Part 1:

PEARLS OF WISDOM GLEANED FROM 50 YEARS OF EXPLORING DUSTY BACKROADS AND MUSTY ARCHIVAL SHELVES
Misconceptions

• There is a paucity of historical and cultural documentation

• Life-long wetlands residents have nothing of value to offer scientific researchers

• It is difficult, if not impossible, to forge trans-disciplinary bridges
Misconception 1

- There is a paucity of historical and cultural documentation, especially cartography.
Documentation

- UNDERUTILIZED RESOURCES

- 18\textsuperscript{TH} CENTURY:

  - French colonial sources
  - Official correspondence – 1 million folios

  - Spanish colonial sources
    - Audiencia de Santo Domingo – 1 million folios
    - Papeles Procedentes de Cuba – 15 to 18 million folios
DOCUMENTATION

• OTHER UNDERUTILIZED RESOURCES

– Local records (conveyances, probates, judicial proceedings, etc.) – estimated 200,000+ pages 18th century, estimated 2,000,000+ pages (1803-1860)

– Huge reservoir of resources in state, federal, and university repositories
  • Examples: Standard Oil Collection, Newberry Library, Beinecke Library, NARA Still Image Repository (College Park, MD), Bancroft Library, NARA San Bruno, CA, The Benson Ford Research Center, The Historic New Orleans’ Collection
Documentation — Examples

• FRENCH PERIOD (1699-1763)
  • Pierre Le Moyne d’Iberville’s vivid descriptions of the natural and cultural landscapes of the lower Mississippi Valley (1699)
  • Antoine-Simon Le Page du Pratz’s detailed accounts of Native American life, and his sometimes amusing, descriptions, and illustrations of Louisiana’s fauna and flora (ca. 1720-ca. 1732)
Le Page du Pratz

Top: Panther or Catamount—Bottom: Bison or Buffalo

Top: Cat Fish—Middle: Gar Fish—Bottom: Spoonbill Catfish

Top: Wild Cat—Middle: Opossum—Bottom: Skunk
Colonial Era Documentation

Superior Council Records, Notarial Archives, and Parish Probate Records

- Collectively the best source of information regarding national/ethnic origins of African and European colonists

- Probates - Perhaps America’s best documentation for material culture and indigenous architectural evolution
Notable Spanish Resources

- SPANISH PERIOD (1763-1803)
- Commandant’s reports
- Louis Judice’s memoir
- Scores of census reports
- Hundreds of surveyors’ plats
Colonial Era Documentation

Spanish colonial sources
Commandant’s reports (PPC)
Best source of information about Creolization
And colonial communities’ adaptation to new, unfamiliar environmental forces
Construction Estimate, New Orleans Fish Market
American Era Documentation

- Early 20th century American sources
  - Corporate archives
    - Natural resource management
  - State agency files
    - Early Flood Control Efforts
    - Historical Environmental Footprint (land records)
    - Conservation
  - Federal repositories
    - Flood control
    - Smuggling
    - Oil and Gas Exploration (and their environmental impacts)
    - Post-1803 Immigration
American Era Documentation

- **19th CENTURY**
- American Land Claims Commission Records—Plats and Witness Trees
- Agricultural Census Reports (1850-1900)
- Newspaper accounts
- Military maps
- Nautical maps
- Louisiana Board of Public Works records
- Travelogues
- Corps of Engineers reports
Witness Trees

Documentation of Indigenous Flora
Value of Documentation

• Shows dynamic nature of the south Louisiana environment, which was very much a work in progress at the time of the initial European settlement.

• Documents original state of environment and human alterations to ecological systems

• Provides concrete evidence of impact of environmental change.

• Provides a track record of the responses of established populations to externally imposed environmental changes that threatened their homes and livelihoods. (Example of Mermentau Dam.)
Part 2:

VISUAL EXAMPLES OF UNDER-UTILIZED RESOURCES
Visual Record

Not as extensive as the documentary record, but quality images are abundant.
Visual Record

- Plats in the claims section of the Louisiana land office records
Birth of Indigenous Architecture

Perron du côté de la rue,
Galerie avec des Colonnes de Brique,
Verrière et le Grand Escalier,
Salle à manger, Galerie avec des Colonnes,
Perron du côté du Jardin,
Galeries avec Balconade et Colonnes de Bois,
Salle de Compagnies,
Profil des Lucarnes.
Wetland Settlement
LABOR CONTRACT.

The McKinley Canning & Manufacturing Co. of New Orleans, La., hereby represented by "S" as its agent, does hereby agree, on the following conditions to-wit:

THE PART 1 and the Second Part agree to enter the employ of and engage the services of the Party of the First Part on the following conditions to-wit:

The time of employment shall be for the period of the outer season of the Party of the First Part.

The rate of compensation or salary shall be.

And the time of payment shall be.

The character of service rendered shall be.

The services shall be rendered at, or as for the Canning Factory of the Party of the First Part located at Avery's Island, Parish of Terre, State of Louisiana, where Party of the First Part is engaged in the business of Canning and Packing Oysters, Shrimps, Vegetables, and Pears.

This Labor Contract is to be executed, and the services to be performed in the State of Louisiana and to be construed according to the Laws of that State.

For and in consideration of the foregoing premises and upon the faith thereof and of this Contract, the said Party of the First Part accepts the conditions of this Labor Contract agrees to furnish the employment and pay the wages specified and agrees to whom for the said Party of the Second Part transportation from Baltimore to Avery's Island, La., and to comply with the terms of this contract, to perform the labor and services, at the end of this Contract, from Avery's Island, La., to Baltimore.

Additional stipulations:

This Done and Signed in triplicate this 1st day of 1893.

McKinley Canning & Mfg. Co.

