At the time of the first Cotton Festival back in 1954, 33 years ago, cotton was really “king” of all farm crops in Evangeline Parish and bordering parishes. This was the main crop then.

Now we do not see a stalk of cotton unless some business or some homeowner plants a few stalks to have a little around Cotton Festival time, or for the grandchildren to see.

I doubt if we had ever heard of soy beans and no farmer ever thought he’d be planting them as his main money crop. On the larger farms, rice was one of the money crops. Sweet potatoes were planted on all the little family farms for their own use, and rarely was any sold.

It was some time later that canning factories came in and there was a market for this crop. Now sweet potatoes are one of our best money crops.

In the early years every small farm grew a few acres of cotton as this was the only way a man could get food and clothing for his family. There were no jobs as there were no industries where a man might have gotten a job, so he had to farm or starve. They grew corn, too, for corn meal with which to make their bread, and to furnish feed for his horses, mules and pigs. He did all his farm work with mules or horses. This had to be a “live at home” time so all you needed had to be raised on these little farms.

Tractors were owned by some who had the bigger farms but they were not on these little farms as these one horse farmers could not afford them.

I can remember when our school opening was delayed in order that the children could be at home to pick cotton and help gather the corn. Now they stay home to go squirrel hunting and have no work at home. Times have certainly changed.

I have no idea how many cotton gins were in operation over the parish but I do know that there were two operated and owned by Dr. B.A. Soileau and one by Audley Soileau and Clabert Duos right here in Ville Platte. Out on the Tate Cove road one was run by Albert Tate, Sr.

When you went in to Ville Platte during cotton harvest it was nothing to see loaded wagons and possibly a few old trucks loaded with cotton lined up all the way from the gins along the railroad, all the way to Main Street.

Sometimes these gins had to run all night. This meant some who might get caught in these long lines would have to stay all night and not get away until some time the next day.

Farmers could let the ginner take a part of his seed to pay for the ginning and bagging of his bale. If the seed were cheap, it might take all of them and he’d have to give a few dollars out of his check when he sold the bale.

Most farmers tried to put about 1500 pounds of seed cotton on his wagon in order that his bale would weigh 500 pounds or a little over.

No school child had to be taken anywhere in those days to see a few stalks of cotton as all had cotton growing on the farm where they lived and they were well acquainted with that crop.

Cotton fields loaded with open bolls are a pretty sight to see but we nearly have to leave this parish to see them. Little is grown here now and we do not have one cotton gin in the whole parish.