

# Stories of Louisiana City and Town Names

By LouisianaTravel.com Staff

You may know that Louisiana was named for French King Louis XIV. The territory was named in his honor by French explorer La Salle, who claimed the territory to the west of the Mississippi River in the 1680s for France. The huge land tract—the Louisiana Purchase—would later form all or parts of fifteen states and two Canadian provinces.

But the cities and towns inside Louisiana have some interesting stories behind their names as well.

New Orleans was founded in 1718 as Nouvelle-Orléans by the French explorer Bienville. He named the city in honor of another French official, then Prince Regent of France Philip II, Duke of Orleans.

Louisiana's capital city, Baton Rouge, means "red stick" in French. The red stick refers to a blood-stained pole that French explorer Iberville found on the bank of the Mississippi River in 1699 at the city's present location. There are conflicting stories about the stick's purpose. One theory is that it was a dividing line between lands occupied and hunted by the Bayougoula and Houma Native

American tribes in south Louisiana. Another is that it was possibly placed to mark the passing of a respected tribal elder. Either way, the stick was placed by the Native Americans.

On a related note, several Louisiana cities owe their names to Louisiana's first American Indian residents including Bayou Goula, Houma, Natchitoches, Opelousas, Coushatta, Jena and Ponchatoula. Bogalusa is named for Washington Parish's Bogue Lusa creek, which is Choctaw for "dark" or "smoky water." Another town with a named tied to the Choctaw is Shongaloo, which is said to be a derivative of shakaio—the Choctaw word for cypress tree. Catahoula, a name for both a Louisiana town and parish, is Choctaw for "sacred lake."

Shreveport's name is tied to a 160-mile log jam on the Red River in northwest and central Louisiana in the early 1800s. A steamboat captain and hundreds of men under his command successfully cleared the log jam opening river navigation southward to the Mississippi River. They established a port community north of the jam named for the jam-clearing captain—Henry Miller Shreve.



Lafayette was originally named Vermilionville, for the Cajun community that formed on Bayou Vermilion in the late 1700s. In the early 1800s, locals wanted to rename the small town to recognize the Marquis de Lafayette. The Frenchman aided the

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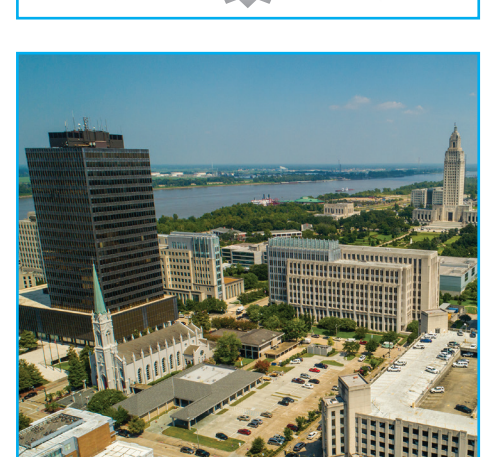
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Contact: Jo Eckert, 319-362-6405, [jo.eckert@sba.gov](mailto:jo.eckert@sba.gov)  
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