By: S. A. Johnson

[Signature]

[Signature]
Environmental History

Plaquemines Point Fort, 1790s
Military Maps

- Houma area, 1863
Nautical Maps

- Atchafalaya Bay area, 1855
Settlement Patterns
Hydrology

Mississippi River Valley, Late 18th Century
Commercial Maps
**POWELL BOX CO., LTD.**

**MANUFACTURERS AND EXPORTERS**

**BOX SHOOKS, PACKING BOXES, CRATES AND LUMBER.**

**OFFICE: CORTEZ AND GRAVIER STREETS**

Factory: New Basin, Gravier, Cortez and Scott Sts. on L. & N. Tracks and New Basin

PHONE MAIN 96

NEW ORLEANS, L.A., U. S. A. 1908

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Ogden P.

MAY 1908
Chinese are one of the ignored and forgotten groups.

New Orleans Daily Picayune, August 14, 1910
Environmental Change

c. 1880

1887

1966
Environmental Change

1858

1871
Environmental Change

1887

c.a. 1905
Environmental Change

- Southwestern Louisiana prairie, ca 1858-1887
Institutional Change

- Balize/Pilot Town, 1723-1867
Visual Record—Examples

- Early human incursions into the environment
- Above: Swamper, Vermilion Parish, 1880s
- Below: Hunters in south Louisiana, 1888
- Far Left: J. B. Wiltz, avid hunter, ca. 1800
Part 3

• Extant documentation, however, can only provide a one-dimensional understanding of any community, particularly in an area, like the Louisiana coastal plain, where literacy – and hence surviving documentation – are far below national averages.

• To tap into the reservoirs of knowledge in such marginalized societies, researchers must mine these communities’ “living libraries.”
Misconception 2

- BECAUSE OF LOW LITERACY LEVELS AMONG TRADITIONAL COASTAL SOCIETIES AND THE FREQUENCY OF NATURAL DISASTERS, RELIABLE INFORMATION MAY NOT EXIST IN SITU
Traditional Ecological Knowledge

- 2000 census indicates Louisiana has the nation’s most sedentary population
- A large portion of rural south Louisiana’s population lives either on, or adjacent to, properties settled by their ancestors in 18th century
- Result: accumulation of an enormous amount of traditional ecological knowledge acquired over 200 years
- Despite its obvious significance, scholars have almost entirely ignored this resource.
Traditional Ecological Knowledge

- There is a real and current threat to the coastal plain’s traditional ecological knowledge and associated database.
- The relocation of the Isle de Jean Charles band of the Houma tribe.
- The federal government is sending $233.8 million in grants to Louisiana to move a coastal the Houma tribe, including $48.3 million to help Isle de Jean Charles relocate behind levees in Terrebonne Parish.
Residents of the coastal plain are consistently the first to recognize and adapt to these ongoing, catastrophic environmental changes.
We run the risk of discounting the stake holders that have the most to lose since they are often ignored in the decision making process.
Heritage

• TRADITIONAL ECOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE IS PART OF OUR CULTURAL HERITAGE.
• WHY IS CULTURAL HERITAGE IMPORTANT?

• Heritage provides a foundation for cultural identity.
• All traditional knowledge is transmitted culturally.
• Cultural heritage holds the solutions to everyday problems.
• Heritage shapes all forms of cultural expressions.
Threats to Cultural Heritage

• Resource Depletion
• Environmental Change
• Unequal Development (natives don’t often reap benefits of economic development)
• Language Loss
State of the State of Louisiana Studies

- As a result of reverse provincialism, Louisiana topics were not afforded the serious attention they deserve until late 20th century.
- In late 20th century, south Louisiana attracted international attention because of the diversity of its population, which was once viewed as a paradigm for 21st-century America.
- Much of recent research has focused on how the established populations have been influenced by the region’s cultural and natural environments.
Salient Characteristics of South Louisiana’s Population

• Large Indigenous Population
• Sedentary Population with Strong Ties to Land
• Ethnic and Racial Diversity, but Common Synthetic Cultural Base
• Distinct Adaptive Strategies Shared Across Community Lines
• Marginalization
• Pragmatism and Adaptability
• Cultural and Environmental Diversity Are Mutually Linked
To understand Louisiana’s present dilemma, one must first understand the historical processes directly contributing to its existence.
The Time Has Come for Bridge Building

• Flurry of research and publishing activity has generally been limited by disciplinary boundaries

• Knowledge base is now sufficient to warrant trans-disciplinary collaboration
Misconception 3

- Conventional wisdom:
- **INTER-DISCIPLINARY**
- **BRIDGE-BUILDING IS EITHER IMPOSSIBLE OR POINTLESS**
Collaboration

• WHY?
• Because Louisiana’s problems are of such magnitude that the time has come for a more global approaches and more comprehensive understanding if we are to avoid the mistakes of the past.

• HOW?
• HERITAGE HABITATS PROJECT -- disciplinary differences in methodologies are not a real impediment – IF PARTICIPANTS STRIP AWAY THEIR DISCIPLINARY JARGON AND SPEAK A COMMON LANGUAGE
Part 4:

INTERPRETATION & DISSEMINATION
INITIAL VOLUME TOPICS

1) Inaugural Volume
2) Landmarks Threatened by Coastal Erosion
3) Bayou Teche
VOLUMES IN DEVELOPMENT
1) Finding Common Ground (Traditional Ecological Knowledge)
2) Swamp Rat: The Story of Dixie’s Nutria Invasion
3) Hunted, Harvested, and Homegrown: Subsistence in Coastal Louisiana (Foodways)
4) Louisiana Dried Shrimp Industry
5) Gulf Coast Oyster Industry
Part 5

JEUDI GRAS