Guildive: a name that proves the devil's in the details

BY CLARE D'ARTOIS LEEPER
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An 1875 map at the Louisiana State Museum records the existence of a plantation named Guildive (Assumption Parish), locating it seven and one-half miles from Donaldsonville, which is in neighboring Ascension Parish.

The next appearance of the name is in Bouchereau's Sugar Directory, which describes the plantation:

"Guildive Plantation in 1904-05 belonged to Louis Dehon and produced almost 1.4 million lbs. of sugar in that year. Guildive was located on Bayou LaFourche 72 miles from New Orleans by way of the Texas and Pacific train route. The railroad station at Guildive was called Kessler."

By way of the Mississippi river, it was an 88 mile trip from Guildive to New Orleans. Mail was received at Klotzville.

Guildive Plantation manufactured sugar, using steam and kettle apparatus. The building that housed the manufacturing operation was of wood construction.

The French word Guildive suggests that perhaps the plantation owner was also engaging in distilling - probably for personal consumption - rum. Rum is a spirituous liquor made from sugar cane utilizing molasses and other by-products. The French name for rum is rhum or guildive.

Guildive is said to be a corruption of the English "Kill-Devil," a West Indian name for rum. Tafia was an early name for rum made from the lower grades of molasses or refuse brown sugar. Another word for rum is "grog," so called because it was served to the sailors of the Royal Navy. The name comes through Admiral Vernon (1684-1757), who wore breeches of peculiar fabric called program.

A 1690 quote from N. P. Davis' Caravels and Roundheads states that at Barbados "... the chief Tudering they make in the island is rum bullion, alias Kill-devil, and it is made of sugarcanees distilled, a hot, hellish and terrible liquor."

A 1740 History of Jamaica concludes that "Rum punch is not improperly called Kill-devil for thousands lose their lives by its means."

Edwin Davis, writing in Louisiana, The Pelican State, describes farming in French colonial days: At first corn and rice were the most important crops, but it was not long before cotton, tobacco, and indigo were being produced also. Sugar cane was first brought to Louisiana by Iberville, but little was grown until 1751, when a better variety from Santo Domingo was introduced. The cane juice was boiled down into thick mass, for it would not granulate, and this was used for sweetening purposes and for the making of an alcoholic drink called "tafia." It was not until 1795 that Etienne de Bore succeeded in clarifying and crystallizing sugar, a far more profitable use of the sugar cane.

Davis notes that the selling of liquors was watched very carefully: In 1717 an ordinance prohibited the selling of brandy to slaves or Indians and fixed the penalty at a fine of fifty livres, half the money to be given to the church and half to the hospital. Nine years later an ordinance closed all dram shops on Sunday while church was in progress, and the following year slaves were required to have a permit from their masters before they could purchase any kind of liquor.

By the time of Governor Vaudreuil, drunkenness and crime had become so common in New Orleans that he issued the first police regulations and also special regulations...All liquor-sellers now had to have a permit. Drinks could be sold only to voyageurs, settlers, sailors, and sick persons; they could not be sold to soldiers, Indians, or Negroes. Soldiers had to obtain their liquor at government canteens where no civilians were permitted. However, these liquor regulations were poorly enforced.

The Guildive of colonial days has evolved into a connoisseur's delight. In New Orleans for the past 10 years a small distillery has been producing rums using Louisiana sugar cane from Edgard in St. John the Baptist Parish. Tours through the facility located on Frenchmen Street are offered by the Celebration Distillation.

(http://www.neworleansrum.com) (504) 945-9400.