

Below: In the antebellum period, the Creoles lived in the Vieux Carre, or French Quarter. The Spanish-style architecture there created quiet courtyards such as this one at the Raymond Gallard Cottage. **Opposite page, above:** This engraving depicts a street in one of the French neighborhoods of New Orleans. **Opposite page, below:** In the Garden District are neo-classical mansions, many surrounded by ornamental iron fences.

Antebellum Life

As you read, look for:

- communication and education improvements during the period,
- the dangers of epidemics during the antebellum period, and
- vocabulary term **tutor**.

During the antebellum period, Louisiana was changing from a colonial and frontier world. Small towns and villages had grown, adding some of the basics of urban life. In rural Louisiana, however, some people still lived closer to the frontier lifestyle, self-sufficient and independent.

New Orleans had already become the fourth largest city in the United States and one of the premier ports in the world. As the city expanded, the Americans and the Creoles built separate communities in different sections of the city. The





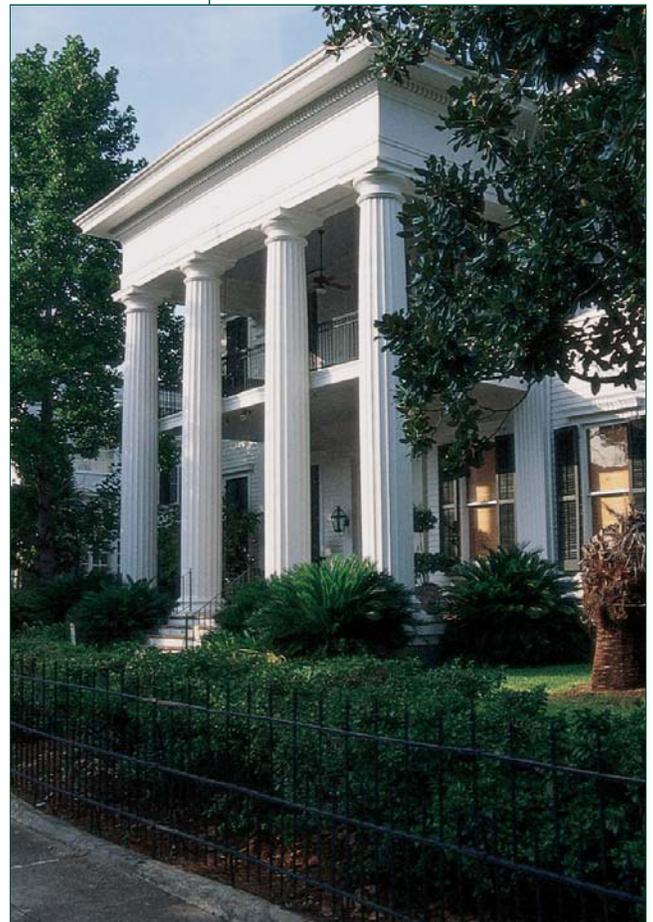
Americans built their own neighborhood with a grand display of architectural styles. Known today as the Garden District, this section exhibits that antebellum splendor. The Creole community was the Vieux Carre, or French Quarter.

Communication

The lack of good roads isolated people and made communication and the spread of information difficult. Delivery of mail was quite a challenge. Some mail was carried by stagecoaches traveling between the larger towns. But often the mail carrier rode a horse. If the horse had to ford a river or bayou, the mail arrived wet. One mail rider reported that the mail was lost because his horse was swept away and drowned. He hoped that when the flood waters went down, he could find the horse with the mailbag still attached. Then the mail would go through.

People outside of the city depended on this mail service to get newspapers. New Orleans had different newspapers printed in English, French, Spanish, and German. The *New Orleans Picayune* was founded in 1837. A *picayune* was a coin worth 6½ cents, which was also the price of the newspaper.

Small-town newspapers also existed in places like Franklin and St. Francisville. The papers published news and



Lagniappe

In 1840, Samuel Morse sent the first telegraph message, from Washington, D.C., to Baltimore, Maryland.

Below: Many of the early schools in Louisiana were Catholic, reflecting the heritage of the early settlers. This is the Academy of the Sacred Heart in Grand Coteau, built in 1821.

influenced public opinion. Some newspapers slanted their views toward certain political groups, and some were funded by political party leaders.

