Ascension rural heritage lost to rampant development

By JOHN McILLRIN

ONZALES — When Kermit Braud was growing up at Bridge Bend on the east side of the Lake Ponchartrain in the 1950s, Ascension Parish residents bashed in Baton Rouge.

"My grandfather would travel to Baton Rouge about once a year to check his account," said Braud.

"That money was not from selling strawberries. The economy in Ascension Parish was one, and their income was through strawberries," said Braud, now 73 and a retiredandy salesperson.

"We'd stop by to visit, and sometimes the only thing we see was it was a lot for the shipping." Braud said.

Ascension is now one of the most industrialized parishes in Louisiana, but not when Braud was growing up. Agriculture and trapping continued.

That environment influenced youth who were getting a degree in natural science at LSU and later, the nation, a new way of life, and agriculture education.

"There was an absence of industry," Braud joked. "We hadn't any big industries. We didn't have any money.

"An example of that can be seen in the classroom picture taken in 1960 in Ascension Parish only one boy had an orange. The other's insurance because he had to use the money was going to the store to buy that shirt," Braud said.

"The Denton Parish High School football team only had five pairs of shoes. They had to go when some one else didn't wear it," he said.

"All these little boys had in shoes and a shoe. The only thing you had to eat was white bread and sometimes you couldn't make more corn," he said.

While strawberries brought a little money, "the corn crop was the most important thing," Braud said. "You could find your money and the corn make grits, and that way you could make the water.

"All the planting was by hand and our feet. The only thing that bad wheels was the buggy and the buggy we took to church. I remember when there wasn't more of corn than 10 at St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church.

"The women took care of the gardens and riddles the corn. They cut corns gone and believe me you didn't eat it from them. Most of the corns were wild. I can still smell how much of some smelling corns we had.

"When we butchered a hog, we cut everything but the nose. We had a hog be his big red and it had a lot of fat on it. We had a lot of fat on it.

"We cut the meat, Braud said pigs came cooked with the horn much better than cooking of hams. The corn-fed hog provide more flavorless and is in a way to prepare with genteel. When he was a hog, the only thing you could catch them in the plantation and had corn for the remaining and for the remaining.

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