1st Constitutional Convention in La. Was Conducted in 1811

By CLAIRE PUNEKY

DONALDSONVILLE, La. — With a constitutional convention in the news and plans of today, thoughts revert to earlier days when Louisiana drafted its first such document and several that followed.

The session that passed Congress by a large majority approving Louisiana to statehood provided that people of the territory would select members of a convention to draw up a state constitution. And Congress called for use of the English language in court proceedings and laws of the new state.

In what is now Ascension Parish and also St. James Parish and then Acadia County, as elsewhere in the about-to-be-state, plans were underway for the convention, and in September, 1811, election of representatives to it took place.

The convention to frame the Constitution met in New Orleans on Nov. 4, 1811, as quoted in the "Louisiana Gazette": Yesterday thirty members of the convention convened in a large room of Mr. Tremolet's Coffee-House, which is fitted for their accommodation."

The convention completed its work in January, 1812, adopting the Constitution Jan. 22. Representing Acadia County were Judge Macel Cantrelle, J. M. Reynaud, Genazi Roussin and Mr. Armand.

Julien Poydras was president of the first constitutional convention and Jean Noel Destrehan, speaker of the House in the Territorial Legislature, who in 1811 had opposed admission of Louisiana to statehood, was one of seven to draw up the Constitution.

The constitution gave the General Assembly 25 representatives and 14 senators, with Ascension getting a representative and St. James a senator. The governor had the duty of visiting the various counties at least every two years, and Ascension was placed in the Second Judicial district.

With adoption of the Constitution by the convention accomplished, two delegates were named to convey it to the nation's capital. They were Eligius Fromentin and A. B. Magruder, and each was allowed $2,000 for expenses on their mission.