

In and about Washington

June 2022
FREE—TAKE ONE



St. Landry soldier home at last

Army Pvt. Hillary Soileau, a World War II soldier killed in the Pacific nearly 80 years ago, finally came home to rest in Cedar Hill Cemetery on Armed Forces Day, May 21.

He was buried here with military honors near the graves of his parents, Odey and Leona Soileau, who were farming near Whiteville when he entered the Army in 1942. He was only 23 when he was listed as missing after a battle on the island of Guadalcanal in February 1943.

It was not positively established until last December that he was one of two unidentified men who were found in the area a month after the fighting. His remains, marked only as Unknown-52, were placed in a military cemetery in Honolulu until scientists using DNA and other evidence were able to identify him.

Among family members present here were Hilary's last surviving sibling, Mary Lee Soileau. She was presented the flag from his coffin by her great-nephew, Marine Capt. Joseph Soileau, who offered a eulogy at services at Sibille Funeral Home.



The 17-year Marine veteran said one of a soldier's biggest fears is being killed and not being returned to his family. He said Hilary's reburial here was a celebration of "all that it took to get him back home."

Another great-nephew, Gregory Badeaux, coordinated the burial services here.

Town acts on blighted properties

Owners of three properties condemned as blighted have been given until September 30 to demolish the buildings and haul away the debris.

If the owners do not do it, the town will have the buildings removed and add the cost to the owners' tax bills.

Two of them, an old mechanic's shop owned by Theodore Toler at 105 N. Anderson and a mobile home owned by Ester Marie Pitre at the corner of Vine and Anderson, were substantially damaged by a tornado in March 2021. A second mobile home on the Pitre property was not badly damaged and will be brought up to code standards.

The third property, a mobile home owned by Augusta Green at the corner of Gardiner and Hill has been abandoned for some time and will be removed.

Codes and permits administrator Rodney (Conney) Richard said other blighted properties will be identified for possible condemnation.

2-In and about Washington, June 2022

Of Note

THE MONTHLY Main Street Market will be held June 12 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the pavilion across from Town Hall. Contact Laura Wilson, 337-351-4244, for vendor information.

YOGESH PATE from India will preach at the 10:30 a.m. service at on June 12 at Washington Baptist Church. Vacation Bible School will be July 17-20.

THE STEAMBOAT CITY Association is taking applications for \$750 scholarships for graduating high school seniors from Washington. Deadline is June 15. Contact Jim Bradshaw, P.O. Box 1121, Washington LA 70589.

THE HEALTH BUGGY provides free screening for blood pressure, blood sugar, and cholesterol on the Immaculate Conception parking lot from 8 to 11 a.m. each third Friday



**Take pride in your town.
Stash your trash.**

Town of Washington Logo Options



Which one do you like?

The Town may adopt a new logo as part of an effort to better market Washington.

These suggestions were part of a ULL presentation on how to use social media to promote the town. They also identified ways to encourage visitors to visit our businesses and attractions. A group of citizens accompanied the mayor to Lafayette to hear the presentation and will follow up on the suggestions.

Too wet last year, too dry this year

Washington has gone from the wettest spring recorded in 80 years last year to one of the driest on record this year.

By Memorial Day last year, the town had received 41.84 inches of rain, more than 20 inches above the average for this time of year. This year we've measured only 12.20 inches, 10 inches below normal.

At the end of May most of south Louisiana was listed as in moderate to severe drought by national weather officials.



Book machine

A book vending machine has been installed at Washington Elementary to allow students to use earned tokens to redeem books of their choice.

THE WEATHER



May 1-27

High: 94, 17
Average High: 88.4
Low: 61
Average Low: 67.0
May Rainfall: 2.14
Avg. May Rain: 5.58
Rain for 2022: 12.20
Avg. Yearly Rain: 22.50



More cemetery improvements

Leonard Reed spray paints a new entry marker for Hebrew Rest, one of the three historic cemeteries in Washington. Cedar Hill cemetery has also received a rejuvenated archway at its entrance.

Mayor offers conservative budget

Mayor Dwight Landreneau has proposed a "very conservative" \$1.5 million budget that "will allow the town to operate within its means" for the fiscal year beginning July 1. A public hearing will be held in conjunction with the Town Council meeting on June 20.

