from 1976 until his death in 1983, Frank and Ann Godchaux transformed a rice milling operation in Abbeville into the leading international corporation in the rice industry. A strong entity, Rivertown Foods of Abbeville is currently headed by Godchaux’s great-grandson, Frank Godchaux III, and his cousin, Frank Godchaux Sr., chairman and vice-chairman, respectively, of the company’s board of directors.

In 1911, when Frank Sr. was only 22 and running two rice mills in Abbeville, a friend and fellow rice miller, Alexx Kaiser, suggested merging 28 small, struggling Louisiana rice mills into one large milling corporation, to help improve the price of rice in Louisiana. This successful merger, in which Godchaux joined with other mill owners, created the Louisiana State Rice Milling Company Inc., according to Dr. John R. Moore, head of LSU’s history department and author of Godchaux for the Mill, a company history tentatively scheduled for publication later this year.

Within three years, 11 New Orleans mills were added, and more acquisitions were to come. Between 1915 and 1916, Louisiana State began producing Water Mold rice, a high-quality short-grain rice. In the 1920s, however, Frank Sr. discovered a long-grain similar to the Indian grain known as “patta.” He called it “makutta.”

As a businesswoman, Frank Sr. was a cautious but confident visionary, commanding respect from his peers. “Very few people called him Frank,” says Charles. “The only guy that I knew who did was an old [buck] man, Kake Keys, who called him Buster.”

Charles says that friendship was one of the fondest his grandfather held. (The Abbeville Historical Society identifies him as “Henry Keys” in a series of articles written on the Godchaux family, and Charles recalls that his grandfather called his friend “Keys.”)

“He did anything for a friend,” Charles says, explaining how his grandpa-would rescue Keys out of his latest snarl. “I remember, my time, I would call up in the middle of the night, ‘Hey Buzzy, I’m down here in jail. Come get me out, and I’ll go get and get them.”

Frank Godchaux III was born in Abbeville in 1979. His father, Gus, was originally from France, and had immigrated to Franklin with his parents. Gus eventually became a rice mill owner, and a rice mill owner and head man in Abbeville, with 20 acres. Frank Sr. had a diversified business career, which included (until) an LAU, Takane and Vendo, in his last year in Vendo, where he played guitar, he was forced to retire because of a serious injury. Godchaux maintained homes in early 1900 and began working for the National Rice Milling Company of New Orleans as the regional manager and distribution center for southern Louisiana. He married the daughter of an Abbeville cotton factor, and they had one child, Frank Godchaux Jr.

Frank Sr. was named to the board of directors of the Planters Rice Milling Company in Abbeville. When Planters’ mill burned in 1914, Frank Sr. took control of its reconstruction. Four years later, he was the general manager of Planters’ Mill and another local mill, Merit.

The mill is a two mill which merged with 28 others to create Louisiana State Rice Milling Co. Inc. From the mid-1930s to 1940, the rice industry suffered from political and economic uncertainty, taking Louisiana State on a rollercoaster ride of profit and loss. In the 1930s and 1940s, the company continued to expand, acquiring mills throughout the South. By the 1950s, Rivertown Foods of Abbeville was a major player in the rice industry, with mills in Louisiana, Arkansas, and Texas. Today, Rivertown Foods is one of the largest processors of rice in the world, with mills in Louisiana, Arkansas, and Texas. The company continues to grow and expand, with a focus on sustainability and responsible sourcing. The story of Rivertown Foods is a testament to the resilience and innovation of the Godchaux family, who have been leaders in the rice industry for over a century. The company’s success is not just a result of hard work and dedication, but also of the strong community and family values that have been at the heart of the business since its inception.