DOWN THE BAYOU

Famed Places Described in 1933 La. Tourist Guide

Many, Like Belle Grove, Gone or in Ruins

By CLAIRE PUNKEY

DONALDSONVILLE, La. — These sunny spring days find tourists, local Louisianians and out-of-staters, taking to the highways to see scenes and settings of the oak-draped, bayou-lined Pelican state. There are published guides for the touring public that lead to places of interest today. And a tourist-conscious Highway Commission of four decades ago was pointing the way to lovely spots in the state.

It is interesting to pore over this guide, which is 1933 called “Know Louisiana,” brought out by the commission headed by A. P. Tugwells when O. K. Allen was governor. At that time Houmas House in Ascension Parish across the Mississippi River from Donaldsonville was designated Burnside, Belle Grove upriver was recommended for viewing to tourists, as was the then year-old New Louisiana State Capitol.

SIMILAR FATES

Now Belle Grove is no more, and similar fates have befallen other famed places named in that 41-year-old guide which described itself as “A Tourist Guide to Points of General & Historic Interest.”

Burnside was described as “white, two stories, topped with a cupola” and “pillars on three sides. It is set well back from the road in a wonderful grove of live oaks.”

Belle Helene, upriver, was described as “a grand old home built in 1841 by Duncan Kenner” with “large square columns reaching from the ground to the roof,” and “surrounded by a magnificent grove of live oaks.”

Belle Grove, in Iberville Parish, shown here in about 1940, was described in the guide as “vacant and almost in ruins.”

BELLE GROVE, Iberville Parish plantation home built in 1857 which no longer exists, was recommended for viewing in a 1933 Louisiana tourist guide. The 73-room mansion was said to be the “finest and largest home ever built in the State.” The book described it as “three stories in height” and containing “seventy-five rooms, some of them 40 feet square. It is of the Greek revival type with fluted pillars and Corinthian capitals.”

NOTHING IS LEFT

The color, the guidebook noted, was old rose. The house, built in 1857 by John Andrews, was later sold to Stone Ware and occupied by his family. “It is now vacant and almost in ruins,” read the account. Today nothing is left of this magnificent mansion.

Every once in a while someone will come to Donaldsonville looking for the ruins of old Fort Butler, and all that is left to show the visitor is a declivity. The 1933 tour lured pointed out that the fort was built “by the Union forces in the latter part of 1863.”

It described the fighting there, particularly on June 26, 1863, “when the Confederate troops fought to capture the fort at 1:30 a.m., fighting until daylight.”

Donaldsonville itself is described as a former “Indian trading post for more than a hundred years.” The South Louisiana State Fair Grounds located here were on the tourist list. The grounds are still here, but the fair no longer calls those of its many parishes together once a year as October and autumn come together.

Looking toward Baton Rouge, as Louisiana does now with the Legislature in session, in 1933 touring eyes were focused on the new 33-story edifice that housed the government of the state.

“Located at the north end of the city, on the grounds of the old Louisiana State University, its 33 stories are ample to house all departments of the state government,” read the tourist book.