Donaldsonville History Intertwined with Sugar

Industry Continues to Demand Facelifting

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(The T-P Bayou Lafourche Bureau)

DONALDSVILLE, La. — A 20th century face-lifting of this historic city is under way as industry and the changes it brings move into the Donaldsonville community.

This particular spot, at the meeting place of Bayou Lafourche and the Mississippi River, had its 19th century face-lifting similar, on a smaller scale, to that of today.

The sale of valuable farmland is involved in the coming of 20th century industry to this area. A similar sale is noted back in 1801 when John Maguire sold his farm to William Conway, who developed it into what would today be called a subdivision. This is now St. Patrick st., running the length of the city.

The area land, part of the Acadian Coast, was described as “prosperous” in 1804, and two years later, William Donaldson, of New Orleans, moved in and bought a small plantation from the widow of Pierre Landry.

It was on this land, acquired by Landry in 1775 by Spanish grant, that Donaldsonville came into existence under the guiding hand of William Donaldson.

In 1816, William Darby, publisher of “A Geographical Description of the State of Louisiana”, noted “The thriving town of Donaldsonville” as “The first village on the Mississippi above New Orleans worth notice.”

Today, the Sunshine Bridge, across the Mississippi River has its place in local industrial expansion. In 1817, the people were looking forward to a bridge across Bayou Lafourche, authorized by the state legislature, to aid the business climate.

The sugar industry was booming here in 1827, as Martin’s “History of Louisiana” relates, and planters from Natchez were buying choice land on Bayou Lafourche. There was as much excitement in 1829 over a coming sugar refinery as there is now as modern industry moves in.

The modern industrial boom and a hospital under construction go hand in hand here. In 1847 the upsurge in sugar revenues caused the populace to call for erection of a local hospital.

Transportation needs today for industry and people call for good roads and easy access to super-highways. In 1855, the local need saw incorporation of the Lafourche Railroad.

As industrial scope, centered around sugar planting, expanded, Donaldsonville grew larger. It put down plank walks and other conveniences for the people. The sugar industry had its “spin-off” industries, and stores and other business establishments were on the increase.

What is still today the largest structure here was begun in 1877 by Bernard Lemann, a three-story building to house his mercantile business.