Vacationing anywhere in the United States other than the attractive rural areas near DeRidder is a thing of the past for the West sisters and their families thanks largely to reliable electric service supplied by Beauregard Electric Cooperative.

Nestled in the pine-shaded hills bordering the 12-acre spring-fed Tarkil Lake, just two and one half miles east of DeRidder on Highway 171, are the resort type cabins of the West sisters - Lucille, Madeleine and Delina.

Although the story of the campsite dates to the 1880 era of covered wagons and grist mills, the actual beginnings of the land as a private resort area for the families of the West sisters did not become evident until 1946. P. W. West, the girls' father, was a man who loved people and decided to build a huge barbecue pit and screened smokehouse on the land to entertain guests, hold reunions and allow organizational meetings.

It was not until 1950 that the West girls made their decision to build three separate camp houses on the lake, one of them connecting to the huge smokehouse by the use of a breezeway. Electricity provided by the Cooperative was already partly a part of the area and the father had provided lights of the barbecue pit and along the shores of the Tarkil Lake framing the property.

Lucille, now Mrs. Bob Nichols of DeRidder and mother of three sons, recalled the hard times prior to the Beauregard Electric placing a line to power a water pump for the camp.

"It was not until the Co-op came to our rescue that we could really enjoy the camp houses," she said, "but now there is no need to go anywhere in the United States to find a more comfortable and completely livable camp or vacation spot."

All three cabins, including those of the other sisters, Mrs. T. L. Baer Sr. and Mrs. Harry Thompson, are fully equipped with electric ranges, air conditioning and/or window coolers, electric water heaters, television, and modern wash unit heaters furnished through the Co-op.

The campsite is situated on a 22-acre plot of land belonging to the West family. Tarkil Lake covers 12 acres of flatland and is a well-stocked "sportsman's paradise" where the sport is swimming, boating, fishing or even water skiing.

The West sisters speak of the 1880s as their grandfather, Mahlon West, as if it were yesterday, telling of the hardships involved in moving to this portion of the country from Newton County, Texas. They recalled that the family, for instance, had to cross the Sabine River to go down before they could complete their trip.

Upon arrival in the "new land", the Wests started what could be described as a "friend" motel for the weary by setting up a grist mill for the traveling farmers in their covered wagons to bring corn for grinding. Often, because of the distance and dangers of covered wagon travel, the West family catered to the travelers by allowing them to sleep and eat prior to moving on down the old Lake Charles highway.

The land fell naturally to P. W. West, the eldest son, who continued the work begun and kept up a country store through the years to further accommodate travelers. It was his livelihood, but he loved a lot of people and a desire for freedom from the "pressures of business enterprise" for a time caused P. W. and his wife, the former Arthene Code, to move off the highway and begin forming what today is the Tarkil Lake and campsite.

The name Tarkil even carries historical significance. Before people were aware of what petroleum actually was, they thought it to be some type of tar and would store it in large vats for use by wagon masters to grease the wheels on the wagons as they traveled from one part of the country to the other. The P. W. West farm had several of these vats, and since the people had decided upon the name "Tarkil" for this newLegend and High School, and the avid fisherman and hunter of the family.

The Thompsons are in the mercantile business at DeRidder and their family includes Mrs. David Baer of San Francisco; Harry Jr. who is manager of the Gibson Store in Jasper, Tex.; and Susie, 15-year-old student at Gulf Park School for Girls in Gulfport, Miss.

The only sister to leave DeRidder on a permanent basis to make a home was Denise West Berry, whose husband owns and manages several West Bros. stores in a seven state area. The Berrys have four children, including T. L. Jr., who manages a mercantile business in Leesville; Dick, manager of the Gibson store in Leesville; and Todd, a 14 year-old student of Leesville High School.

All of the family and many of their friends would agree that the best advice to be found when in DeRidder is "Go WEST, young man... go WEST!"