

In and about Washington

November 2023
FREE—TAKE ONE

Fall, finally

A heat-breaking front moved through on October 5, finally bringing relief from a brutally hot summer.

June, July, August, and September were each the hottest ever recorded here.

The high reached 90 degrees or higher at R&D Research, just east of town, on 119 of the 127 days between June 1 and October 5. It went above 95 on 70 of those days, and above 100 on 24 of them.

Little rain fell, and we remain in a severe drought. We average about 23 inches of rain from June 1-October 31. This year we've seen about 8½.

THE WEATHER

October 1-27

High: 92, Oct. 3, 4

Average High: 78.8

Low: 41, Oct. 17

Average Low: 54.1

Average Temp: 66.4

Oct. Rainfall: 0.89

Avg. for Oct.: 4.55

Rain for 2023: 36.48

Avg. for Year: 44.26



Volunteers help ready Christmas fête

Christmas in Washington, which will be held December 9 in and around the Town Pavilion, is an excellent example of how citizens can play a big role in making the town more attractive to residents and visitors alike, in the estimation of Mayor Dwight Landreneau and other community leaders.

“More and more people are beginning to realize that they can play a part in making Washington a really neat little town and keeping it that way,” the mayor said.

The current trend toward greater involvement may have begun in the Spring of 2019, when the Washington Garden Club, which has been active in community affairs for years, led a community-wide, award-winning effort in the state Cleanest City contest.

The annual Christmas fete, now in its fourth year, is administered through the Steamboat City Association, which has also been active for more than a decade, but the festival was created by a handful of volunteers who have since been joined by others to put on the annual event. A volunteer group also began the Community Festival which is now held each Spring.

Volunteers have also worked to build a new Ethel Park across from Town Hall and to rejuvenate the Jacob Joubert Park on Prescott Street. Several organizations and individuals come forward regularly to support Washington Elementary and its students, or to take part in one-time events such as the state's Love the Boot trash cleanup. A foundation formed by another citizen's group has taken charge of improvement and maintenance of Washington's three historic cemeteries.

“A little bit of effort by volunteers like these makes the town better for everyone, and helps build community pride that encourages others,” the mayor said. “To slightly change the old saying, one good deed does lead to another.”

To volunteer for the
Christmas festival,
contact Brenda Pitre,
972-754-7755.

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Of Note

YOU'LL SOON be able to check your watch by the sound of our new steamboat whistle. It tooted just fine and right on time in a test at 6 p.m. on October 25, and will be blowing regularly after fine tuning and a proper dedication.

EVANGELIST Lyndon Longoria will preach at Washington Baptist at the 10:30 a.m. service on November 19.

THE AMERICAN LEGION post here has set up a GoFundMe account to help repair the Legion Home. The link is <https://gofund.me027782b8>. Donors may also send a check to American Legion, Jasper Neyland Post 209, P.O. Box 45, Washington, LA 70589

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



Meditation area

A group of volunteers created a meditation area at Cedar Hill Cemetery. This project was made possible through a grant awarded by the Williams Gas Pipeline Corporation.

Christmas concert, judging in early December

The annual holiday concert and the judging of Christmas decorations will be held in the first week of December.



The free community concert sponsored annually by the Washington Garden Club will be held at 6 p.m. on December 2 at the old St. John's Episcopal Church on Church Street.

There will be a Christmas decorating contest for both businesses and residences again this year. In order to have the Town decorated for the December 9 Christmas festival, applications will be available at Town Hall beginning on November 12, with judging during the week of December 3. The garden club will coordinate the competition and judging.

Ardoin's under new ownership

Stacha Weber has acquired Ardoin's Grocery and Market from Wes and Ashley Walker, pledging in a Facebook post to "strive to continue the store's legacy." Russell and Bee Ardoin opened the store in May 1955. Paul and Brenda Ardoin Bacque took over ownership in 1990

Tricky Main Street market

Tricks and treats was the theme of the October 21 Main Street Market at the town pavilion. Kids went trick-or-treating at each vendor's station while their parents shopped.

Laura Wilson has organized the monthly event since May 2022. She can be reached at 337-351-4244.



New mowers

Public works director Jimmy Alfred and Pat Vidrine took delivery in October of three new mowers from Billy Lanclos. They were purchased through a U.S. Department of Agriculture grant.



Light turnout here for October 14 election

Only 25% of Washington voters turned out for the October 14 election. Jeff Landry (R) got 99 of the 190 votes cast here for governor, Shawn Wilson (D) got 62, and all other candidates were in single digits.

For lieutenant governor, incumbent Billy Nungesser (R) got 97, Willie Jones (D) got 46, and St. Landry native Elbert Guillory (R) got 40.

