large and the smaller religious divisions were more suitable. As a consequence, when Louisiana became a state, the term "parish" was accepted with the name of the region to which it had applied under the church. Today, Louisiana has 64 parishes.

Laissez les bons temps rouler!

LET THE GOOD TIMES ROLL!

Louisiana

LAGNIAPPE

(lan-,yap) n: a little something extra given free by way of good measure.



State Reptile

The alligator is common in the swamps, bayous, rivers and marshes of Louisiana and other states along the southeastern coast of the United States. It is a large, semi-aquatic, armored reptile that is dull gray and dark olive in color. Alligators are usually between six and 16 feet in length and can weigh 450 to 500 pounds. They are carnivorous, eating anything they can catch including fish, turtles, lizards, snakes, small mammals, waterfowl and crustaceans. Alligators provide better care for their young than most reptiles, protecting them for one year or more after their birth.

Once common, their numbers were reduced enough to be classified in 1967 as endangered. Regulated hunting resumed when this designation was changed to threatened in 1977. Today you can find alligator farms and ranches throughout Louisiana. In addition to those living on farms in Louisiana, there are more than one million alligators in the wild.

State Mammal

The Louisiana black bear is one of 16 recognized subspecies of the American Black Bear *U. Americanus*. This bear is distinguished from other black bears by having a skull that is longer, narrower and flat, and by having proportionately large molar teeth. Black bears are huge, bulky mammals with long black hair. Although weight varies, large males may weigh more than 600 pounds. The Louisiana black bear often winters in hollow cypress trees either in or along sloughs, lakes or riverbanks in bottomland habitats of the Tensas, Black and Atchafalaya river basins.

These bears are mobile, opportunistic herbivorous omnivores, which means they eat a variety of foods, based on availability. They spend a considerable amount of time foraging for food. Cubs are born in the den during January and February, and litter sizes range from one to three cubs. Although numerous at one time, the black bears are now a threatened species protected and managed on wildlife refuges and state-owned lands.



State Flower

The large creamy-white bloom of the magnolia tree was designated the state flower in 1900 because of the abundance of the trees throughout the state. The magnolia is an evergreen and the flower is usually fragrant. After six to 12 petals have fallen, the large cone-shaped fruit of the magnolia is exposed.



State Insect

The honeybee is Louisiana's state insect. They are social insects, which live as a group, sharing responsibilities in the hive and caring for the brood. There are three different types of bees in the hive: the worker, the drone and the queen. In the summer there may be 40,000 to 60,000 bees living in a single colony.



State Bird

The brown pelican is Louisiana's official bird nesting from South Carolina to Brazil. Pelicans are famous for their large bill, the lower portion of which has a pouch that may be greatly extended.

The birds, depending almost entirely on fish for food, scoop up quantities of water into their pouches as they seize prey from salt waters. As the bill is elevated the water dribbles from the mandibles, and the pouch contracts as the fish is swallowed. The average pelican, from the age of one month, consumes five pounds of fish per day.





State Dog

The Catahoula Leopard dog is the only breed of dog native to Louisiana. This hound is a cross of a domestic dog the Indians of the Catahoula Lake region raised and a Spanish “war dog” that came through the area in the early 1500s. The dog has glassy eyes, webbed feet and a spotted coat. They are gentle with children, loyal to family and aggressive to strangers, making them good pets and guard dogs. As a hunting dog, the animal is diligent, dependable, efficient and especially good at tracking deer, raccoons and squirrels.



State Wildflower

The Louisiana iris (*Giganticaerulea*) is perhaps the most magnificent of its species. Although it is adaptable to all climates, the iris is seen growing wild mainly in damp, marshy locations in Louisiana’s coastal areas and for perhaps 100 miles inland. This graceful beauty grows to a height of five to six feet and has a wider color range than any other iris, ranging from pale blue to deep indigo.

State Tree

Half of Louisiana is timbered with an abundance of varied and beautiful trees, but no action was taken to designate a state tree until 1963 when the bald cypress was made the official tree of Louisiana. The cypress grows in many areas of the state, particularly swamps, bayous and marshes.

Its shape depends greatly on the amount and duration of flooding in an area, varying from columnar to conical or bottle shaped. The bark is reddish-brown, fibrous, thin and divided into small flat ridges and shallow furrows. Leaves of the cypress tree spread in flat planes in a feathery pattern on its branches.



State Fruit

In 2001, the Louisiana Legislature designated the strawberry as the official state fruit. Ponchatoula, located in Tangipahoa Parish, is considered the strawberry capital of Louisiana. The annual festival attracts 300,000 festival goers to the small town of 5,000.



State Crustacean

South Louisiana is the crawfish capital of the world, supporting a multi-million dollar a year industry. The crawfish greatly resembles the lobster in appearance, but is much smaller. It’s color varies with the water in which it lives.

Although the crawfish is found in swamps and marshes throughout the state, the best wild populations exist in overflow basins of the Atchafalaya, Red and Pearl rivers. Crawfish farms have also been established where the crustaceans are cultivated for local use and for export around the world.



Mardi Gras

 (\ˈmär-dē-,grä)

Mardi Gras is an ancient custom that originated in southern Europe, was brought to Louisiana by the French and was later continued by the Spanish. As each year passed, Mardi Gras became a bigger and bigger event. Soon superbly ornamented carriages, musical marching bands and richly decorated masqueraders began to parade the streets of New Orleans. Although Mardi Gras is actually only one day, Fat Tuesday, today it has come to mean the last two weeks of carnival that immediately precede Mardi Gras Day. The celebration occurs in preparation for the 40 days of Lent that follow, and festivities may include balls, parades, street masking or any combination of these activities.

