Attention Is Directed
to Areas on Bayou

Three Parishes Began
Life at Same Time

By CLAIRE FUNERY
(Times-Picayune Staff Correspondent)

THIBODAUX, La. — At the
height of a season that prom-
ises a record Louisiana sugar
crop, attention focuses on Ba-
you Lafourche and the three
major cane-producing parishes
that contain the legendary
stream.

Along the bayou shores in La-
fourche, Assumption and the
tip of Ascension that houses the
waterway, cut cane, heaped
high, rides in huge open trucks
to the mills for grinding.

Historically, all three bayou
parishes began life at the same
time, in 1807, when the first
Territorial Legislature cut Or-
leans Territory into 19 parishes,
abolishing the 12 counties set
up by the 1804 Legislative Coun-
cil.

Under the French and Spanish
regimes, Assumption and La-
fourche had formed part of the
"Lafourche Settlement" and
Ascension was a part of the
"Comte d'Acadie."

Two of the parishes derived
names from ecclesiastical par-
ishes already established. The
third, offering the bayou its
longest stretch of shoreline,
became Lafourche parish.

The oldest church on Bayou
Lafourche at Plattenville gave
Assumption its name. Ascension
bears the name of the church
parish founded in 1772 on the
site of Donaldsonville.

In their government seats,
two parishes honor men who
helped their growth, and one
uses the name of a man who
had never seen Louisiana.

NAMED FOR ORLEANIAN

William Donaldson of New Or-
leans bought land on the west-
bank of the Mississippi river
where it joins the bayou, sub-
divided it and founded his town
in 1806, a year before Ascension
parish became a parish. He do-
ned land for parish buildings.
Later Donaldsonville was to be-
come briefly the capital city of
the state.

Henry Schuyler Thibodaux's
name is memorialized in La-
fourche parish in the govern-
ment seat. State legislator and
governor, he gave land for a
courthouse and jail and for a
market.

When Assumption became a
parish, Canal or Courthouse, as
it was also called, became the
government seat. Later a set-
ler, a former French soldier,
changed the name to Napoleon-
ville, in commemoration of his
former emperor and military
leader.

Settlement of all three par-
ishes goes back to the mid-18th
century by the French and
Spanish, and by the homeless
Acadians who found peace in
this long-time stronghold of the
Chitimaches Indians.

Irregular in geographical out-
lines, Lafourche parish holds
about a thousand square miles
of coast marsh, alluvial land
and wooded swamp that furnish-
ed cypress for bayou homes
and ties for a railroad that by-
passed the parish.

Among its famed inhabitants
was Edward Douglass White,
U. S. supreme court chief jus-
tice, whose father was a Loui-
siana governor and one of its
earliest American settlers.

"FAT LAND"

Assumption parish, containing
almost 500 square miles, winds
for 25 miles along the bayou,
boasting soil that includes sandy
loam, mixed oil and black land,
called by early inhabitants
"terre gras," or "fat land."

A wildlife wonderland, Ass-
umption has one of the South's
finest fishing grounds in Lake
Verret, Belle river, and other
streams.

At Napoleonville, on the bayou
bank, Leonidas Polk, Episcopal
bishop of Louisiana, built Christ
Church. In the Civil War Bishop
Polk, called the "fighting
bishop," lost his life. His
Church, used by Federal troops
to house horses and to practice
marksman, was restored
after the conflict.

Most of Ascension parish is
on the east bank of the Missis-
sippi river, but Donaldsonville
is on the west bank at the
bayou beginning.

Embracing more than 300
square miles, Ascension has,
through its rich soil, contributed
much to Louisiana agriculture.
Its sons, such as Francis T.
Nicholls who served as a gen-
eral and governor, have brought
renown to that bit of bayou
country.

Today the three parishes are
leaders in the production of
sugar cane, a product they
early put their faith into, and
Bayou Lafourche is playing its
part in the life of the parishes
built around that sweet com-
modity.