Duson

Duson was named after W.W. and CC. Duson. Willie was born in 1853 and Curley in 1846 along the Mermentau River. Of Scotch-Irish descent, their father was born in Canada and migrated to Louisiana when the French Canadians rose against the English in 1837. Curley Duson became sheriff of St. Landry Parish and later U.S. Marshall and state senator. During his boyhood, W.W. worked first at herding cattle, carrying mail and working in a sawmill or clerking in country trading posts to save a little nest egg. In 1970, he took his earnings and entered Blackman's school in New Orleans where he remained seven months. He became a merchant and remained so until 1884, when he began operating a small real estate business in Rayne where he finally acquired the Rayne Signal. At this time he became obsessed with the ideal of developing the land of his birth and became general manager of the Southwest Land Company, using the newspaper as his first medium of advertising. W.W. bought the many acres of land which now constitute Duson and the surrounding area.

To this day the town of Duson has retained the name of the Scotch-Irish pioneers who blazed the trail through the section which now constitutes much of Acadia Parish. (The town of Duson is now in Lafayette Parish.) There is no record in the Lafayette Parish courthouse as to when Duson was incorporated into a village.

Old landmarks in Duson are the depot which was bought by the L & W Railroad Company in 1892, the present depot building was built in 1915. DeJean's store now a warehouse, and the City Hall which was used as the first schoolhouse in the early 1900s. Today the City Hall is used as a courtroom where the mayor presides over sessions concerning local miscreant owners, and as a voting place and as a branch library of the Lafayette Parish Library.

In back of City Hall is the jail. The old two-cell wooden jail has been torn down and replaced with a new cement block two-cell jail. With the raising of the old wooden jail, many anecdotes were recalled by older Duson dwellers. There is one of two fellows who had to be taken to the "doo" for a little patching up after their night in jail. As the story goes, they were tossed into opposite sides of the little jail. During the night they managed to break down the separating partition where they fought out the remainder of the night. Somehow the old jail withstood the battering.

Among ecclesiastical landmarks are St. Theresa of the Child Jesus Catholic Church. It was built in the center of town in 1877 and has been enlarged twice. Until the first resident priest came it was placed under Father Hubert Lerchen, pastor of St. Joseph's Catholic Church in Rayne. Father Mira, a French-speaking priest, was the first resident priest from 1928 until 1932. In 1949 the St. Theresa Hall was built on the lot next to the church. It is used for all church organization meetings and is rented for big social affairs such as wedding receptions. It is also used for funerals.

The first stores in Duson were the DeJean and the Jack Davis. Later Judge Breaux's store was established in 1912. Gabriel Breaux, the son of Judge Breaux, became a partner with his son-in-law, John B. Breaux.
father in 1920 and went into business by himself in 1924.

A resident doctor of Duson, Dr. R.J. Arretig, had a hospital in Duson but in 1932 a fire caused by a faulty electrical wire completely destroyed both the hospital and his home. After the first, Dr. Arretig moved to Church Point and built a hospital there.

There were three cotton gins in the town of Duson, all close to the railroad tracks. During the summer these three gins operated both night and day due to the many cotton-growing farms around Duson at that time. Along the railroad tracks was also a lumber yard that was purchased in 1930 by Richard Lagneaux and Son. The “moving picture” theatre on School Street was built in 1947. This theatre provided the first “talking” picture show in town (the other theatre showed only silent films.) The going rate for the picture show was 25 cents per family.

After World War II, when materials became available again, small lots of land East of Duson were bought from Mr. Earl Stutes, and small houses with brick-siding paper went up one after the other. People began to refer to the new addition as “Paper Town” and although many of the houses had been re-covered since then with white asbestos shingling, the name “Paper Town” stuck for years.

It was the new addition which gave Duson its jump in population. Its size surpassed the neighboring town of Scott. Today the population of Duson is around 1,700. Citizens take pride in a new school that was built in 1983, a new post office which opened in November 1983, and a new bank which began doing business at the beginning of this year. 1984 marked the completion of a new Fire Station. The town is naturally prideful of the fact that Duson now has the largest volunteer fire department in the State of Louisiana.

Special thanks to Cindy Rise at the Dupre’ Library, USL, and to Jimmy Guidry, town councilman and street commissioner of Duson, for supplying information to make this history of Duson possible.

In conjunction with the Lafayette Centennial, this history of Duson is the fourth of a series of articles that will be published weekly on the pasts of the communities in Lafayette Parish.

To Answer Your ?

Working with more than one realtor would tend to become confusing.

"To Answer Your ?” is a weekly question and answer column of the Real Estate Guide of the Lafayette Board of Realtors. If you have questions regarding real estate, please send same to "To Answer Your ?”, Lafayette Board of Realtors, P. O. Box 52686, Lafayette, LA 70505

con’t from pg. 1