Newspapers and letters mailed from New York took two weeks to reach New Orleans. The speed of communication changed dramatically in July 1848 when the telegraph reached New Orleans. Businesses telegraphed many messages a day, at about 5 cents a word. In its excitement, the New Orleans *Daily Crescent* reported that “Distance and time are annihilated.”

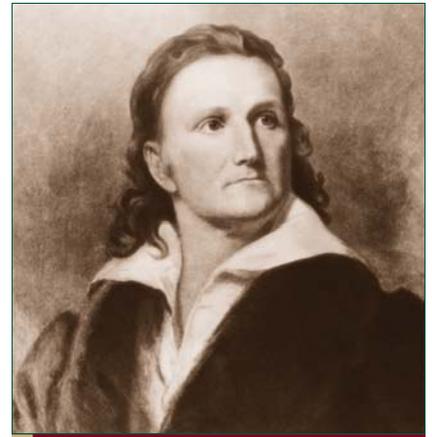
Bringing this “lightning system” to Louisiana presented obstacles. “Cypress sawn square” poles had to be used to prevent rot in Louisiana’s rainy weather. Storms, floods, and fallen trees could quickly bring down telegraph lines and stop service. Fallen lines created additional hazards. One traveler complained when his horse and buggy became entangled in fallen wires. Despite the problems, Samuel Morse’s dot-and-dash code improved communication and brought progress.

Education

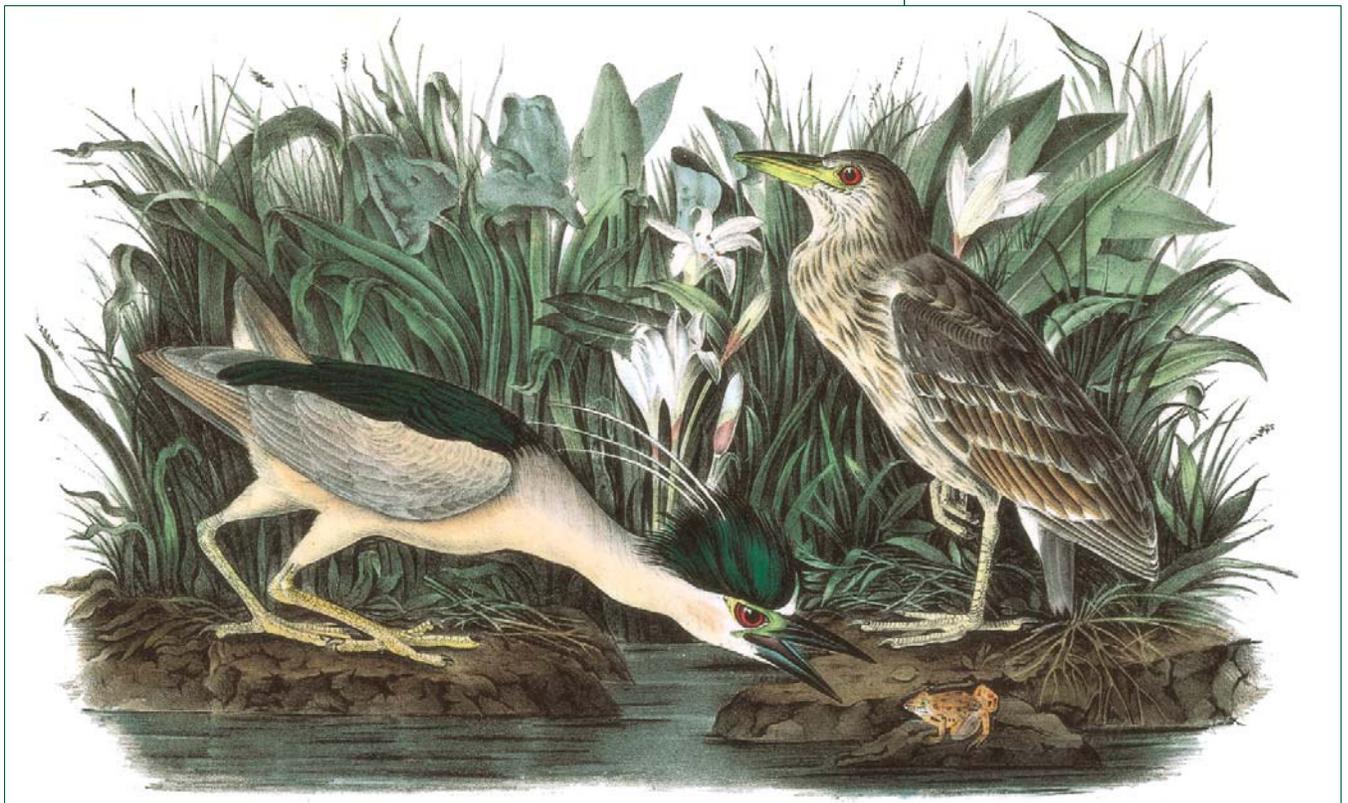
The first schools in colonial Louisiana were taught by nuns and priests. As the Protestant churches grew, they added schools of their own. Some children were taught at home, and the wealthy planters often hired **tutors** (private teachers). John James Audubon spent time teaching drawing to the children at Oakley Plantation in West Feliciana. He became famous for his paintings of birds.

