Crowley: the only town in Acadia Parish that did not develop naturally; the planned, man-made town, the two-months-old upstart of a municipality that had the presumption to bid for, and win, the parish seat.

Crowley was founded by the Duson brothers, C.C. and W.W., with the support and financial backing of a group of Opelousas business professional men.

Cornelius C. Duson, called "Curley" by his friends, was the older of the brothers. A man of dynamic personality, he was one of the most influential political figures in the history of St. Landry Parish. He had high level connections all the way from the Opelousas courthouse to Washington, D.C. He was sheriff of St. Landry Parish for 14 years, from 1874 to 1888; he served a term as state senator and was appointed a United States marshal by President Theodore Roosevelt, a position he held at the time of his death in 1910.

William W. Duson, less flamboyant than the popular sheriff, was a businessman of foresight and imagination. His numerous enterprises included real estate, newspaper publishing, rice farming, milling and irrigation; banking and oil speculation. At one time his holdings totaled more than $1.5 million; financial reverses caused him to end up in relatively modest circumstances.

During the years of parish development he donated land for literally dozens of institutions — churches, cemeteries, schools and parks — in all sections of Acadia.

Crowley was named for Pat Crowley, the contractor who graded the roadbed for the Southern Pacific through Acadia Parish. The railroad company had placed a switch, or spur tract, on property owned by Michael Coleman, and as a courtesy to the contractor had named it the Crowley Switch.

The location of the Crowley Switch just west of land owned by the Dusons made the property desirable as a town site. The Dusons tried to make a deal with Coleman, but he refused to sell or trade. The town builders then persuaded the railroad company to relocate the Crowley Switch on their property on the main line east of the Coleman tract.

The switch played an important role in the development of the new town, which was situated in the middle of a prairie. All of the material that went into the construction of the first buildings was brought in by railroad cars which were switched onto the spur track for unloading.

At the beginning of 1900 Crowley was about to celebrate its 14th birthday. Construction on the first building in the town site had begun January 4, 1887, barely three months after Acadia Parish was established as a separate parish. This date has traditionally been celebrated as the birthday of the town.

While Crowley's early development could hardly be described as booming, nonetheless progress of a steady and substantial nature can be noted.

The greatest growth during the early years was the 1890-1900 decade, when the town gained almost four thousand residents, increasing from 420 in 1890 to 4,414 in 1900.

The period of greatest business development was from 1899 to 1903, when new and better buildings replaced many of the old structures. As new buildings went up on the avenue, the old buildings were moved into the middle of the wide expanse of Parkerson Avenue so that business could go on as usual. In February of 1903, for the first time in three years, the view down the avenue from the depot to the courthouse was unobstructed. The last building to be removed from the street was that of Chris Memtsas, the fruit dealer, whose store had temporarily occupied the intersection of Parkerson and Third Street.

The original area of the town, as laid out by Leon Fremaux, was exactly one square mile lying north from the Southern Pacific tracks to Northern Avenue and between Eastern and Western Avenues. South Crowley, the section south of the railroad tracks, was laid out in 1897.

In 1902 the corporation limits were extended south to Bayou Blanc, and an additional fourth of a mile on the west was taken in.

The first large scale extension of the city began in 1919 when P.L. Lawrence undertook the development of 94 lots. The residential area, situated north and west of the city, is known as the Lawrence Addition.

Crowley's main business district built up from the Southern Pacific depot north to the courthouse along Parkerson Avenue, the extra wide street that bisects the town.

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Second courthouse for Acadia Parish