Alexandria, a flourishing city of about 45,000 population and a retail trading area of 355,000 people, is belted all around with busy factories of nearly every description.

If Rip Van Winkle were to awaken in Alexandria, he'd rub his eyes and ask, "Where did it all come from?" That would be a valid question. Most of the plants were projected day before yesterday, so to speak, and built next morning.

For example, in 1950 a group of imaginative Alexandrians boasted, "Just give us one really impressive smokestack, and we'll be on our way!" There must have been a genie in the water decanter, because now Alexandria has more than 25 industrial smokestacks. Take the elevator up to the top floor of the Guaranty Bank and Trust Company in downtown Alexandria and count them. They're all going strong, puffing away like busy steamboats shoving up the Red River!

And the genie included all the benefits that go with booming industry: new schools and improved old ones, shopping centers in surrounding fields where purebred cattle had recently grazed, two huge modern convention centers, a new city hall, police station, three new libraries—and jobs for countless workers.

"I think it's the ideal town," says taxi driver H. L. Manning of 2613 Wives. "People are active. A man can make a living here."

But really this progress is not a magic phenomenon; an abundance of natural resources is found nearby. The city spreads out across a plain in the center of extensive forests. Although millions of feet of timber have been cut, enough trees have been replanted to be the source of wealth for years to come. In fact, these are some of the most extensive longleaf pine stands in the United States. It's not surprising that more than 21 factories in Alexandria manufacture products that require wood.
'Just Give Us One Smokestack'

This bell tower and chapel will be part of a Catholic school. The Alexandria-Pineville school system has an excellent reputation.

But south of Alexandria lies a rich delta—some of the greatest cotton soil in the world. Alexandria's marketers get top dollars for steaks, hams, cotton, fruit and vegetables.

"This combination of natural resources, manufacturers and excellent facilities for distribution have made Alexandria a retail center for Central Louisiana. Five major railroads have lines running to her. Motor freight companies have eight local terminals. Buses arrive 26 times a day. Commercial airlines fly 15 flights daily out of her supermodern Esler Field.

By 1970, Army Engineers hope to have control of the Red River—now almost useless, but potentially of great value for low-cost, bulk transportation—with locks at 50-mile intervals to create a navigable channel from the Mississippi to above Shreveport. When that project is completed, the river, now an oxblood red and unfit for recreation, will be clear—ideal for swimming, boating and fishing.

But just because Alexandria seems to have nearly everything she needs doesn't mean she's not hustling to provide for what she's going to need in a few years.

"Although Alexandria has enough water right now," says Mayor George Bolton Jr. "we want to be able to supply our new factories, such as the $60 million paper mill building just across the river. That mill will employ up to 50 persons and create over 1,000 related jobs—raising Rapides Parish employment to over 51,000 people!"

Citizens voted in favor of the farsighted water plant improvement, and now, with federal funds financing half the cost, Alexandria will have more than enough water for her new industries and expanding population.

Her booming industrial expansion created a need for high quality schools and colleges. "Although some of the best high schools in the nation are right here in Alexandria," says Bolton High School Principal W. E. Pate, "the Rapides Parish School Board has built a new school either here or across the river in Pineville every five years since 1950—when 1,600 students were crammed into one small building. Since then, we've had a student-teacher ratio of 25:1. When the National Council of Teachers set out to determine what high schools did the best job of teaching English, they selected an Alexandria high school—one of 100 throughout the nation!"

"We see to it that our teachers have time to teach, time to create in our students a genuine respect for learning," continued Principal Pate. "And 98 per cent of our kids are just as fine and idealistic as they can be. If we turned the world over to them today, they'd solve our problems for us. We've created a good atmosphere for education!"

Rapides Parish citizens have cooperated with their school board whenever a new facility was needed.

Alexandria has built new libraries and keyed up the quality of her trade schools. Principal Pate, an alumus of LSU graduate school and principal since 1938, says about occupational training, "Although 75 per cent of our students go on to college, vocational pupils can spend half a school day in business and go right into gainful occupations as soon as they graduate."

Bridge over Red River at Pineville, locale of new mill.
To guarantee low-cost, high quality colleges and universities for the city's fast-growing young population, the Louisiana Legislature established LSU-A within commuting distance of Alexandria. Enrollment exceeds 800.

Also in Alexandria is Louisiana College, the state's oldest college operated by the Baptist State Convention; it offers 14 areas of study for a Bachelor of Arts degree. Enrollment is over 1,200.

A great number of medical men with large staffs of nursing and technical people have created a modern medical center in Alexandria. The staffs of seven hospitals, six specialized medical institutions, 14 clinics and 11 nursing homes spend as much as $13 million in the area—and new medical facilities are under construction.

"This town suits me," says painting contractor Bill Seldy. "My two girls are going to high school here, and soon they'll go on to LSU-A or Louisiana College. Here in Alex, I feel I can do something for my children."

Alexandria has an auspicious origin. As a trading center at the end of the Texas cattle trail before railroads pushed west of the Mississippi River, and as a lively steamboat port in the center of a cotton paradise, the city was bound to prosper. Alexander Fulton planned the city in 1810 and named it for his daughter.

But during the Civil War, Alexandria was burned by Union troops and left in wreckage. She wasn't able to thrive again until the World War I—when her forests of pine and hardwood brought dollars to the city. She boomed along.

But after the Armistice, when her forests were cut over, railroads moved their terminals out of the city. Alexandria went into a slump and snoozed—until 1939!

In that year, almost overnight, when the smoke and dust of bulldozers cleared away, Alexandria was surrounded by four Army installations: Camps Beauregard, Livingston, Polk, and Claiborne. In a trice, the sleepy city became a recreational and shopping center for thousands of soldiers.

Now two military installations remain operative in the Alexandria area. England Air Force, headquarters of the 1st Air Commando Wing, employs nearly 500 civilians with an annual civilian payroll in excess of $2.5 million and averages $500,000 of construction annually. Fort Polk at Leesville is a basic training installation, including a "Vietnam" village complete with trip wires, tunnels, sharpened bamboo spikes and pajama-clad defenders who prepare U.S. infantrymen for the type of jungle warfare they will face in South Vietnam.

This time city planners told site-seeking industrialists all over the U.S. what Alex had to offer. And they saw to it they had what industry needs: natural resources, transportation, modern schools and a cooperative and forward-looking citizenry.

With legislative support and sound planning, the outlook for the city in the center of the state is excellent. As young and zealous Nathan Ducat, clerk in a thriving downtown Alexandria hardware store, will tell you, "Although I like to hunt and fish in the surrounding country—it's fun to live in a thriving city!"