Acadia Carved Out of St. Landry

The St. Landry Parish courthouse was destroyed by fire during the early morning hours of March 22, 1866. While Opelousas citizens slept the two-story brick structure was gutted by flames. The court records and some books in Sheriff Dunson’s office were saved; the tax rolls, all papers in the tax collector’s office and some valuable papers in the sheriff’s office were destroyed.

The fire was believed to have been the work of an incendiary. Since no clues had been tampered with, the suspected motive was destruction of the records. Damage was estimated at between $30,000 and $50,000.

The courthouse fire set off fireworks in opposite directions from Opelousas. Almost before the embers cooled two movements were launched: the people of Rayne began a campaign to divide St. Landry and create a new parish, and the people of Washington initiated a movement to divide St. Landry's Barousse.

Clerk of Court
Martin Venable
Registrar of Voters
Cumey P. Haure
Civil Defense Coordinator

Parish Officials Commemorating Acadia Centennial

As Acadia Parish celebrates its 100th Anniversary, parish officials in addition to the Police Jury are presently serving on this commemorative date, Oct. 11, 1981, are pictured here.

Kenneth Gonz
Acadia Sheriff

Dr. Mark Dawson
Acadia Parish Coroner

J. Andrus Barousse
Clerk of Court

Russell Beneit
Parish Assessor

Martin Venable
Registrar of Voters

Curney P. Haure
Civil Defense Coordinator

We have no doubt of it. The slight increase in taxes which might result from such a course would be more than offset by the increase in value of all real estate within the parish. This increase in value would be spent by our people at the parish thorough their numerous visits throughout the year amount to quite a tax. Opelousas is 36 miles from Rayne, 40 miles from Breaux Bridge, and 15 miles from Leesville. The fire was believed to have been the work of an incendiary. Since no clues had been tampered with, the suspected motive was destruction of the records. Damage was estimated at between $30,000 and $50,000.

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Movement Began With Fire At Courthouse In Opelousas

The Rayne Signal reprinted the Courrier editorial, also a rebuttal which appeared in the Washington Argus. The divisionists were victorious; on May 18, 1886, St. Landry Representative J.C. Lyons "Continued on Page 24.

Jury Has Impressive List Of Presidents

As Saturday, October 11, is observed as the 100th anniversary of the creation of Acadia Parish, leaders in the fine progress of the past century made up a "Roll Call of Honor." While it is impossible to even begin naming these Acadia pioneers, those deserving special recognition for organization and operation of the new Parish, the people of Rayne and southwestern St. Landry, are hereby respectfully urged to introduce as early as possible after the assembly of the next Legislature, and to secure a successful termination, an enabling act, granting to the people of Acadia Parish, the right to create a new parish to be taken out of the southwestern portion of said parish, and to be confined strictly within the present existing boundaries of the parish of St. Landry. 

Mr. Lewis's speech was received with great applause. The vote when ordered was restored, the following resolution was offered by Mr. James Webb:

"That, whereas, at a mass-meeting of the people of southwestern St. Landry, held at Rayne, September 29, 1886, the Hon. E.T. Lewis, candidate for the State Senate, having been called upon to express his sentiments, for or against a bill to be introduced in the General Assembly for a division of the parish of St. Landry; and he having pledged himself to support a bill to that effect, therefore be it resolved: that this mass-meeting endorses the nomination of the Hon. E.T. Lewis for the State Senate, and pledges him our hearty support in the coming campaign.

The resolution was adopted with great enthusiasm, the applause seeming to express the belief that the people felt at knowing that they could give their earnest support to the regular nominees, and one whom they greatly admired.

After repeated calls Sheriff Dunson stepped to the front and spoke quite earnestly on the question of favor of division, and said that although he wished to speak with his friends in Southwestern St. Landry, he was like the girl, when asked, said "yes." He stated that the property owners of Opelousas would most certainly vote on a proposition to impose a tax of two and a half cents on their property for the purpose of raising a fund to assist in rebuilding the courthouse. He concluded by reading a letter from our esteemed friend and honored district judge, the Hon. G.W. Hudspeth, who offered to pledge himself in writing to support us in our efforts for an early division of the parish.