The state’s first attempts at public education offered students scholarships to private schools. But the small number of openings and the perception of charity resulted in few children going to the schools. The constitution of 1845





John James Audubon, famed naturalist and artist (above), was hired to teach drawing to Eliza, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. James Pirrie, at Oakley Plantation (left), the Pirries home in St. Francisville. This Audubon lithograph (below) depicts a pair of black-crowned night herons.





Above: This one-room plantation schoolhouse is on exhibit at the LSU Rural Life Museum.

was the first to establish free public schools in the state and fixed the school age between six and sixteen. However, the state's new public school system struggled with funding and public support. Many children were still taught in private schools or at home. And many more children who lived outside the cities and towns received little education.

An early one-room schoolhouse in Claiborne Parish was typical. School "took in" at 8:00 a.m. and "turned out" at 5:00 p.m. There was a lunch break from 12:00 to 1:30 and two short recesses. The school term was usually six months or less. The textbooks were Webster's "Blue-Backed Speller" and Smiley's arithmetic. The teacher kept a good supply of switches on hand with which to discipline students. Naughty boys experienced hardwood switches, while girls were punished only with softwood.

Disease and Health

Medical progress in this era did not include conquering the most dangerous enemies. Cholera and yellow fever frequently attacked the population. The worst cholera epidemics occurred in the 1830s. A cholera epidemic of 1832 killed 6,000 people throughout Louisiana, including almost 20 percent of the population of Baton Rouge. Conditions in New Orleans were so awful that hundreds of people were buried together in the same trench or grave.

Old cemeteries still tell the story of the worst yellow fever epidemic. The headstones of entire families are dated 1853. In that year, yellow fever killed 9,000 people in New Orleans alone. Thibodaux lost 224 people, 15 percent of the town. Even working through the night, the grave diggers could not keep up. Cannons boomed every twenty minutes in New Orleans in an attempt to clean the air of the disease. Smaller towns burned buckets of sulfur to try to protect themselves.

