

Photo by Christine Bordelon | CLARION HERALD

Present-day St. Bernard Church on Bayou Road, left. Its historic cemetery is across the street.



## ISLEÑOS

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150 burials were unaccounted for, beginning in 1787.

"It intrigued me where they could be," Fernandez said. "Of course, those were our Isleños ancestors and first colonists who came here."

Catholic sacramental records show the first burial in 1787 of Joe Mesa, a native of Gran Canaria, Canary Islands, he said. Records also show 85 known burials on the grounds but without markers. (Church records for baptisms between 1787-1801 and marriages from 1787-1821 were lost, according to "A Southern Catholic Heritage," written by former New Orleans archdiocesan archivist Dr. Charles Nolan.)

A Spanish territory since the 1763 Treaty of Paris (after the French and Indian War, when France ceded the Louisiana territory to Spain), the earliest sacramental records were in Havana, Cuba, the original seat of the church in Louisiana and the Floridas, Fernandez said. Spain returned the property to France in 1803, and France quickly sold it that same year to the United States in the Louisiana Purchase.

With GPR verifying possible burial locations, Fernandez is working on honoring the dead with a modest memorial next to the church. He has already had an ironwork artist design a sketch for the memorial entrance and has purchased

a wrought-iron cross as a preview of the site to come.

"We might have support from the government of the Canary Islands," Fernandez said, mentioning how – during the first imaging in 2000 – Canary Island representatives visiting the annual Isleños Festival in St. Bernard toured St. Bernard Church to learn about early Isleños here. They expressed interest in collaborating on a suitable Isleños memorial.

Katrina sidelined that effort, but the recent GPR imaging re-energized it. Fernandez sent a survey copy to Canary Island officials.

"I would love to have materials crafted from the Canary Islands over these graves here," he said. He hopes Archbishop Gregory Aymond will re-consecrate the land at the graves sites when the project is completed.

"Our new pastor, Father (Hoang) Tuong, is excited about the discovery," Fernandez said. "He attended a luncheon given by the Los Isleños Cultural and Heritage Society, honoring the feast day of St. Bernard, and disclosed at the luncheon that the memorial is in the process of being designed."

"This work confirms the many generations of Isleños and others who were baptized, married and buried on this same ground. It is a story of their faith in their Church and in Jesus Christ, their savior," Fernandez said.

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Francis Janssens appointed fifth archbishop of New Orleans, Sept. 16.

1888

1891

Mother Frances Xavier Cabrini, with the close assistance of Archbishop Janssens, establishes a school and orphanage for the children of Italian immigrants who had arrived in New Orleans by the thousands. Her sisters arrive in 1892 and operate a center for Italian immigrants at 817 St. Philip St.

1888

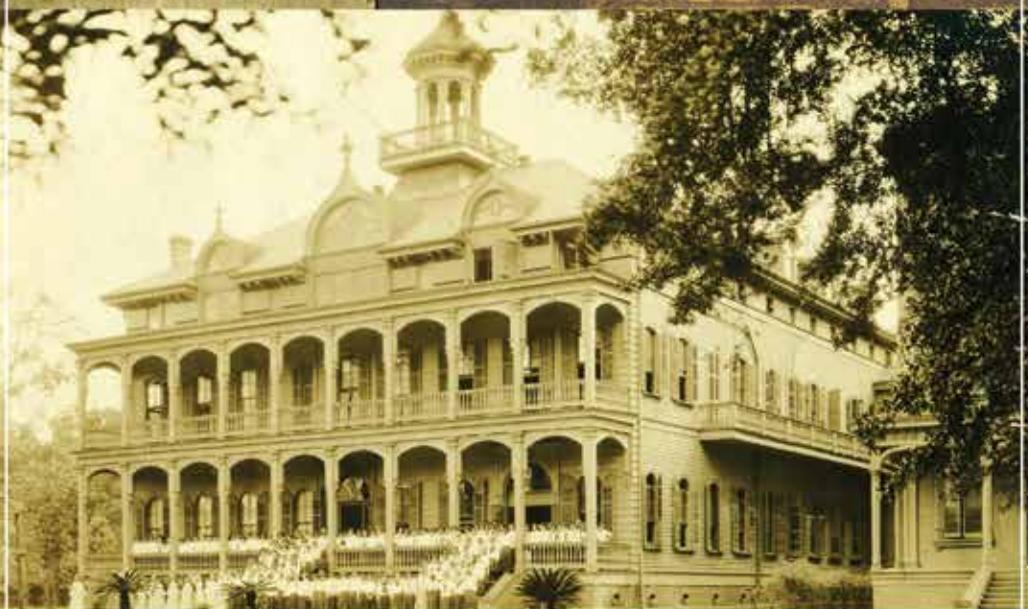


1891



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