At its May meeting the Council approved introduction of the new budget and a companion document revising the current budget upward. The town took in more money than expected during the current fiscal year, largely because of state and federal grants. Auditors require adoption of an amended budget if spending or revenue changes more than five percent from the original projection. The current year budget anticipated \$1.45 million, but actual revenue was \$1.55 million.

"In normal circumstances there would be an opportunity to use excess funds from prior years to meet budget goals," the mayor said. "In our situation, we do not have this luxury, having over \$330,000 in accounts payable from past over expending. ... We plan to address the fund deficit by pursuing additional grants and increased revenue."

The proposed new budget is based on actual receipts from the current year, and anticipates only \$9,000 in grants. That is a conservative number. At its May meeting alone the Council approved applications for \$70,000 in state funding for utility system improvements and needed equipment, and voted to use some \$50,000 from a federal American Rescue Plan grant as the town's portion of a pending \$240,000 state grant for water system improvements.

From Town Hall

THE TOWN COUNCIL took no action to change current policies on utility bill payment. The issue came up because auditors said the town has inappropriately allowed a grace period when the due date of the 17th of each month falls on a weekend or holiday. Auditors said the date is set by ordinance and it must be enforced or the law must be changed. A \$10 penalty is charged when the deadline is missed. Utilities can be cut off if the account remains unpaid after another seven days and a \$50 reconnection fee is charged. Bills can be paid in person during office hours, through a dropbox at Town Hall, by automatic withdrawal, or online by computer.

A TRAILER LOAD of treated lumber was donated by Keith Quebedeaux of St. Landry Cabinets to build a pergola at Ethel Park across from Town Hall.

THE DAILY WORLD will continue as the official journal for publication of Washington legal notices.

Send items for *In and About Washington* to
jimbradshaw4321@gmail.com.

Cotton supported Washington's culture

The cotton crop was largely harvested and folks had a bit of money to spend in late October 1882, when the *Washington Argus* reported "the most lively day we have seen for a long time" for the town's businesses.

"Passing on Main Street," the *Argus* writer said, "we counted twenty-nine teams and twenty-two saddled horses, most of which [were] from the adjacent country. The establishments of our merchants were thronged, and traffic with them was much more brisk than common."

That was welcome news. That spring, a major flood along Bayou Courtableau drove people from their homes and cotton couldn't be planted until the soggy ground dried. Planters and the merchants they supported were afraid the cotton crop would not be what it should, and when cotton planters were hurting, so was everyone else. It was the major crop on the Courtableau and by far the most valuable.

In a good crop year a decade earlier, 1869, the *St. Landry Journal* editors estimated that "the cotton crop will yield about two millions of dollar" in the region. That would be \$50 million in 2022 dollars, Most of that ended up in the hands of New Orleans cotton brokers, but enough of it flowed through Washington to buy fancy goods as well as the basic salt, flour, coffee, and whiskey.

The crop had doubled in size by the busy shopping day the *Argus* noted in 1882. An Army Engineer studying the Courtableau about that time estimated that steamboats alone carried 5,000 to 6,000 bales each week from Washington during the six months of the harvest season and just after it. The actual crop that year was probably double that, because by 1883 the railroad was taking big bites from the steamboat freight trade.

But it made no difference to Main Street merchants whether the cotton went to market by water or by rail. Cotton profits, by 1883, supported a town that was described by the *Opelousas Courier* as a town of 1200 people "where culture and refinement prevail." Washington had "a full complement of stores and shops, excellent church and school facilities, and is beautifully located on Bayou Courtableau," the newspaper reported. "It is a good solvent town and some enterprising men are found there. ... It has several steam saw mills in operation, and a cotton seed oil mill in course of construction. Socially it is a delightful place."

But there was trouble on the bayou, and those busy days became less and less frequent over the next years. Railroad competition and log jams on the bayou eventually killed the steamboat trade. By the late 1800s, the planters, who once had no option but to bring their crops (and money) to Washington and its steamboats, by then had no option but rail cars that didn't need a bayou to float on. The trains stopped at other places more convenient to the cotton fields.

The horse count at the hitching racks at those other places grew steadily. The brisk business that delighted Washington merchants that October shopping day began to slip away, slowly at first, but then more and more steadily.



Looking Back.

In and About
Washington

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