

The Louisiana Supreme Court, created under the Constitution of 1812, was a “circuit riding” court. The Constitution divided the state into two districts of appellate jurisdiction, eastern and western. The Court was directed to hold sessions each year in two locations, designating New Orleans as the seat of the Eastern District and Opelousas for the Western District. The Eastern District consisted of the counties of New Orleans, German Coast, Acadia, Lafourche, Iberville, and Point Coupee. Eastern District sessions were held in New Orleans from November to July. The Western District was composed of the counties of Attakapas, Opelousas, Rapides, Concordia, Natchitoches, and Ouachita, with sessions being held at Opelousas from August to October.

Riding circuit enabled the judges to provide access to justice to the entire state at a time when transportation involved traveling long distances over waterways and marshlands in the midst of inclement weather, floods, and yellow fever outbreaks. With roads being of poor quality or nonexistent, such circumstances proved to be nearly insurmountable for most individuals. Each western district location had its own resident Clerk, and the Legislature annually appropriated \$250 to each Clerk to furnish a room for holding the Court’s sessions.

The Judiciary Act of 1813 gave the Legislature the power to designate the location of court sessions for the Western District every five years. Through various enactments over the years, the Legislature designated Baton Rouge, Monroe, Natchitoches, and Shreveport as locations on the Supreme Court circuit. The minute book for each location reflects which justices were present for the Court’s sessions held at that location; only a quorum was necessary.

The 1894 Legislature passed Act 69, which stated that court sessions would be held in New Orleans from November through June, meaning New Orleans became the single domicile for the Court’s sessions, which were then held at the Cabildo. This ended what must have been a trying logistical juggling act on the part of the Court’s administration to transport and house justices, arrange for courthouse venues, fill dockets, and maintain records at several different locations throughout the year.