Avery Island Historic Salt Find Marked

By M. A. WOLCOTT

Recognition was given Avery Island Saturday morning for producing the first rock salt mine in North America 101 years ago.

In a ceremony held in the shelter of a bowser of Live Oak trees equally aged, a bronze marker was unveiled to commemorate the historic discovery over a century ago.

Miss Annie Lou Murphy, representing the State Department of Commerce and Industry, presented it. The marker was accepted by S. Coleman Avery, president of Avery Island Inc., after it was unveiled by two retired workers of the International Salt Company, operators of the mines. They were Batista Gazotte and Sam (Man) Green.

JACOB LANDRY was master of ceremonies for the occasion. After presentation of distinguished guests, Mrs. J. S. Brown Jr., gave message from the Iberia Chapter Louisiana Cultural Resources Commission, of which she is president.

Principal speaker was Charles L. (Pie) Dufour, longtime writer and columnist for the Times Pica-yune, New Orleans.

Dufour summed up the importance of the event in this manner: "One hundred and one years ago yesterday a slave was digging in a salt spring near this spot in order to increase the flow of brine, which would be boiled down to make salt. Suddenly he hit something solid. He thought it was a log and tried to dig around it. After sweating away for a while he called up to the 18-year-old son of Judge D. D. Avery, who was peering into the pit.

"IT AIN'T no use Mr. Jawn. I done hit a log and can't go no further."

"But it wasn't a log that the shovel had struck. It was, as everyone here knows full well, solid salt - the first rock salt to be mined in the United States," said Dufour.

Dufour recalled that the discovery of rock salt at Avery Island sent a thrill of excitement throughout the Confederacy, for in those century old days before refrigeration was vital to a nation at war, and here at Avery Island was salt for all the Confederacy.

It was stated by the speaker that prior to the Civil War most of the salt consumed in the South came from England through the port of New Orleans. But by the fall of 1861, the South had six salt mines, one of which was Union Salt donated to the Confederacy.

A long and at times humorous account of Dufour was the topic of the ceremony. Avery Island in 1863 was roofed with salt. Avery Island was the last stop for this salt as it was sent to the West to be dissolved for use.

DUFOUR RELATED that when the Civil War broke out there were three methods of producing salt: 1 - Evaporation of sea water by boiling; 2 - Evaporation of sea water by boiling; 3 - Evaporation of sea water by boiling. The latter method was the one used in Avery Island.

When the war broke out, Salt was in demand. The major source of salt was Avery Island and it was sent to the Confederate States. Avery Island was the last stop for this salt that was sent to the West to be dissolved for use.

In the meantime Avery Island had fallen into Union hands in April of 1863, less than a year after the discovery of the rock salt deposit.

Its loss to the Confederacy was just one of many dire consequences stemming directly from the Federal seizure of New Orleans.

MARKER UNVEILED - Photo shows marker at Avery Island after it was unveiled by Sam (Man) Green, left and Batista Gazotte, retired workers of the International Salt Company of Avery Island. The marker tells the story: "First Rock Salt Mine - Salt was evaporated from brine springs on Avery Island from 1791. On May 4, 1862, workmen enlarging these springs to produce more salt for the Confederacy hit solid salt at a depth of 16 feet. Mining operations began in 1865 by Union forces."

Distinguished guests introduced by Landry included: Mayor P. Armand Viator, New Iberia; Mayor Foribus Mestayer, Loreauville; Sheriff G. Jerry Wattigny, Registrar of Voters Ray (Moon) Mulinas, Clerk of Court S. J. Segura, former Police Jury President J. D. Darnall; John D. Hamilton, president of the International Salt Company; and Mrs. Hamilton, officials and residents of Avery Island, the McIlhenny Company and guests were present.

Invocation was given by Rev. Robert Wayne Jackson, rector of the Episcopal Church of the Epiphany, with benediction by Rev. Edward Fruge, pastor of the Catholic mission at Rynella.