Bayou Lafourche Has Been Scene of Business, Pleasure

Summertime Is Season of Lush Greenness

By CLAIRE PUNEKY

DONALDSONVILLE, La. — There is something about a bayou that captures one's interest and imagination. The mere sight of one is sufficient to ease tensions and produce a sensation of calmness as gentle and still as its own waters.

Bayou Lafourche, meandering from Donaldsonville to the Gulf of Mexico, is no exception. It is indeed an illustration that proves the gentling effect of this narrow waterway on a hurrying human.

Summertime on Bayou Lafourche is particularly a season of lush greenness bordering the banks, of trees and shrubs reaching down to the water’s edge as though the ones on one side are trying to reach out to the make contact with those on the other in an overhead arch.

The bayou is a fun place as well as a place for storing emergency water, or anchoring boats for the businesses of lower Lafourche Parish. It is a place from which the long-time sugar industry along the sides of it and other industries that have come to it can draw a needed water supply.

SCENIC ENTITY

It is a long scenic entity dotted at intervals with vehicular crossings where a motorist can catch a quick view of it in midstream. Once, in its days of frolic with the Mississippi Tiver, its rough playmate taught it to overrun its banks up this way, but controls have ruled such play out in this period of time.

What does the word “bayou” mean? It is a corruption of the French “boyau,” meaning a long, narrow passage. The slender stream that is Bayou Lafourche has been a passage for a long, long time.

At first it provided transportation for Indian tribes settled along its shores. It launched their canoes that took them off to war on other tribes, and it brought to these Indians others who would war on them.

It took the young men of the tribe and the older ones too into other arteries in search of new and better fishing grounds, and it was the guardian of the craft used for the depository of the craft, or anchoring boats in which the long-time sugar industry along the.

NAME DERIVED

It was from the Indians that Bayou Lafourche derived its name. The Chetimaches who lived on the site of Donaldsonville were in possession of the bayou mouth here when explorers first came to this region.

Iberville and Bienville came to Bayou Lafourche and others who followed down its winding course were aware that they were looking on the Mississippi River for the Fork of the Chetimaches. So, it became for them “Lafourche de Chetimaches.” In time only the French word for “fork” remained, the Indians, displaced to another area, forgot. Today it is simply “Lafourche.”

The exiled Acadians made their home here and the bayou welcomed them as it had the Indians. Soon the Acadian culture made itself felt in the area, and other influences began to come in.

Sugar became king in the Lafourche country and the bayou responded by accommodating vessels to transport the precious cargo to markets down the Mississippi in New Orleans.

As the sugar era progressed and the space along the river increased until there seemed to be no more available, the crop that continues to dominate the area scene to this day began its march down Bayou Lafourche.

The magnificent mansions that accompanied the founding of sugar estates found their way down the bayou also and such edifices as “Madewood,” splendid today in Assumption Parish, “Woodlawn,” no longer part of the bayou scene, and others rose to cast their architectural shadows in these waters.

Summertime has always been a great time on this bayou. There was the era when the steamboat had come into its own and permeated the interior of this country down the stream. There were excursions to and from New Orleans and to and from the southernmost tip of the bayou.

There were merry scenes and laughter and music on the wharves of homes along the bayou as a relative departed by boat for a pleasure trip or a legislator and his trunk were taken on board, destination the capital city of the state.

The bayou that laps at the heels of Donaldsonville and says “so long” to the Mississippi River there is always a lovely spot to view, but in summertime its beauty is greater than at any other time of the year.