Donalsonville's News Items of Past Century Are Recalled

Donation of Courthouse, Jail Site Noted

By CLAIRE PUNKEY

DONALSONVILLE, La. — Every year has its big news stories. This has been true in the past as it is in the present, and it holds for the tiny town just as it does for the complex city. Stepping into a past century in Donaldsonville and peering into events at 10-year intervals, the traveler into historic time will note that here too news was made and recorded.

In 1810, the big news here centered around the donation of a courthouse and jailsite, the partitioning of the giant Houma's estate and creation of the office of sheriff by the Territorial Legislature.

William Donaldson, founder of this city, gave the site for the sheriff and jail buildings, a location used to the present day. That year his son and John Wrenn Scott divided up their Houma's land on the Mississippi River. Though the sheriff's office remained in effect.

While Donaldsonville’s News Items of Past Century are recalled, races, concerts, churches and cotton topped the news here in 1840. Donaldsonville had a new race track and jockey club. Two concerts were presented here by artists recorded in the Picayune of that day as "Brough and Madame Otto." Andrew Ginyer donated to the Methodist Episcopal Church a lot for a church, and a new Catholic church was going up at a cost of $19,000. A caterpillar worm destroying the Ascension parish cotton crop was in the headlines.

MAIL IMPORTANT

The mail, an important part of people's lives, was the center of news in 1850, and local people were lobbying for improvement in what was termed inadequate service for many years. The Louisiana Legislature asked Congress for a service between here and New Orleans. Later in the year Victor Maurin was named postmaster.

A native son, Albert Duffel, was elected to the state supreme court in 1860, a year in which war rumors were ripe in conversation and in the printed word. The legislature met in extraordinary session on Dec. 10, and two days later called a convention to discuss secession.

The railroad made headlines in 1870 as the New Orleans, Mobile and Chattanooga Railroad Company asked permission of the town council to traverse certain streets in this city. Elections also held the reader's eye, when the town council adopted a resolution ordering all bars closed on election day until "ballot boxes are regularly removed from the town," as a move "to keep the peace of the said town on the withdrawal of the militia."

Transportation, the telegraph and road-building were newsworthy. A messenger was placed on the New Orleans and Donaldsonville Railroad by the Southern Express Company. This opened up transportation for the local populace in transmitting and receiving goods from elsewhere.

Western Union was getting ready to build a telegraph line to Donaldsonville, and the police jury was seeking rights-of-way for roads.

In 1890, new sidewalks got quite a bit of publicity when the Donaldsonville Town Council ordered construction of brick sidewalks on Nicholls Avenue and Iberville streets.

Dedication of a park made big headlines. The park, comprising Mississippi river bottom lots below the steamboat wharf, was dedicated by the town council to the memory of a former mayor, W.C. Lawes, and named "Lawes Park."

These were some of the local events that made the headlines in the past century. Then came the 20th century and its headlines, so different from those of its predecessor.

HOUMAS IN NEWS

The Houmas was again in the news in 1820, with famed American Revolutionary General Wade Hampton selling a third interest in the Ascension-Iberville boundary line by the Legislature.

Heirs of Walker Gilbert received authority from the Legislature to build a toll-bridge across Bayou Lafourche here and had a year to do it, otherwise the project would be taken over by the Ascension police jury.

The news was mighty big in 1830, the year Donaldsonville became the capital city of Louisiana, wresting the honor from New Orleans to host the second session of the ninth Legislature. Armand Beauvais was acting governor. Andre Bienvenu Romano was speaker of the House, and Isaac A. Smith, president of the Senate. Also that year Sen. David A. Randall of this city announced his candidacy for governor.

Times-Picayune, Dec. 10, 1967, s. 1, p 4