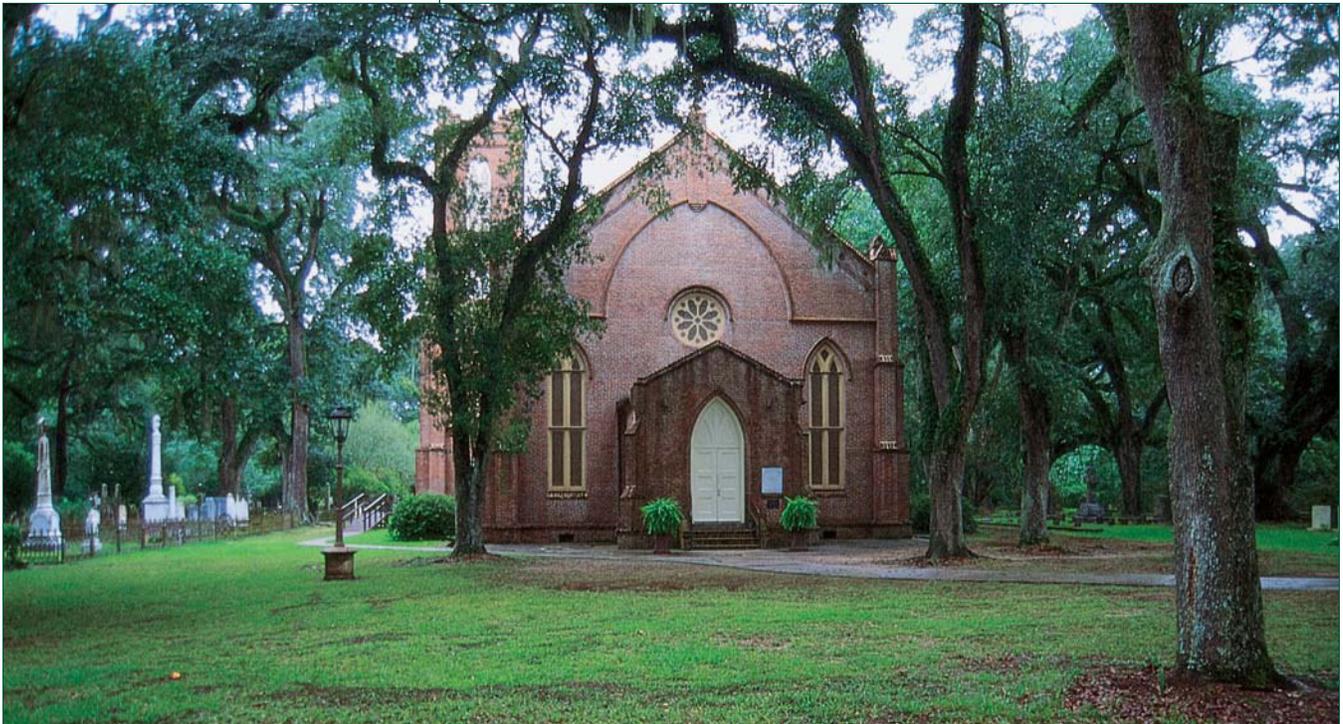
These epidemic diseases touched everyone in Louisiana. One cholera epidemic killed the speaker of the house of representatives during a session of the legislature. Early in the century, Governor Claiborne lost two wives to yellow fever. Poor sanitation and limited medical knowledge made nineteenth-century Louisiana an unhealthy place.

Religion

France and Spain had allowed only the Catholic Church in colonial Louisiana. Established in 1794, the St. Louis Cathedral facing Jackson Square symbolizes

Below: Cholera, yellow fever, and other diseases struck often during the antebellum period. This painting depicts the Duchamp family in mourning for Mr. Duchamp who died in 1832, the year of the great cholera epidemic.





Lagniappe

In 1840, Louisiana had nearly 2,500 stores, and about 2,000 of them were in New Orleans.

the Catholic Church in Louisiana. Some of the early churches still offer Sunday mass to Louisiana's large Catholic population.

When Louisiana became part of the United States, Protestants flocked into the territory. By 1805, the Protestants in New Orleans were ready to build a church. The group voted to establish an Episcopal Church.

