A BRIEF HISTORY OF COLFAX, LOUISIANA
By G. C. Smith

It is a paradox that in the Deep South, there should be a parish named after a Yankee president and its seat of government named in honor of his vice president, but such is the case for the parish and its seat of government was organized in the days of Carpet-baggers and U.S. Grant was president and Colfax was vice president at the time. Grant Parish was carved out of Winn and Rapides Parishes in 1869 and Colfax was designated as the parish seat but up until this time it was known as a plantation store and steamboat landing for the W. S. Calhoun plantation consisting of 14,000 acres of excellent river land, 1,000 slaves and hundreds of mules. This plantation consisted of four quarters known as Smithfield, Farenzi, Mirebeau and Meredith, with mills and gins and enormous barns and stables. One of the largest sugar mills in the state was erected at Farenzi, costing $100,000.00 with a bayou running by it that took its name from this mill and is called today Sugar House Bayou from this installation; some of the ruins of this mill remain to this day and can be seen on the Bill Racine farm, one mile east of town, said to be the most northerly sugar plantation in the sugar belt of Louisiana.

The present site of the town of Colfax figures in the early settlement of Louisiana. From the journals of St. Denis, we learn that he visited this site in or near the present location of the town and at this early date it was probably an Indian trading post which St. Denis called the Bluff of the Cross, probably because of the cross displayed by the early padres who worked among the Indians of that day. This was in 1707, so the history of Colfax dates back to days prior to the founding of Natchitoches, generally conceded to be the oldest town in the Louisiana Purchase, 1714, seven years later, than the above visit of St. Denis, who has been referred to as the Patron Saint of Red River Valley, so valiantly did he strive for its settlement and development.

During the Civil War, only one important military incident occurred in this region, at Colfax. In April 1864, a detachment of De Polignac's Command, under Captain Bradford, fired on a retreating Federal transport from a masked battery, blowing off the steamboat cap, and scalding to death 130 negroes and one white man. The next day a second transport was captured at the same point, one of the crew killed and the pilot wounded.

On Easter Sunday, April 13, 1873, a bloody event occurred, known as the Colfax Riot, in which 150 negroes and three white men lost their lives, resulting from partisan clashes of the Reconstruction Period of the Civil War. This event proved to be a crucial event for the entire South, as it brought forcibly to the attention of the nation the rank abuses that had been perpetrated on the South in the days just after the Civil War.
During the Post-Civil-War era, Colfax was devoted to the industry of growing and shipping cotton, principally on fifth thousand acres of Red River alluvial land above and below the trading point and was served by steamboats on Red River when the water was deep enough for navigation and by ox-team to Pineville and back during low water stages on the river, but in 1900 the L R & N Railroad was built into Colfax and after that a large sawmill was put up at Colfax to cut the immense stands of virgin stands of pine timber that covered the hill lands to the East and the North of the town. For a period of forty years or more the town underwent changes to accommodate the saw mill interests that had penetrated the region with its hundreds and thousands of work hands needed in the lumbering industries that had come about as a result of the coming of the railroad which enabled timber interest to market their holdings.

With the cut-out of timber, the town of Colfax once more returns to the cotton growing interests which revised after the set back of the boll weevil that came in 1909 and has remained the leading industry since although cattle appear to be taking the lead of cotton in quite recent years due to the restriction of cotton acreage under late farm programs instituted by the government. For reasons as stated above Colfax has always been the chief town in Grant Parish and is the largest and most prosperous town in the parish of Grant, today.

It is interesting to note that if Colfax had not changed its name at various times, it would today be called Crossbluff instead of Colfax if anglicised or Croixscore if it had retained its French designation.

Grant Parish was one of the "Reconstruction" parishes of Northwest Louisiana. It was created out of the southern part of Winn Parish and the northern part of Rapides Parish.

The formation of Grant Parish was born in the minds of some of the last and most loyal citizens Louisiana ever had. In the year 1869, C. C. Dunn, J. V. McCain, Phillip Burnstein, M. Haze, David Hardy and S. M. McCracken of Montgomery, then in Winn Parish, and James Hadnot of York Parish, 1st Smith and others of prominence in the Rapides Parish area, conceived the idea of forming a new parish out of the north portion of Rapides Parish, the south of Winn Parish and the west portion of Catahoula Parish. Hernando De Stolle, born in Cadiz, Estremadura, in Spain in 1501 died and was buried in the Mississippi River May 31, 1542 and according to the chronicles of the time of Hernando de Stolle making a southern expedition in 1542 is the first European to cross the Mississippi River. Stolle died in the Mississippi river May 31, 1542 and according to the chronicles of the time of Hernando de Stolle making a southern expedition in 1542 is the first European to cross the Mississippi River.