

# In and about Washington

January 2025  
FREE—TAKE ONE

Lights, celebrations warmed Christmas in Washington



## It was the season to be merry

Cheerful lights on Main Street, Santa's annual visit to Christmas in Wahington, Story Time at the pavilion, a concert of traditional music, and decorated homes and businesses made for a festive holiday in Washington. Southern Strands Salon again won the business decorating contest, the Sarah Clostio Art Studio was second. Hotel Klaus and Norma's Main Street Grocery tied for third, and Washington State Bank received honorable mention. Residential winners were Marie Pitre, first; Evelyn and David Hanna, second; Barbara and Billy Hatcher, third; and Pamela Arrington, honorable mention.

## 2–In and about Washington, January 2025

### Of Note

**HUGH MORRISON**, visiting from Nova Scotia, will speak at Washington Baptist at the 10:30 a.m. service on January 26.

### THE WASHINGTON

Cemetery Foundation is accepting donations via the Venmo payment app. Donations may also be made by check to Washington Cemetery Foundation, P.O. Box 42, Washington 70589.

### THE AMERICAN LEGION

first Saturday barbecue has been suspended until spring. Donations to help repair the legion home can be sent to American Legion Post 209, P.O. Box 45, Washington 70589.

### WASHINGTON WEATHER



January forecast: Warmer than usual, average rainfall

#### December 1-27

High: 77, Dec. 16, 17  
Avg. High: 67.0  
Low: 29, Dec. 22  
Avg. Low: 44.8  
Avg. Temp: 55.9  
5-year Avg. 55.9  
Dec. Rainfall: 3.30  
Avg. for Dec.: 4.34  
Rain for 2024: 61.31  
20-year Avg.: 56.60

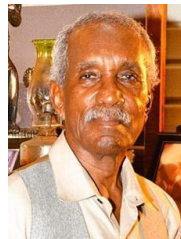


### Retired teachers

The St. Landry Parish Retired Teachers Association toured Washington and conducted its annual meeting here in December.

### Aaron Harris dies at age 89

Aaron Harris, patriarch of a prominent local family, died early December 16 at his Washington residence at the age of 89. He was a teacher, lawyer, scholar, entrepreneur, and substantial land owner.



He was born in 1935, the son of a sharecropper, graduated from school in Washington, and worked his way through Southern University, receiving an undergraduate degree in mathematics. He was drafted into the Army in 1959 and used his math skills on a project called the Army Rocket Guided Missile Agency.

After leaving the army he taught in St. Landry Parish schools before earning his degree from the Southern law school. He joined the law faculty in 1971 and became the associate dean of the law school several years later. He was also associated in a law firm with his children Alonzo and Vanessa, both of whom he taught in law school and who now are judges. His other son Antonio is director of the Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development Institute.

### Health buggy” ends Washington visits

The “health buggy” will no longer visit Washington, a decision “not made lightly,” according to Michael LeJeune, CEO of the Acadia-St. Landry Hospital. The bus was just wearing out.

“Following the passing of one of our long-time bus crew members, we carefully evaluated the program and determined that changes were necessary due to two key challenges: staffing limitations and the advanced age of the vehicle. While the Health Buggy has provided valuable service to our communities for many years, its age has made maintenance increasingly difficult and costly. Although we have not discontinued the health buggy entirely, we have had to limit the distances it can travel,” Lejeune said in an email.

The 40-foot bus began visiting Washington in April 2012 .





CPA Burton Kolder reviewed Washington finances at the December Town Council meeting.

**Auditor says town “moving in right direction”**

Washington’s finances continue to improve and are “definitely on the right track,” according to auditor Burton Kolder. The latest audit shows that “your numbers are good,” he reported at the December Town Council meeting. “Keep up what you are doing.”

The audit showed that the town ended the last fiscal year with a surplus of \$34,513, and that hundreds of thousands of dollars in old debt inherited by the current administration will likely be fully paid by the end of this fiscal year on June 30.

The utility system continued to generate about half of the town’s \$1.7 million income for the year and also about half of its spending. The gas and water utilities each showed a profit, but the sewer system showed a deficit that Kolder urged the administration to remedy. “You want it to at least break even,” he said.

