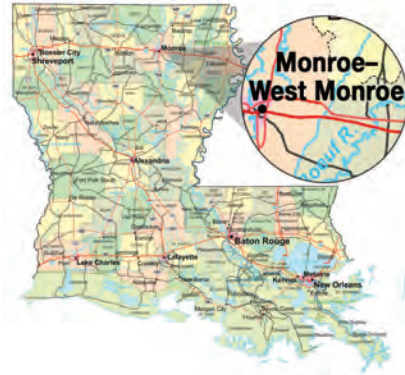# Monroe–West Monroe, LA

The twin cities of Monroe and West Monroe, Louisiana, began with the establishment of Fort Miro as a Spanish presence on the north Ouachita River. In May, 1819, Fort Miro was renamed Monroe to honor President James Monroe and the first steamboat to travel up the Ouachita River to North Louisiana. West Monroe received its name in 1880 from railroad workers who needed to name a new city located west of Monroe.

Monroe's Biedenharn Museum & Gardens was once home to Joseph Biedenharn, the first bottler of Coca-Cola. Attached to the house and gardens is the Coke Museum, which displays early Coca-Cola memorabilia, and the Bible Museum, which contains historically significant Bibles. The Chennault Aviation & Military Museum of Louisiana occupies a building from the World War II Selman Field Army Air Corps Navigation School and exhibits artifacts highlighting the Navigation School, the birth of Delta Airlines, General Claire Lee Chennault's Flying Tigers fighter squadron, and World War II aircraft and vehicles. Displays at the Northeast Louisiana Delta African American Museum include kitchenware and furniture from slave cabins, early cotton farming tools, and sacks used for picking cotton. The University of Louisiana at Monroe's Museum of Natural History exhibits Native American artifacts.

Other museums include the Masur Museum of Art, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and the Northeast Louisiana Children's Museum, which features an annual Santa's Christmas Village.

Layton Castle was built in 1910 around a Louisiana cottage, and Cooley House is a rare example of Prairie School architecture in the South. Both are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Performing arts venues include the Monroe Civic Center, Monroe Symphony Orchestra, and Twin City Ballet Company. Kiroli Park in West Monroe stage hosts ballet in the spring and the orchestra in the summer. Strauss Theatre Center produces dramas and musicals for adults and youths. University of Louisiana at Monroe School of Visual and Performing Arts presents student performances and hosts guest artists.

The Downtown RiverMarket is operated by the City of Monroe and is part of a nine-month festival held in celebration of the downtown area and the river. The festival features artisans, food, produce, entertainment, workshops, and children's activities. West Monroe Farmers' Market is open year-round and offers various crops and goods.

NEIGHBORHOODS

Downtown Monroe primarily consists of office, retail, government, and institutional structures.

Bordering the Ouachita River, Monroe's Garden District has older, single-family residences developed from approximately 1930 to 1950, with some houses dating to the late 1800s and early 1900s. Styles include Tudor, Spanish Mission, and Craftsman as well as Dutch Colonial Revival. The area is heavily landscaped and has mature vegetation and tree-lined streets.

The North Monroe neighborhood consists of a range of single-family residences built between 1967 and 1985. Many of the one- and two-story homes in River Oaks and Frenchman's Bend subdivisions were built in the 1990s and 2000s. Brick and wood-sided bungalow style single-family homes and duplexes dominate Southside Riverfront, which was developed in the late 1950s and 1960s. Developed during the 1960s and 1970s, the University Area includes single-family residences along the north side of the bayou.

West Monroe's has two commercial historic districts in the downtown. The north side of the city features bungalows and ranch-style homes built mostly during the 1950s and 1960s. Some new homes have been constructed on individual empty lots during the past few years.

PARKS AND RECREATION

Monroe has 18 parks and 7 community centers with amenities that include swimming pools, tennis facilities, golf courses, sports fields, walking/jogging trails, and many playgrounds. Chennault Park features an 18-hole golf course, disc golf, softball field, paved walking/jogging trail, Northeast Louisiana Soccer Complex, and the Northeast Louisiana Delta African American Heritage Museum. Forsythe Park has a 9-hole golf course, putt-putt golf, tennis courts, softball, soccer fields, a children's park, beach volleyball courts, a jogging path, and a public boat launch. Revolution Park Racing and Entertainment Complex is home to multiple levels of NASCAR racing and special events.

Louisiana Purchase Gardens & Zoo contains a special Louisiana Purchase Exhibit that features animals indigenous to the original Louisiana Purchase, including black bears, bison, elk, mountain lions and American Bald eagles.

Black Bayou Lake National Wildlife Refuge visitors' center offers interactive exhibits that include an aquarium with native fish, reptiles, and amphibians. The refuge also has an arboretum with Louisiana native tree and woody shrub species, a photo blind, boat launch, canoeing, year-round fishing, and seasonal hunting opportunities.

West Monroe has a community center and three parks. The heavily wooded 160-acre Kiroli Park features a theater stage, dog park, tennis courts, playgrounds, fishing ponds, gardens, and walking/jogging trails. Located along the Ouachita River, Lazarre Park has disc golf and a boat launch and hosts the Ronald McDonald House Annual Big Bass Tournament in May.

EDUCATION

The Monroe City School District educates approximately 8,273 students in 12 elementary schools, 3 middle schools, and 3 high schools.

Ouachita Parish School System serves approximately 11,700 students of West Monroe and its suburbs with 14 elementary schools, 5 middle schools, 2 high schools, and an alternative school. In addition, this school system serves about 7,700 students in the Monroe area with 8 elementary schools, 3 middle schools, and 3 high schools.

The University of Louisiana at Monroe offers undergraduate and graduate degree programs. Louisiana Delta Community College has campuses in Monroe and West Monroe and offers associate degree and workforce-ready programs.

HEALTH CARE

The twin cities are served by three hospitals more than 2,100 licensed beds. Two long-term acute care facilities are also located in the area.

CITY STATS		2011
City Population	Monroe	49,021
	West Monroe	13,099
Metropolitan Statistical Area Population		177,651
Per Capita Personal Income, Monroe, MSA		$33,846

Photograph courtesy of Austin Bantel, Monroe-West Monroe Convention and Visitors Bureau.