Sheriff Dunson, the Courier said, had given "a sound and practical speech on the subject, which had a strong weight with the people who had known him from childhood." At this time the 48-year-old sheriff was at the height of his popularity in St. Landry Parish. He had been sheriff for 12 years, and had been virtually drafted for the office two years earlier. He had some amiable qualities with Rayne; his only brother was in the real estate business in Rayne, his brother-in-law, R.T. Clark, was a member of the Rayne Town Council, and Sheriff himself owned land in the proposed new parish.

The pros and cons of parish division were debated through the columns of the four parish newspapers, the Opelousas Courier and the St. Landry Democrat, the Rayne Signal and the Washington Argus.

M.H. "Mr. Mike" Scanlan- Longest record as Police Jury President from June 1929 to December, 1960, with additional long-time recognition as District Attorney, President of the Louisiana Police Jury Association.

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As Acadia observes the Centennial year of its creation, residents of this energetic and progressive Parish can be justly proud of the Parish and municipal officials who are playing such an important role for Acadia and its towns and cities, with particular commendation for the Mayors and commissioners for the incorporated Acadia Municipalities.

For "Posterity," the seven Mayors are included in this Centennial salute. They include:

Robert L. Irete
Crowley

Ralph Sultes
Rayne

Ernie P. Broussard
Estherwood

Ernest Gautreaux
Mermentau

Harold Beaugh
Church Point

Euna Rasberry
Isla

Shirley Abshire
Morse

of Plaquemine Brulee introduced a bill in the house entitled "An act to create the parish of Nicholls, and to provide for the organization thereof." Referred to the committee on parochial affairs, the bill came back with the title changed to read: "An act to create the parish of Acadia.

The change of name for the proposed parish was plainly a matter of political expediency. Samuel D. McEnery was governor of Louisiana, his opponent in the forthcoming election was former governor Francis T. Nicholls. Governor McEnery and Sheriff Duson were staunch political allies; in fact, the sheriff was later to be declared McEnery's lieutenant governor in St. Landry and Acadia. Governor McEnery himself may have suggested the change of names for the proposed new parish, or it could have been engineered by the sheriff out of deference to the chief executive.

Be that as it may, the name "Acadia" was substituted for the name "Nicholls" for the new parish. Father Joseph Antoinein, first pastor of the church at Rayne, is credited with suggesting the name, Acadia Parish.

One such step was reported in the Rayne Signal of September 11, 1886. This was the completion of a bridge over Bayou Plaquemine Brulee, the construction of which was directed by a three-man committee. James Webb, L.V. Frenaux and W.W. Duson. The bridge, identified in the newspaper as the "Duson Bridge," was 22 feet high from the bottom of the bayou. The span, costing $1,000, was designed by Webb and Frenaux; more than 30,000 feet of lumber and 3,000 pounds of iron were used in the construction. The location of the bridge was given as follows: "The bridge crosses the bayou at the old railroad grade, and piers which may be observed where it is seen can be worked out by simply following the old road down to the bayou." A barbecue, to celebrate the completion of the bridge, was held September 30, 1886, the public was invited to attend the barbecue, especially "the residents of Pointe-aux-Loups, Mamou, and Prairie Hayes."

This new bridge, the newspapers said, would greatly facilitate travel between Rayne and a large section of country on the other side of the bayou. The bridge, which later came to be known as Long Bridge, was the first step towards the founding of the new town of Crowley.

