



# River Road Rambler: A Curious Traveler along Louisiana's Historic Byway

*Mary Ann Sternberg*

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The River Road between New Orleans and Baton Rouge hosts a fascinating mix of people, traditions, and stories. Author Mary Ann Sternberg has spent over two decades exploring this richly historic corridor, uncovering intriguing and often underappreciated places. In *River Road Rambler*, she presents fifteen sketches about sites along this scenic route. From familiar stops, such as the National Hansen's Disease Center Museum at Carville, with its octogenarian guide, and the sui generis perique tobacco area of St. James Parish to the less well-noted yet highly distinctive Our Lady of Lourdes grotto in Convent and the gradually disappearing Colonial Sugars Historic District, Sternberg presents a new perspective on some of the region's most colorful places.

While many of the places remain easily accessible to any River Road rambler, Sternberg also presents others closed to the public, giving armchair travelers an introduction to these otherwise unreachable attractions. Throughout, Sternberg captures the ambiance of her surroundings with a clear, engaging, and sometimes quirky examination of the relationships between past and present. In a poignant piece on the Valcour Aime garden, for example, she delves into the history of this lavish, nationally acclaimed planter's garden, created and abandoned in the mid-nineteenth century. Her visit to the now private and protected site, which has never been altered or replanted since its origins, reveals an extraordinary landscape—the relic of what Valcour Aime created, slowly overwhelmed by nature.

The essay-like stories brim with insights and observations about everything from the fire that razed The Cottage plantation to the failed attempts to salvage the reproduction of the seventeenth-century French warship *Le Pelican* from the bottom of the Mississippi. *River Road Rambler* takes us along to River Road treasures, linking us to both past and present and bringing some delightful and unexpected surprises in the process.

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