

### **About the Program**

Emmy Award winning journalist and filmmaker Bill Rodman details nature photographer CC Lockwood's return to America's largest swamp wilderness, thirty years after his acclaimed Atchafalaya Swamp book and National Geographic article. Surprisingly, Lockwood finds the Swamp's most interesting and threatened species has since vanished. The story Rodman weaves explores the degree to which the Atchafalaya Swamp has changed – naturally and culturally – since the great flood of 1927, while revealing one of America's last and most intriguing frontier communities.

Atchafalaya Swamp Revisited (26:40) is a co-production of The Bill Rodman Production Shoppe ([www.billrodman.com](http://www.billrodman.com)) and Louisiana Public Broadcasting. The program was funded by the Atchafalaya Trace Commission and Heritage Area and supported, in part, by funds from the Louisiana State Arts Council, the Louisiana Division of the Arts and by the Arts Council of Greater Baton Rouge through the Decentralized Arts Funding Program.





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**BILL RODMAN**

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**LOUISIANA STATE LIBRARY – LOUISIANA COLLECTION**  
**GREG GUIRARD**  
**THE GENE SENECA FAMILY**  
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**Suggested Reading**

**ATCHAFALAYA:  
AMERICA'S LARGEST  
RIVER BASIN SWAMP**

CC Lockwood

**BAYOU CHENE:  
THE LIFE STORY OF AN  
ATCHAFALAYA BASIN  
COMMUNITY**

Ben Maygarden

And

Jill-Karen Yakubik

**CAJUN FAMILIES  
OF THE  
ATCHAFALAYA**

Greg Guirard

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**Bill Rodman**  
**Writer, Producer, Director of Photography and Editor**  
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The Producer and Director of *Atchafalaya Swamp Revisited* is Bill Rodman; a Baton Rouge based independent producer/filmmaker. Rodman is a two-time Suncoast Emmy Award winner with thirteen years of Broadcast experience. Ten of those years were spent in the News Department of WAFB-TV, the Baton Rouge, LA. CBS affiliate. During that time Rodman became best known for reporting feature stories depicting the life and culture of Louisiana. Along the way, he became a regular contributor to CBS News This Morning and CBS News Sunday Morning in New York, as well as the Cable News Network (CNN) in Atlanta. In addition, Rodman traveled the state and world as a one-man Special Projects Producer, Writer, Director of Photography and Editor on the 10 documentaries listed below.

- (1) **“Louisiana Naturally”** (1995)
- (2) **“Louisiana Naturally”** (1996)
- (3) **“Louisiana Naturally: Land of Water”** (1996)
- (4) **“Louisiana Naturally: By Louisiana Hands”** (1996)
- (5) **“Louisiana Naturally: Manchac Swamp”** (1997)
- (6) **“Medjugorje: Journey of Hope”** (Bosnia Herzegovina 1997)
- (7) **“China: In Search of a Cure”** (Mainland China and Hong Kong 1998)
- (8) **“Iberville: After the Red Stick”** (1999)
- (9) **“Caribbean Carnival”** (Port of Spain, Trinidad, West Indies 2000)
- (10) **“Antarctica: Science on Ice”** (New Zealand/McMurdo Station, Antarctica)

2000/2001) Distributed Internationally by Teleproductions International, Ltd.



## **C.C. Lockwood**

### **Wildlife Photographer, Writer, Naturalist and Lecturer**

[www.cclockwood.com](http://www.cclockwood.com)

Throughout his career, C.C. Lockwood has established himself as one of the nation's outstanding nature and wildlife photographers and as the premier Chronicler of the natural wonders of Louisiana and the Gulf Region including the Yucatan peninsula. He is also the recipient of the Sierra Club's Ansel Adams award for outstanding conservation photography. Besides his ongoing work above Cajun Louisiana, C.C. is working on a book about dogs and another on alligators. Lockwood's photographs are held in many personal, museum and corporate collections. Most recently C.C. was honored as a La Legend at the La Public Broadcasting annual event.

