Bayou Chene Is Now Only a Fond Memory

By HOWARD JACOBS

ESPECIALLY meaningful as high water laps at levee tops is “The Bayou Chene Story,” the tale of a small South Louisiana community that ceased to exist after the devastating flood of 1927. The author, Gladys Calhoun Case of New Iberia, has drawn up a jacket blurb that affords an illuminating insight into the dodos of a great river and the profound influence it has exerted on the people who dwell upon its shores.

“The Bayou Chene (Oak) story is a true account of life and times in the Atchafalaya Basin of Louisiana from 1798 through 1927,” notes the jacket summary. “The Basin is little known outside Central Louisiana, where it is formed from the waters of the Atchafalaya River where it flows OUT of the Mississippi — one of the few streams that does not flow INTO it.

“It helps this river carry the heavy volume of flood waters on to the Gulf of Mexico each year during the spring, when these rivers drain over half of the United States. The Basin is about 75 miles long from Simmesport, La., to the Gulf, and some 20 miles wide.

“The people who settled Bayou Chene were not Acadians, as the people who came to the Attakapas country were ..... The early residents came from everywhere ..... and soon formed the small village of Bayou Chene ..... The story tells of their lives through an era of easy living in the sugar plantation days and the great cypress timber operations ..... “Life ran on smoothly, generation after generation, until the 1927 flood that devastated millions of acres of farmland and made homeless numbers of people all along the Mississippi River where the levees broke ..... “Plans were made to control this floodwater through a series of guide levees to the east and west of the Basin. This left Bayou Chene squarely in the middle, and the people were told to move. They did, but they took their memories with them, and each year they have a great reunion of Bayou Chene people.

“Now a deep silence lies over the Basin, broken only by the hum of the dredges that keep the channels open, as decreed by the Flood Act of Congress . . . “