

Captain Toussaint and the Cajun Gator Brigade

by Warren Swenson

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When you hear this Cajun Christmas tale
I'm sure that you'll agree
That Louisiana and Texas
Share a common history
Now, I'll share some of that history
To show how it connects us
Then you tell me if this history
Is the history of Texas
Or of Louisiana
But before you answer me.
Just remember what I said
We share a common history.

We were under Spanish rule
And they were to protect us
But they were both corrupt and cruel
And so they had oppressed us.
When we felt our Spanish rulers
Had pushed us much too far
We revolted and marched under
A blue banner with one star.

Our revolution was successful
We had won and we were free.
But asked if we strong enough
To defend our liberty?
We answered by becoming part
Of a much stronger country
Whose constitution would, itself,
Our freedoms guarantee.

It was a course of action we were
Happy to embrace
As our new country became part
Of the United States.
If I were now to ask you
Whose history was this?
If you said Texas, I would say
The Florida Parishes.

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You could argue either answer
Expecting to prevail
While wondering what this has to do
With the Cajun Christmas Tales.
Well now I'll tell my story
But let me warn you friend
You won't see the connection
Until the very end.

What happened on May the second
Of the year Eighteen O three
Would establish a new doctrine called
The Manifest Destiny
Which said the United States should grow
From sea to shining sea.
We made a deal with Napoleon
And bought the French colony

Known as Louisiana
But the Spanish would soon claim
Part of what we bought was Florida
And that belonged to Spain.
So, they disputed our purchase
And their issue was this
The territory now known
As the Florida Parishes
Belonged to them and was not part
Of Louisiana
And would remain under their rule
And fly the Spanish banner.

And for the next seven years
That's how things remained
But in Europe during that same time
Things had really changed.
The French Emperor named Napoleon
Had just taken over Spain
So many feared Napoleon
Would then try to lay claim
To all the Spanish territories
In North America
And that, of course, would include
All of Florida.

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So those who lived in what's known
As the Florida parishes
Rather than to be governed
By the French or the Spanish,
Formed another government
To thus, govern themselves
Then their elected delegates
A special meeting held.

They petitioned the Spanish Governor
To submit or to concede
To their elected council
His governing authority.
To which at first it would appear
He was willing to agree
But later was found out
That he had secretly
Contacted the governors of Pensacola
And Havana
And asked them to march their troops
Into south Louisiana.

To quash these brazen rebels
And make them flee and cower
He then would by the force of arms
Be restored to power.
But those that he called rebels
Learned of his treachery
And decided they would forcibly
Defend their liberty.

Any terms that might be offered
They decided to refuse
So, they formed a small militia
Which then marched on Baton Rouge.
Even if they caught them by surprise
There was no guarantee
That the attack would be successful
And they'd win the victory

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But neither was there any doubt
That they were going to try
Though the garrison was fully armed
And heavily fortified.
That's when they met Captain Toussaint
And the Cajun Gator Brigade
Who told them of an entrance
Through the cypress palisades.

It was there, he said, this fort
Had a little-known back door
That was very lightly guarded
If at all and he was sure
They could get in undetected
And catch them unawares.
Overpowering the soldiers
Before they knew that they were there.

In the meanwhile, Captain Toussaint
And the Cajun Gator Brigade
Would patrol the Mississippi
So that any attempt made
To bring in reinforcements
Would by them be turned away.
And so, the fort was captured
By the rebels that same day.

The new republic's banner
At Baton Rouge was raised
As it proudly flew over the fort
For seventy-four days.
It symbolized their freedom
And their purpose pure and true
With a white five-pointed star
On a field of solid blue

When word of what had happened
Was heard in Washington
A real dilemma was created for
President Madison.
Who decided to move quickly
Without Congress' consent
When to Governor William Claiborne
These instructions he had sent

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You're to take possession of
The parish of Feliciana,
The West Florida parish we purchased
When we bought Louisiana.
The Governor published and delivered
The presidential declaration
To the leaders and the people
Who had formed this brand-new nation.

He was hoping that the declaration
Would be well received
And the leaders of the new nation
Would willing concede
The power of their government
To the United States
For the answer to this question
He hadn't long to wait.
A leader of the revolution,
Named John Johnson, had delivered
An invitation to the Governor
To meet them by the river.

To be escorted to St. Francisville,
Their new nation's capital,
Where the transfer of the government
Would there be made official
They then marched to Baton Rouge
To hold a meeting with
Colonel Commander Philemon Thomas
And Governor Skipwith.

It was there that they decided
To let the new republic's troops
Hail the new republic's flag
With a final grand salute.
Then march out of the fort,
Lay down their arms and be
Relieved of further duty and
Be discharged honorably.

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The US troops would then march in
And in respectful manner
Lower from its lofty perch
The new republic's banner.
Then raise the United States flag
With fifteen stripes and stars
Over the fort at Baton Rouge
To be seen from near and far.

So, the transfer of the Government
Was accomplished peacefully
And the new republic soon became
A part of history.
But whatever happened to that flag
Remained a mystery
As also did Captain Toussaint's
True identity.

After several years of research
I would discover later
Captain Toussaint was no man at all
He was an alligator
As were all the members
Of the Cajun Gator Brigade
And as for the new republic's flag
That Melissa Johnson made.
That flag, it was decided,
For the major role they played,
Would be given to Captain Toussaint
And the Cajun Gator Brigade.

Then in 1836
Down by the Rio Grande
Another Cajun Gator Brigade
Would help to make a stand
Against the Spanish General
Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna
Their battle flag looked just like
The new republic's banner.
Their Captain's name was Tuson
But he, his name had changed.
Captain Tuson and Captain Toussaint
Were both one and the same.

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After the war was ended
And the revolution won
Tuson had a special meeting
With General Sam Houston
Who thanked the Cajun Gator Brigade
For the work that they had done.
Then for their valiant service
That went above and beyond
The official call of duty
And for exceptional bravery
They each received a medal
And became part of history

Tuson became a general
And had a great grandson
Who would follow in his footsteps
And a great leader become
They would all call him Big Tuson
This same Tuson it seems
Later became the leader of
The Christmas Gator team.

Now that you've heard the story
I am sure it's clear to see
How Louisiana and Texas
Share a common history
And how the Cajun Christmas Tales
And history connect us
With our friends and next-door neighbors
From the Lone Star state of Texas

PS

He had another great grandson
Who just happens to be
An officer and leader in
The new Cajun Navy.
His exploits and achievements
Are quite legendary
So, in the near future
I'll be writing his story