#### **BOOKS**

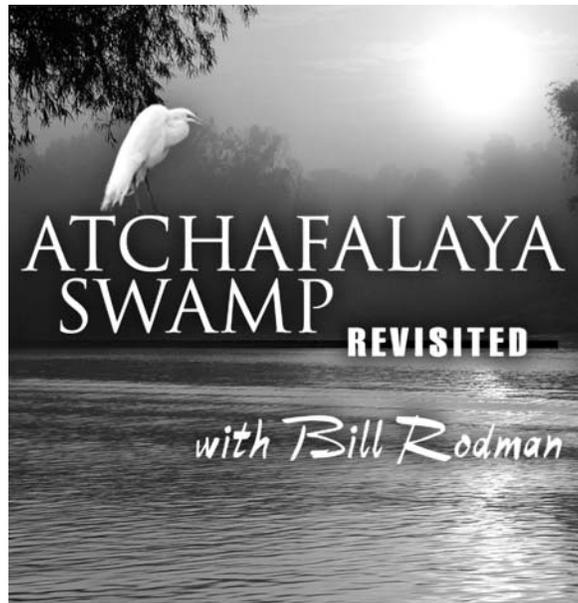
- Atchafalaya, America's Largest River Basin Swamp, includes 137 color photographs and text by Lockwood, 1981
- The Gulf Coast: Where Land Meets Sea, includes 160 color photographs and text by Lockwood, LSU Press, 1984
- Discovering Louisiana, includes 155 color photographs and text by Lockwood, LSU Press, 1986
- The Yucatán Peninsula, includes 142 color photographs and text by Lockwood, LSU Press, 1989
- C.C. Lockwood's Louisiana Nature Guide, includes 246 color photographs and text by Lockwood, LSU Press, 1995
- Beneath the Rim: A Photographic Journey Through the Grand Canyon, includes 137 color photographs and text by Lockwood, LSU Press, 1996
- Around the Bend, A Mississippi River Adventure, includes 158 color photographs and text by Lockwood, LSU Press, 1998
- Still Waters, Images, 1971-1999, includes 100 color photographs and text by Lockwood, LSU Press, 2000

#### **PUBLICATIONS**

- National Geographic – September 1979, "Atchafalaya"
- National Geographic – June 1980, "Neshoba County Fair"
- National Geographic – August 1983, "Mississippi Delta"
- Smithsonian – April 1998, "The Yucatán's Flooded Basement"
- Work published in thousands of magazines, books, advertisements, CD-roms and other media

#### **LECTURES**

- National, state, and local conventions, seminars, workshops and conferences relating to wildlife, photography and environmental issues.



## Transcript

### **Shimmering reflection in water... Music fades under**

**CC Lockwood** (Paddling canoe)

*"I had always liked wildlife... I had always liked the outdoors... But I was used to mountains and clear water and streams like that... I had been in the Rockies chasing big horn sheep for about two years when my stock photo agent asked me if I had some pictures of Bayou Pigeon... And he figured since I lived here I would have it... Well, I had never been in the Atchafalaya except crossing it on Highway 190... So I called him and said I'd go shoot it and he said the deadline's tomorrow so you wouldn't have time to develop your film... Well, I decided to go anyway. So I drove around the entire Atchafalaya on the levee... Took me three days... And I said, **WOW**, I got to get out in a boat and get out there! So I got in my canoe, started paddling around and it was just like a wilderness paradise."*

*"Those are some of the most peaceful and memorable days of my life..."*

### **Open music up full and fade in title graphic**

*"Hello I'm Bill Rodman... It's been thirty years since nature photographer and author CC Lockwood first set foot in Louisiana's Atchafalaya Swamp... America's largest swamp wilderness..."*

His work introduced much of Louisiana and the world to the profound natural beauty and diversity and the mystery and intrigue of a dynamic natural wonder... And his present day perspective is an interesting one...

### **CC Lockwood**

*"The change in nature is changing faster than the Grand Canyon or Sonoran Desert... You know, I could foresee those changes in nature better than I could in the people..."*

CC Lockwood was eyewitness to the last of an endangered Atchafalaya species that has since altogether vanished...