The Great Seal

One of the prescribed duties of the Secretary of State's Office is keeper of the Great Seal of Louisiana. The secretary of state must attest and imprint with the seal all official state documents such as laws passed by the Legislature, executive orders, proclamations of the governor and commissions.

From territorial days, the pelican and her nest of young have figured in Louisiana's official emblem. The territorial governor, William C.C. Claiborne, is thought to have first suggested the pelican for the seal. As early as 1804, there was such a seal in use which depicted a pelican feeding her young.

In 1812, it was decreed that a seal be devised "as the governor may direct," but made no mention of using a pelican. A 1902 report of the secretary of state noted that there was no enactment actually providing for a seal until 1864. As a result of this lack of description, versions of the seal included scales of justice, stars and as many as a dozen young in the nest (impossible in reality since a pelican rarely has more than three eggs in its nest at one time).

During the Civil War years, the governor of the confederate portion of the state and the governor of the federal portion each had his own emblem. The seals differed in the direction the pelican turned its head and how many chicks were in the nest.

To establish uniformity in the seals, Gov. William Henry Wright Heard directed the secretary of state, in 1902, to use a seal of this description: "A Pelican, with its head turned to the left, in a nest with three young; the Pelican, following the tradition in act of tearing its breast to feed its young; around the edge of the seal to be inscribed 'State of Louisiana.' Over the head of the Pelican to be inscribed 'Union, Justice,' and under the Pelican to be inscribed 'Confidence.'" That is the seal that represents the State of Louisiana today.



Flags of Louisiana

The first flag to fly over Louisiana soil was probably the Spanish flag of Leon and Castile carried by Hernando DeSoto's expeditionary force when they reached the Mississippi River in 1541. The first official flag of Louisiana was the French fleur-de-lis raised by Robert Cavalier de LaSalle at the mouth of the Mississippi River in 1682 when he claimed the lower river valley for France. Until 1762 when France ceded her Louisiana holdings west of the Mississippi River to Spain in the Treaty of Fontainebleau, the banner featuring the flower of the lily was flown over Louisiana. In 1763, France ceded the land east of the river, except for the Isle of Orleans, to England. Thus the flags of Spain and England flew over the former French colony until 1779, when the Spanish flag flew throughout Louisiana, following Gov. Bernardo de Galvez's defeat of the British Garrison at Fort Richmond in Baton Rouge.

In 1800, Spain returned its portion of Louisiana to France in the Treaty of San Ildefonso, but the French tricolor wasn't hoisted until Nov. 30, 1803. However, on Dec. 20, 1803, the American flag of 15 stars and 15 stripes was raised at the Cabildo in New Orleans in celebration of the United States' "Louisiana Purchase." In 1810, residents of Spanish West Florida declared themselves independent of Spain and established the Republic of West Florida. On Sept. 26, 1810, they raised the Lone Star banner of their new republic. In December of 1810, the Republic was dissolved and its citizens swore allegiance to the American flag. In 1812, Louisiana was admitted to the United States as the 18th state.

Following Louisiana's secession from the union in 1861, Gov. Thomas Moore declared the state a sovereign nation and adopted a national flag for Louisiana. After joining the Confederate States of America on March 21, 1861, the "stars and bars" of the Confederacy was raised in Louisiana's capital.

On July 1, 1912, the state Legislature adopted a state flag for Louisiana featuring a pelican in white trimmed with gold. The mother pelican is tearing at her breast to feed her young.



Spanish Flag of DeSoto
1541



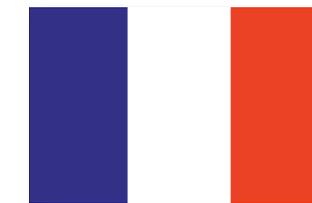
French Flag of La Salle
1682



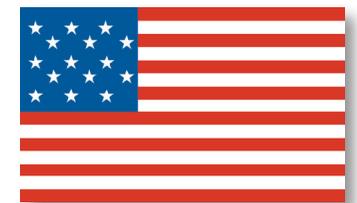
1st British Union Jack
1763-1779



Spanish Flag
1769-1800



French Flag
1800-1803



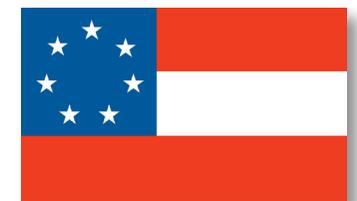
American Flag
1803-1861



West Florida Republic Flag
1810



Independent Louisiana Flag
1861



Confederate Stars & Bars Flag
1861

Louisiana's Old State Capitol

Museum of Political History

(Cover Photo by Herbert Sumrall Jr.)

Louisiana's Old State Capitol, a Gothic architectural treasure, stands high on a bluff overlooking the Mississippi River. It has withstood war, fire, scandal, bitter debate, abandonment and an occasional fist fight. Today, the building stands as a testament to bold, inspired leadership and active citizenship.

In 1990, the Louisiana Legislature placed the former statehouse under the jurisdiction of the secretary of state and appropriated funds for a major restoration project. The building re-opened as the Center for Political and Governmental History in 1994. Now referred to as the Museum of Political History, the Old State Capitol has received awards for its architecture, exhibits and preservation.



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