



Giroir, Alex, A.

Boat Maker (1932-2008)

Born in 1932 in the Assumption Parish community of Pierre Part, Alex Giroir grew up speaking Cajun French and English. As an accomplished carpenter, he was skilled at making the wooden boats traditional to Atchafalaya Basin. He learned from his father Alexander Giroir who was a master boat builder. Alex has said, "I was born into the boat building tradition, and I knew carpentry work before I knew anything else."

Using hand and power tools, Alex made a variety of wooden boats, including pirogues and rowing skiffs. He sometimes worked with his nephew, Raymond Sedatol.

Mr. Giroir's father, at one time, made traditional dugout pirogues from cypress logs. Around the turn of the century, the elder Mr. Giroir started building what they called "plank boats" or pirogues constructed of cypress planks because of the waste involved in making dugouts. Dugout pirogues used more than half of a large cypress log and a boat builder could make about 15 plank boats from the same wood. Giroir pointed out, "Today, good cypress is hard to find and most wooden pirogues are now made of plywood--but even plywood planks are becoming hard to get." Occasionally, he and Mr. Sedatol made aluminum pirogues used for fishing and hunting in the swamps.

Mr. Giroir's wide-bottomed pirogues were exceptionally stable. He pointed out that he sets his seats differently than does Raymond Sedatol. Raymond set his seats from one side of the boat to the other, but Mr. Giroir left an opening on each side of the seat. That way, if the boat tips, the seat wouldn't get wet. Alex Giroir did not make as many full-sized boats as he made miniature boats, which he used as visual aids when he described boats rarely seen today, and to talk about life in the swamps as it used to be. Mr. Giroir built an old-fashioned ferry for use at Vermillionville in Lafayette, he also made cypress swings but found it hard to get enough good wood to make many of them.

As a master boat builder, Alex Giroir was a member of the Louisiana Crafts Program and received many honors for his maintenance of this art. He demonstrated boat building at festivals through out the United States and Louisiana, including the Smithsonian's Festival of American Folklife, the 1984 World's Fair in New Orleans, the Louisiana Folklife Festival, and the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival. Mr. Giroir's wife Mazie is a traditional cook, and often accompanied her husband to festivals. Mr. Giroir passed away in 2008.

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