From here we explore how, ironically, the very forces of nature that first attracted people to live in the Atchafalaya wilderness ultimately forced out the great swamp's most unique inhabitants... And, perhaps most importantly, what this change bodes for the Atchafalaya Swamp's future..."

### **MAP**

Situated in South Central Louisiana, between the metropolitan areas of Lafayette and Baton Rouge, the lifeline of the six hundred thousand acre Atchafalaya Swamp is the Atchafalaya River... The second largest river in America in terms of water volume, the Atchafalaya - a main tributary or flood valve for the Mississippi River - empties into the Gulf of Mexico, accounting for thirty percent of the bigger river's annual flow...

Leveed in the 1930's for flood control by the Army Corps of Engineers, the Atchafalaya Swamp is essentially a wet and wild eighteen-mile wide, ninety-mile long emergency spillway for the Lower Mississippi River. Since the creation of levees, the swamp's water level can rise and fall eight to ten feet in a typical year, a seasonal cycle responsible for cultivating twenty three million pounds of crawfish - a Louisiana delicacy - annually, and one of the largest fish crops in the United States... These combined forces - of nature and man - contribute to making the Atchafalaya Swamp one of the most productive and rapidly changing natural environments in the world...

### **CC Lockwood**

*"I basically spent about 8 years out here... And I'd estimate about 100 days, at least, camped out in the swamp for that time..."*

While living in and photographing Louisiana's quintessential swamp - this native of Arkansas turned out a high profile National Geographic article and a critically acclaimed book about the Atchafalaya, a name that stems from the Choctaw Indian word **hacha falaia** - meaning long river...

### **CC Lockwood**

*"I mean it's a magical word first of all, and everybody just wondered what was out there..."*

...From the beginning, his work began drawing attention, in cities - like Baton Rouge, Lockwood's home - just eighteen miles away...

### **CC Lockwood**

*"They were afraid of swamps... Then they started seeing this cute little raccoon, an egret with her breeding plumage... Wow, that's neat! ...Downtown business men would come up and say, wow, I didn't know that was out here? I've crossed that bridge... But god, it's beautiful!"*

Yet, outside Louisiana, most folks still have never heard of it... The Atchafalaya Basin – a six-hundred thousand acre maze of hard wood swamps, back-water lakes and winding bayous in the heart of Louisiana's Cajun country – remains a watery and Spanish moss draped enigma, that somehow has managed to elude national and international recognition...

One contributing factor is that the Atchafalaya knows **no roads**... The only way in or out of the Swamp is by paddle, motor or airboat...

### **Natural Sound/Air-boat**

#### **CC Lockwood**

*"You know, it's been a long time, but I get the feeling it's right over here a couple hundred yards..."*

Above all else, CC Lockwood was lured to the Atchafalaya by its wildlife... The swamp supports fifty percent of America's migratory waterfowl and is home to two hundred species of birds...

#### **CC Lockwood**

*"I spent 38 days in that blind and one night..."*

From there, most memorably, CC Lockwood took pictures... But what Lockwood remembers most about his prized perch in this vast egret rookery is that it was all **a lake**...

#### **CC Lockwood**

*"And that's some of the biggest changes I've seen in the last twenty-five years... Is that land that was once lakes is now forest... And, of course, in the spring it's pretty wet throughout the Atchafalaya... But in the fall, lakes that were once there in the fall are no longer there..."*

#### **Calvin Voisin**

*"I don't know anybody that's full-time anymore..."*

Fifty-five year old Calvin Voisin w-a-s a full-time swamper...

#### **Calvin Voisin**

*"I just wanted to live out here awhile, and I had the opportunity to do it..."*

The mainstays of his subsistent lifestyle were commercial fishing and trapping, over a period of six years in the 1970's... Since then, like every young resident swamper of his time, Voisin was lured out of a full-time Atchafalaya existence by economic opportunities outside...

**Calvin Voisin**

*"I was getting into working construction and it was too hard to work out here... You just couldn't make any money – year round – out here, you know..."*

A favorite ritual was a visit to the Atchafalaya home of fellow swamper Alcide Verrett... A man who knew, or cared to know, no other life...