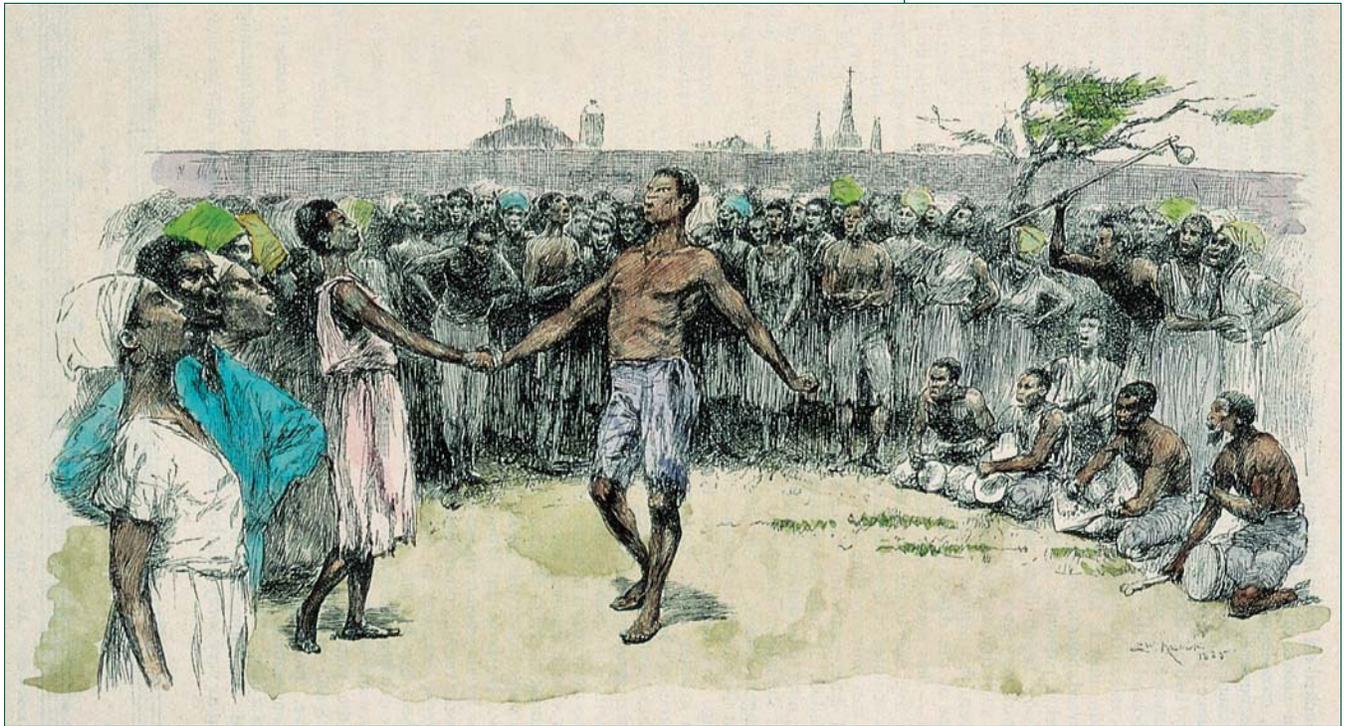
A Protestant revival, called the Second Great Awakening, swept America in the 1800s. (A major religious movement called the Great Awakening had occurred in the British colonies in the 1700s.) This revival sent ministers on horseback into Louisiana. These *circuit riders* came to preach and to establish churches. An early Methodist minister built a simple log church with his own hands.

Even more Protestants arrived when North Louisiana was opened to settlement. There, camp meetings served as religious and social gatherings. A makeshift church, called a *brush arbor*, was built, and people camped for days at these revival meetings.

The first synagogue was built by the Jewish community in New Orleans in 1828. One wealthy member, Judah Touro, is remembered in New Orleans for the contributions he made to the city. He donated money for a hospital, libraries, and parks. Other members of the Jewish community included German immigrants who came to the city in the 1840s.

Entertainment

In the city of New Orleans, visitors and locals found a fascinating variety of entertainment. More than two thousand people could attend performances at the French Opera House. Theaters were very popular, and traveling troupes visited the small towns to perform.



People also entertained themselves with social activities. Dancing was popular in the ballrooms of the plantations, the cabins of the Acadians, and in Congo Square in New Orleans, where the slaves were allowed to dance on Sunday. Plantation dances included an elaborate midnight supper with flowers at every place setting. When the guests left at dawn, they were given strong coffee and hot gumbo. The people in North Louisiana danced to fiddle music, part of their Celtic heritage. As the Protestant religions grew stricter, dancing was forbidden by many churches. However, some forms of dancing survived when they were labeled party games.

Louisiana also loved horse racing. The largest and most elegant track was the Metairie Race Track. In 1854, some 20,000 people, including former President Millard Fillmore, watched a horse race between Lexington and LeCompte. LeCompte, the Louisiana horse, was honored by having a town in Rapides Parish named for him.

Check for Understanding ✓

1. How did the telegraph change communication?
2. What were the two deadliest diseases in antebellum Louisiana?
3. What forms of entertainment did the people of antebellum Louisiana enjoy?

Above: Most slaves were given Sundays off. Some were able to enjoy dancing in Congo Square in New Orleans.

Opposite page, above: The church held a very important position in a community. Grace Episcopal Church in St. Francisville, established in 1827, is the second oldest Episcopal congregation in Louisiana. **Opposite page, below:** While Louisiana was a French and Spanish colony, only the Catholic Church was permitted in the territory. St. Louis Cathedral, completed in 1794, is actually the third Catholic Church on this site. The spires were not added until the church was rebuilt in 1847.