Donaldsonville Past Events Recalled by History Month

Lesser Known Action Is Remembered

By CLAIRE PUNKEY

Donaldsonville, La.

The 28 days of February are set aside, under the designation of "American History Month," to commemorate events of the past. Every corner of this country has historic memories, some looming large and others scaled down to smaller size.

This city at the tip of Bayou Lafourche on the Mississippi River has its remembered moments of past action and some of the lesser known ones are recalled here.

Donaldsonville really came into existence in 1809 and its founder, William Donaldson of New Orleans, died in November, 1811, the year in which his village was incorporated by the state Legislature.

In February, 1812, U.S. troops halted smuggling in Bayou Lafourche. The Viata plantation below Donaldsonville was thought to be the smugglers' operations base.

Gen. James Villere became Louisiana Governor in 1814, and five years later, in 1821 the town of Villere was established opposite Donaldsonville with its entrance on the right bank of Bayou Lafourche. Today Villere is part of Donaldsonville. Under its recent annexation it was called "Port Barrow."

Although this city was named for William Donaldson in 1809, the Post office he obtained for it found the name changed to "Lafourche" in 1809, but pressure over the years restored the original name in 1822.

The Legislature in 1823 authorized a lottery to improve and maintain Bayou Lafourche and named to conduct it were Parish Judges David A. Randall, Carlier D'Ourtheur and Narcisse Landry.

Although Donaldsonville became the state capital in 1839, the Legislature met for the second and last time here in 1831 and passed a bill to move back to New Orleans.

Voters in Ascension Parish had a change of choice over a four-year period in the U.S. Presidential election. In 1828 they gave 197 votes to Henry Clay and 106 to Andrew Jackson. Four years later Jackson got 117 and Clay was down to 17.

The Steamer "Reaper" in the spring of 1833 on its way upriver was stranded near Donaldsonville and immediately saved with the loss of several lives and all the cargo on board. The steamer "Robert Pullen" had an accident above here when the wheel struck a log and the vessel broke a coupling of a shaft.

Sugar planters of Louisiana met in Donaldsonville May 16, 1832, to try to avert the total ruin of the crop involving a $2 million outlay, and sent a petition to Congress outlining the depression in value of the planters' property since passage of the Compromise Act.

Dr. Francois Marie Prevost, eminent physician and surgeon who made history by performing in Donaldsonville the first Caesarean operation in Louisiana and the second in the United States, died May 30, 1849, survived by his widow and a brother.

The year 1853 witnessed a Whig convention in Donaldsonville that nominated the Hon. S. G. Hunt of New Orleans as Whig candidate for the U.S. House of Representatives from the Second Congressional District.

The incorporation of Port Barrow came in January, 1862, by act of the Legislature, providing for a mayor and five aldermen. The following year Port Butler at Port Barrow was completed and was used alternately by federal and Confederate forces.

Donaldsonville was bombarded in the summer of 1862 by Farragut's fleet, and the commander of the U.S. Gunboat Rhatdin protested to his superiors looking by troops going ashore.

"It is disgraceful and humiliating to me to be ordered on board duty of soldiers employed in pilaging ladies' dresses and petticoats, and I respectfully request that I may be relieved from such service," he wrote.

In 1865, the commander of federal forces at Fort Butler, Maj. D. Bullen, was murdered by Union private.

The Phoenix Fire Company No. 1 was organized here Dec. 2, 1873, with H. O. Mahler, who became Ascension Parish sheriff the following year, as its first president. The following year a second local company was formed and called the Ascension Hook and Ladder Fire Company No. 1, with Christian Klene as its president.

A fire on the night of Nov. 30, 1878, destroyed an entire block in this city, and an historic account notes that Charles Oberkampf, the barber, lost a few razors and dental tools.

The name of Attakapas St. was changed by the city council in 1878 to "Nicholls Ave." to honor Francis T. Nicholls, famed native son whose birthplace was on that street.

These are some of the events that transpired in this city's past adding local pages to the ever-expanding volumes of American history.