**Calvin Voisin**

*"Well, everybody just liked Cide... And he never met a stranger."*

**CC Lockwood** (Imitating Verret)

*"You all come on up here! Have a cup of coffee... You hungry?"*

**Calvin Voisin**

*"You could stop here on a Sunday morning, it was like going to Piccadilly."*

**CC Lockwood**

*"Always a lot of deserts... Potato Salad, rice, biscuits... Always something and plenty! ...You couldn't pass her in daylight hours with out somebody being up visiting."*

**CC Lockwood**

*"Looks kind of cleaned out now... We got a canopy over it... Last time I had to blaze through the briars..."*

**CC Lockwood**

*"What I remember most about Alcide was that energy... The love of people... He could go on and on talking, cooking, making coffee for people... And when it was time to go to work, he worked hard... And I knew him in his seventies... And he could go through that swamp with all his hunting and fishing paraphernalia a lot faster than I could go through with my cameras."*

**CC Lockwood**

*"This could be the last time I could walk in here..."*

**CC Lockwood**

*"It would be hard for somebody who's had any taste of civilization to come out here and change and do it the way they used to... It's plain hard work! He made his own paddles, his own nets... Alcide lived a heck of a life... And it feels good to me to see it just as it was... I mean his dishes are in there – everything. There might've been a little pilfering of an iron pot or something... Basically it's just like Alcide lived there and it's neat to me to see I go back to nature."*

When Alcide Verret died in 1998 he was ninety-nine years old... Aside from his last few years spent with a brother in the city of Plaquemine, Louisiana, Verrett was the last **MAN** to have been born, raised and live his entire life – in the Atchafalaya Swamp...

No one was more familiar with or attuned to the natural ebb and flow, the giving and taking, of the ever-transforming Atchafalaya Swamp... And the Atchafalaya Alcide Verrett knew in the twilight of life would've seemed a million miles away from his turn-of-the-twentieth century youth...

### **Period music up full... Montage of old Bayou Chene pictures...**

#### **Ben Maygarden**

*"Bayou Chene existed as a community for a hundred years... It was a great Frontier American story, it was unique..."*

Roughly five miles northwest of Verrett's home was once the center of a bustling Atchafalaya Swamp community ...

#### **Ben Maygarden**

*"Bayou Chene was very isolated... I mean there were no roads to it certainly... All transportation into the community - out of the community - inside the community, all that transportation was by boat."*

Along these banks the water-bound community of Bayou Chene, French for Oak Bayou, counted three churches, a freestanding Catholic and Methodist church, along with a floating Baptist church-boat. According to accounts there were three different grocery stores at one time or another as well...

#### **Ben Maygarden**

*"You can ride down Bayou Chene in your fiberglass boat with a powerful motor and not have any idea that there was a community of 500 or 700 people living out there!"*

Ben Maygarden is a historian with Earth Search Inc.; a New Orleans based Cultural Resources Management Company. One of his assignments included writing a book about Bayou Chene...

#### **Ben Maygarden**

*"In this area was the geographic center of Bayou Chene... There was a cemetery on Bayou Jean Louis; the Methodist cemetery was down the bayou a little bit... And the Post Office was here... The School building was in this area..."*

#### **Ben Maygarden**

*"The old Bayou Cheners consistently told me how beautiful it was out there... Unbelievable riches of game, of fish, timber, majestic swamps, natural levees teeming with game... This was really one of the last places – certainly in our part of the United States – that led a sort of frontier existence..."*

To better understand the origins of Bayou Chene, one must understand the rich cultural legacy of the Atchafalaya Swamp... Early-historical records show that the Atchafalaya was viewed – understandably - as a great obstacle...

**Carl Brasseaux**

*“The native American’s by the early 18<sup>th</sup> century had established a system of moving through the swamp...”*

Carl Brasseaux is a professor of History at the University of Louisiana Lafayette... According to one account, Brasseaux says the Chitimacha Indians established landings on either side of the swamp and maintained a ferry system made up of a set number of pirogues or flat-bottomed canoe type boats...