Washington’s vote for Secretary of State was spread across the board. Arthur Morrell (D) led with 42 , Mike Francis (R) got 39, Gwen Collins-Greenup (D) got 35, and Nancy Landry (R) got 22.

For Attorney General, Liz Baker Murrill (R) got 71 Washington votes, Lindsey Cheek (D) got 58, and John Stefanski (R).got 41. In the race for Treasurer local voters favored Dustin Granger (D) with 69 votes, followed by John Fleming (R) with 51, and Scott McKnight (R) with 37.

Preston Castille (D) got 110 local votes and Dolores Cormier Zenon (D) got 32 for a seat on the state board of education. Local voters helped return Dustin Miller (D) to the legislature with 151 votes to 38 for Allen Guillory (D). Washington voters also joined a healthy majority to elect Charles Cravins (D) as district judge. He got 97 local votes, Jarvis Clairborne (D) got 70, and Scherri Guidry (D) got 20.

Voters here favored incumbent Clerk of Court Charles Jagneaux (D) over Jan Deville (D), 145 votes to 43, and approved all four state constitutional amendments and two school tax renewals.

The runoff election is November 18

Monarch project

Monarch butterflies like this one on the wrist of Mayor Dwight Landreneau at Ethel Park mark the success of a project by mayors across the nation who have pledged to maintain the butterfly’s habitat at parks and other public places, and urge citizens to do so at their residences and businesses.



From Town Hall

REP. MIKE JOHNSON, who was elected Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives October 25, represents Washington. He was elected in 2016 from Louisiana’s 4th district. It includes mostly western Louisiana, but also the town of Washington, which is at its very southeastern tip. He is a Republican and is regarded as very conservative.

THE ELECTRIC vehicle charging station next to the police station officially went online October 12, making Washington one of the first small towns on I-49 to offer free EV charging. The station was donated by Cleco. Travelers can find the station by using an EV’s navigation system or a mobile phone app. Town and Cleco officials hope the station will help bring I-49 visitors into town.

ONLY ROUTINE matters were on the agenda for the October Town Council meeting. This month’s meeting will be at 6 p.m. on November 20. The agenda is posted at Town Hall and online beforehand.

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Main Street museum served as Town Hall

In May 1939, when the federal Works Progress Administration announced plans to build a town hall and jail in Washington, it said, "The building will occupy the site of the old Plonsky Opera House ... [and] will be the first town hall to serve the community." That's only partly right; the site was right but the town had a building called a town hall well before 1939.

The 1939 building, built for \$13,670, now houses a museum. The WPA described it as "one-story ... approximately 32 by 52 feet in size, with a ... [16-by-18-foot] brick wing which will provide space for the town jail," all equipped with "modern plumbing and electrical facilities."

That was probably the first town hall with such modern facilities, but Cheryl Bihm Meyers records in her comprehensive history of Washington that in 1852, the town built "a two-story structure with a guard house on the bottom floor and the second floor designated as the 'City Council Hall'."

This earlier building was at the corner of East Hill and South Washington, where the old blue water tower now stands. Diarist David Jasper McNicoll recalled in a memoir that the building, which he called the Town Hall and Calaboose, was used for a time as a school when he was a boy.

The 50,000-gallon water tower still standing on the property was put up in 1906, so the old calaboose building was probably on the Moundville Street side of the property. Paved steps on Washington Street across from the post office parking lot exit were probably in front of it. Those steps were likely poured in 1913, when the town's first sidewalks were constructed. There was also a meat market at the site.

"Our classroom was the entire second floor, which was reached by an outside stairway," McNicoll recalled. "There was a bell tower and bell on the roof and a bell rope hung down [to the] stair landing. The bell, in my time, was never used other than as a fire alarm." He says the Town Hall and Calaboose was torn down "when a new one was built at ... Main and DeJean Streets" (in 1939).

According to various accounts, the 1939 building used bricks salvaged after fire destroyed the opera house. Salvaged bricks may have been used, but the destructive fire was in 1902. The opera house was rebuilt and stood until a tornado destroyed it on November 21, 1934. A small fire broke out then, but the damage was mostly done by wind. Bricks in the museum do not show fire damage; they were salvaged after the storm, not from the 1902 fire. J. Austin Perkins bought the property after that storm and sold it to the town in March 1939.

The WPA building was still listed as town hall on historic district documents in July 1978, but the current one on North Washington was under construction. The caption of a newspaper photo of mayor Kirt Soileau and architect Jerome Gaudet published on March 21, 1978, said it was "expected to be finished next month." It took a bit longer than that but it was ready by the end of the year.



Looking Back

In and About
Washington

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