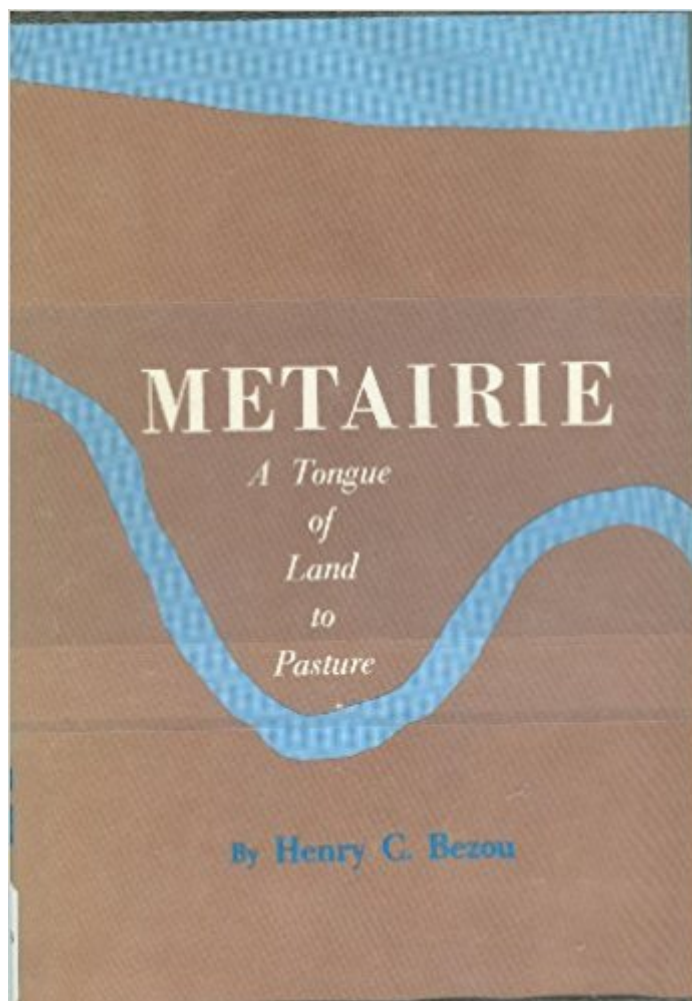


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Metairie: A Tongue Of Land To Pasture



Synopsis

Metairie does have a rich history all its own. What was once described two centuries ago as "a tongue of land to lend pasturage" has become the second largest unincorporated city in the nation.

--This text refers to the Paperback edition.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

A native New Orleanian, Monsignor Henry C. Bezou was ordained to the priesthood in 1938 at St. Louis Cathedral. Among his various ministries, he served as pastor of St. Francis Xavier, in the heart of Old Metairie, from 1967 to 1983. He died August 15, 1989. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

Monsignor Bezou's history is predominately interested in the formation of the Catholic Community in East Jefferson Parish, and in the development of St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church on Metairie Road in particular. Bezou gradually focuses in on the very small community of Old Metairie, excluding most of East Jefferson. The book is open to the criticism that it lacks focus as a whole, though, starting off as a history of the area generally and then becoming a history of one Catholic congregation there. But his very readable history starts with a much wider lens that should be of general interest. Bezou gives a cogent and generally accurate account of European settlement of the area. He traces the natural features of the land and how the Native American and European settlers interacted with them, tracing the ebb and flow of property lines, the rise and fall of colonial figures, and of course the gradual emergence of a stable religious community in Jefferson Parish. (Readers should bear in mind that "Jefferson Parish" once extended all the way from Kenner in the

west to the border of what is now the Central Business District in the East. It's useful to have a good local map handy while reading.)As a local historian Bezou is quite competent, and as a story-teller he has strong gifts, particularly in the earlier chapters as he lays out the colonization of Jefferson Parish and the small early dramas that made it what it is. In my opinion, the first third of the book is the best. Bezou's perspective leaves a great deal out: the role of religion in the subjugation of the Native Americans, for instance, as well as role of religion in both oppressing and liberating African Americans. The story of the integration of Jefferson Parish is not a bucolic one, and Catholicism has played a part for both good and evil in it, but this is not a book anxious to broach that thorny bit of history. For some that will never be a forgivable sin, and in my opinion it does weaken the book considerably: not to notice racial and class issues in a history such as this is tough to justify. In his defense, Bezou is not writing a critical social history or even an academic history so much as he is bringing history to the service of telling a specific story to people who have inherited it. He intends to strengthen the community around St. Francis Xavier, and he does so (as religious people have always done) through wrapping history and story together. The earlier part of the book is informative and incisive, while the latter part is an extraordinary contribution to local history, taken on its own terms.

I really enjoyed this book - at least the first half. It includes detailed information about the first European settlers of Metairie as well as its history from "Cannes Brulee" up through Alfred Bonnabel. Sadly Monsigneur Bazoo, who was pastor of St. Francis for as long as I can recall, turns the book into a history of St. Francis about midway through the book. He neglects to cover Hog Alley, the Papworth Family, the Bonnabels involvement with education, their "plantation house", Kenner, Harahan, Lakeview, etc. I love St. Francis, don't get me wrong - but a history of Metairie includes more than just St. Francis Parish. Thank you Monsigneur Bazoo for a fascinating book. I wish you had written more.

Father Bezou's book is one of the greatest books written about New Orleans and its environs. Certainly the best book written about Metairie. Fascinating history that is extremely well documented using the French source materials, much of which the Catholic Church has, and to which Father Bezou had easy access.

Metairie is great; and it French for little farm.

Msgr. Bezou gives a scholarly review of the early days of New Orleans, including the Indian tribes, and explorers, and historical personages. AND, he finds items that are often missed in more lengthy studies. His primary focus settles in on the suburb of Metairie. How Metairie came to be, who lived there and why, even exactly what the name signifies in French, all of this is written in a grand style. The author has the credentials of an old French family, and the background of an inquisitive churchman, and an easy way of saying what is important in a conversational way. This is a must read book for the inhabitant of Metairie, or for anyone who is interested in Louisiana history. The research is done for you. Msgr. Bezou passed away in 1989 but his work will live on.

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