**Carl Brasseaux**

*“To ensure that transportation facilities were available for people who were brave enough or crazy enough, depending on your perspective, to make the trip across the basin...”*

The first customers of European descent, brave enough or crazy enough, were Acadian refugees banished from Nova Scotia...

**Carl Brasseaux**

*“There’s been an intimate relationship between the Acadians and the basin since arrival of the first exiles in the mid 1760’s...”*

Living on the fringes of the great swamp, the Acadians relied heavily upon the abundance of the Atchafalaya’s natural resources to sustain themselves in the early years of settlement...

But the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, efforts to settle the vast interior of the swamp began... Prompted by a growing demand for agricultural land, pioneers including poor Anglo-Americans, free people of color and land speculators with slaves - keen on establishing sugar plantations and mills - made up the first major wave of Atchafalaya settlement...

**Bill Rodman**

*“In 1841, records show at least 16 planters had homesteaded the Bayou Chene area... A census in 1850, the first to officially list residents at Bayou Chene, counted 184 free persons in 41 households...”*

Free people of color accounted for 30 percent of the free population... And twelve slave owners held a total of 93 slaves...

In 1858 a Post Office was established signifying the newly established settlement was big enough and stable enough to be officially recognized.... And so began the Bayou Chene community...

But troubling times were ahead... The Civil War and a disastrous flood in 1865, brought Bayou Chene to its knees... The sugar industry never recovered.

**Ben Maygarden**

*"In the period after the Civil War, you had Bayou Chene with an entirely white population... They were not – for the most part Acadians, they were largely Anglo-Americans..."*

Cypress logging had become the mainstay commercial industry... And by the early part of the twentieth century, Bayou Chene got its first taste of the industrial age with the arrival of motor-powered boats...

**Ben Maygarden**

*"It made fishing easier, it made moss-collecting easier... And in this period of maybe 1907 to the 1927 flood / is what you could call the golden age of life at Bayou Chene and in the Atchafalaya basin..."*

**Ruel Seneca**

*"I still love it out here... It's like home, it's home to me still."*

**Transition from headshot of Ruel Seneca to childhood picture...**

Seventy one year old Ruel Seneca of Plaquemine, Louisiana was, one, of Bayou Chene's last generation... And he still makes the 45-minute boat ride to his fishing camp on the Chene...

**Ruel Seneca**

*"At least once a week, sometimes twice... I'm just starting to clean it... Get out of here HONEY! ...She's scared... She's not used to all these people." (Referring to dog)*

**Ruel Seneca**

*"**WHY DO YOU LIKE COMING OUT HERE?** It's just relaxing, you know... Get away from the big city... This is, actually, my home... I was born and raised out here..."*

But just four short years before Ruel Seneca was born on a houseboat on Bayou Chene... The community was rocked by one of the most devastating natural disasters of the twentieth century...

**Natural Sound and Pictures of 1927 flood..**

**Ben Maygarden**

*"For a number of reasons, the 1927 flood was the beginning of the end of Bayou Chene..."*

**Ruel Seneca**

*"From that time on it started going downhill..."*

The '27 flood was so destructive, throughout the Mississippi valley; the Federal government began to take a much larger role in flood prevention... So began construction of levees around the Atchafalaya Swamp in the early 1930's...

**Ben Maygarden**

*"But the creation of the floodway eventually led to the environmental deterioration of the basin... Every year the basin would flood more and more severely... Larger and larger amounts of Mississippi River sediment would be deposited on the banks of waterways within the Atchafalaya basin..."*

This transformation of the environment began to tear at the very fiber of life at Bayou Chene... Fisherman began to see a reduction in the size and number of fish...

**Ben Maygarden**

*"Surprisingly enough, even though there were so many professional fisherman out there, people didn't eat a lot of fish... They relied heavily on their livestock and foodstuffs that they could raise... Once you had that annual flood, and that annual influx of sediment, it became virtually impossible to pursue any kind of farming out there."*

To make matters worse, the timber industry had also gone into decline. Nearly every great old-growth cypress forest had been logged out... So began a mass exodus from Bayou Chene...