About 400 persons attended the dedication of the new bridge. "We are now fully convinced of the importance of the enterprise and feel deeply rewarded for the time and money spent in it," the Signal editor stated. Those from Rayne who attended the gala event included B.H. Harmon, A.S. Chappuis, J.D. Bertrand, M. Arnaud, R.T. Clark, R. Brie, Dr. Webb, Dr. Mouton, Dr. Lussard, Thomas Bowden and their families; from Opelousas were C.W. Durey, Laurent Dupuis, Sheriff Duson, James O. Chatchet. The Pointe-aux-Loups delegation included "Zavie" Cart, Melon Doucet, John Regan, M. Pousson and Sauvin Cart. The occasion was also used to promote the campaign for parish division, also a former New Iberia residence, who had located in Prairie Hayes, Capt. John T. White. The Pointe-aux-Loups guests assured that the bridge would be of untold value to them and their people, "the affair ended with the trait that Duson's bridge will prove a blessing to the whole country."


The October 6 election resulted in 2,056 votes for the proposition and 1,523 against, a majority of 533 for parish division. Acadia, the 59th Louisiana parish, was created by the will of the people. Election returns from precincts within the new parish were:

Mermentau, 109 for, 6 against; German Settlement, 1 for, 31 against; Prudhomme City, 28 for, 96 against; Pointe-aux-Loups, 64 for, 34 against; Plaquemine Brulee, 124 for, 9 against; Church Point, 28 for, 22 against; Rayne, 66 for, 1 against.

Both Opelousas and Washington made good their promises to Rayne. The Opelousas vote was 967 for, 110 against; at Washington, 227 for, 29 against. Main opposition to division was at Church Point and at precincts in the north and northwest areas of St. Landry.

After the vote was officially proclaimed Governor McEnery proclaimed the parish of Acadia officially created as of October 6, 1886.

St. Landry Parish had lost an estimated one fourth of its population. The population of the new parish of Acadia was said to be from 10,000 to 12,000; the population of St. Landry Parish in 1880 was 60,000; Acadia Parish population in 1880 was 13,231.

Early in November Governor McEnery appointed five parish citizens as members of the first police jury. Appointed were Dr. B.E. Clark of Pointe-aux-Loups, Homer Barousse of Church Point, B.H. Harmon, Rayne; Paul E. Fremaux, Mermentau, and Melon Doucet, Pointe-aux-Loups. D.B. Lyons was appointed parish assessor.

Editor Bradford also advanced the argument that should Prairie Hayes be chosen, buildings necessary for parish government would have to be erected immediately. He pointed out the expense of hauling lumber and labor expenses to the Prairie Hayes site.

Continued on Page 4C.
On the other hand, Rayne already had two good halls which could be rented; quarters for prisoners could be rented at the Lafayetle jail. All that need be built was a fireproof record office, which could be erected 25% cheaper at Rayne than at Prairie Hayes.

The date for the election to determine the parish seat was set by Governor McEnery for Tuesday, January 25, 1887, from 7 a.m. until 6 p.m.

Meanwhile candidates for the various parish offices had announced. The Sentinel right off endorsed Homer Daigle for sheriff, Thomas Bowden for clerk of court and Dr. R.C. Webb for coroner. Other candidates were H.T. Clark and Charles A. Perrodin for clerk of court, Dr. J.A. McMillan for coroner and E.W. Lyon for sheriff. Perrodin later withdrew from the race. The Rayne Sentinel came out for Lyons for sheriff.

The Acadian Parish Police Jury held its first meeting November 11, 1886 at Rayne. B.E. Clark was unanimously voted president of the body, and A.S. Chappuis as first clerk. The jury laid out five wards, and set up polling places as follows: Ward 1, Rayne Town Hall; Ward 2, Plaquemine Store; Ward 3, J. W. Crouchet; Ward 4, S. Carls store; Ward 5, E.C. Frenaux store.

In the interim, while Rayne and Prairie Hayes were haggling over the courthouse site, the new town Parkersonville was given the name of Rayne, made first mention of the new town Parkersonville. In November, made first mention of the new town Parkersonville. In November, made first mention of the new town Parkersonville. In November, made first mention of the new town Parkersonville. In November, made first mention of the new town Parkersonville. In November, made first mention of the new town Parkersonville. In November, made first mention of the new town Parkersonville. In November, made first mention of the new town Parkersonville.