The council already had on the agenda introduction of two ordinances designed to address the situation, including the possibility of raising rates. The ordinances will provide for regular review of utility charges and make it easier to change them. They will likely be voted on at the January meeting,

Sales tax collections were up from the year before, which Kolder said is a good sign. He said other communities of Washington’s size are seeing declining sales taxes. More than \$300,000 in grants helped fund the surplus, most of it going to utility system improvements.

Kolder commended the administration for continued improvement in its accounting and financial procedures.

**Some tax bills were too high**

Some Washington residents may have been overcharged on current property tax bills. Mayor Dwight Landreneau said he was notified December 16 that a “computer glitch” at the sheriff’s office, which collects taxes for the town, caused bills to be doubled for some Washington property owners. The error did not affect everyone and anyone who overpaid will receive a refund.

**From Town Hall**

**THE DISMISSAL** of Washington police officer Christopher Simien for failing to show up for work caused a lengthy discussion at the December Town Council meeting of police practices and personnel management. No changes were made.

**ONLY 28 VOTES** were cast in Washington in the December election. Four constitutional amendments were on the ballot. All of them passed here and statewide, with just over 50 percent approval in each instance

**THE JANUARY** Town Council meeting will be held on Tuesday, January 21, because of the Martin Luther King holiday on January 20. The meeting will begin at 6 p.m. at Town Hall.

**UTILITY CUSTOMERS** are reminded that bill payments are due on the 17th of each month and that payments received after 3 p.m. are posted on the next business day. A \$10 late fee is charged if the bill is not paid on time.

## German was once common on Washington streets

In the middle 1800s, you were just as likely to hear German as English or French in Washington. In fact, one visitor had the impression that the town was made up mostly of Germans.

The language reached Louisiana during the colony's infancy. Germa-speaking Alsatians came here in 1721, and others from the Rhine Valley, Switzerland, and Belgium joined them on what became known as the German Coast on the Mississippi River. Some of their descendants eventually reached St. Landry.

The lure of free land under the Spanish regime brought others in the 1770s. A St. Landry Parish history by Charles Oubre notes that the population "was considerably augmented by the migration of English, Irish, and German families ... during the American Revolution."

Germans moved to the Roberts Cove area of Acadia Parish in 1881, but the language was well established in Washington long before then. As the town became a commercial center, it attracted merchants such as Edward Plonsky, Max Klaus, Caryl Wolff, and others who were born in German speaking areas of Europe.

When writer and traveler Frederick Law Olmsted visited in 1854, he wrote, "The inhabitants seemed to be mostly Germans. In the inn yard were five German peddler's wagons. ... They testified that each had been in the habit of purchasing from one [merchant in Washington], goods to the value of from one to two hundred dollars a month."

Besides the fact that German merchants were here, it is also significant that Olmsted observed itinerant peddlers getting goods here to sell in the countryside. For a number men who became well known south Louisiana merchants the itinerant life was the first step to prosperity.

About 1900, Louisiana Supreme Court Judge Joseph A. Breaux, wrote that for many early immigrants "the real road to wealth ... [had] three stages, the peddler's box, the wagon, and the country store." These pack merchants carried a box four feet high, two and a half feet wide, about a foot deep filled with small sundries. A hard-working peddler who saved his money would be able to buy a wagon after two or three years of walking the roads. "Here is marked progress," the judge wrote. "The wagon contains an infinity of articles of trade. It is less tiring and brings in more."

A significant German presence remained in the late 1800s when Methodist preacher Julius Blecker , a German, was sent here. Diarist David Jasper McNicoll said that quite a few German families lived in the area and about once a month Brother Blecker would hold a German service for the benefit of these families."

Whatever vestiges of the language remaining in the early 1900s vanished when World War I provoked a huge anti-German sentiment. As Ellen C. Merrill points out in *Germans of Louisiana* (Pelican Publishing, 2005), The "severity of the [anti-German] hysteria" was reflected in the laws passed in 1918 that prohibited teaching or speaking the language, and "even selling or exhibiting German-made products also became illegal acts, punishable by fines and prison sentences."



### *Looking Back*

In and About  
Washington

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