**Ruel Seneca**

*"It was a hard decision, but they had no choice, you know... Everybody was leaving gradually and they had to go sooner or later..."*

**Ben Maygarden**

*"And by the early 1950's, the school was closed, the post office was closed, and really there were no more year-round permanent residents there... Bayou Chene had ceased to exist as a geographical community..."*

Today, sixty-five years after the great flood there is but one visible remnant of the Bayou Chene community...

**Ruel Seneca**

*"This one here... My grandmother died in 1927, and that's the original..."*

A family gravestone, the Senecas have managed – year-by-year - to keep above ground...

**Reul Seneca**

*"We've been trying to keep it up the best we can ever since, you know."*

The rest of old Bayou Chene, including the last of its namesake live oak trees, lies shrouded beneath an estimated twelve to fifteen feet of Atchafalaya River sediment... Its banks and its story now forever obscured by sandy soil loving willow trees...

While most resilient natured Bayou Cheners quickly adapted to new lives in cities and towns outside the leveed Atchafalaya Swamp, a few like Alcide Verrett kindly refused...

Myrtle and Harold Bigler found refuge eight-miles downstream on a high and dry Atchafalaya River bluff...

**Greg Guirard**

*"Myrtle said once, I want to live where there's a river, she said..."*

Author and Photographer Greg Guirard knew the Biglers for over thirty years...

**Montage of pictures of Myrtle and Harold**

**Greg Guirard**

*"You know Myrtle's favorite quotation? Some people think we're crazy to be living here on the river by ourselves... I think people who live in towns are crazy!"*

**Greg Guirard**

*"And her greatest fear, Myrtle's greatest fear, was that she'd be forced to move to town... To live with her nieces or whatever and have to leave this place..."*

When Harold died of cancer in 1990... Myrtle Bigler chose to live the last five years of her life, much the way she always had - without running water and without electricity, alone...

**Greg Guirard**

*"You know, fear of dying was no problem for her... Fortunately, she died right here where she wanted to live and die..."*

It was 1995 when Myrtle Bigler left the Atchafalaya - beside the river she always wanted to live by - she was ninety five years old ... She was also the last full-time resident of the Atchafalaya Swamp...

And so ended a two hundred year old cultural legacy...

**Hazel Ashley Theriot**

*"I'm Hazel Ashley Theriot... And I'm from Bayou Chene, Louisiana... Oh, I'm very proud of it!"*

Or did it? ...The Bayou Chene birthright is still cause to celebrate at the annual Bayou Chene reunion in Morgan City, Louisiana... Here in the eyes of grandchildren and great-grandchildren the story of one of this country's last and most unique frontier communities lives on...

The dynamic relationship between nature and man in the Atchafalaya Swamp continues - to evolve...

Commercial fishermen still work the Atchafalaya's productive waters... Year after year, more and more Sportsmen and eco-tourists discover the bounty and beauty of America's largest swamp wilderness...

The state of Louisiana has also enacted new legislation to further protect the wet and wild nature of the Atchafalaya Swamp... New programs are now in place to promote nature-based, as well as cultural and historic forms of tourism in and around the Atchafalaya Basin.

**Ivor van Heerden, Ph.D., Louisiana State University**

*"That's the newest real estate in the United States..."*

In perhaps the strangest Atchafalaya paradox of all, the river sediment that destroyed a way of life on Bayou Chene is, today, responsible – according to experts – for producing one of the most productive river delta systems in the world...

**Ivor van Heerden, Ph.D., Louisiana State University**

*"The potential exists for Louisiana to gain a whole new parish in the Atchafalaya Bay area..."*

New coastal land, growing seaward at a rate of 100 feet per year...

**CC Lockwood**

*"The best way to save this place is just to let it be... Let the Atchafalaya basin, just let it be, whatever they have to do to keep it from ever being developed... For flood control, for recreation, for wildlife habitat, for clean air, for clean water... It's very valuable to an over crowding world to keep this as a wild place."*