Years Change Jefferson St.

City's Artery Reflects Rapid Growth of Lafayette

Jefferson street—Lafayette’s great white way—a curving thoroughfare that is the spinal cord of the hub of Louisiana’s fastest growing industrial and agricultural area.

The past ten years, four of which were hard war years, have made a great difference in the street’s appearance. The change has not been gradual—rather, almost overnight, in the calendar of cities—Jefferson has had its face lifted, its traffic almost tripled and from a sleepy main street has become a bustling artery that dumps lifeblood into the rich Vermilion delta area.

Older residents of Lafayette see the changes every day. The old Baptist church at the intersection of Lee, Jefferson and Oak avenues is gone; in its place is a modern dress salon and office building. Across the street from the city hall, on commercial property once occupied by a gasoline station, another new building has been erected—housing offices, a music store, and soon, a ladies ready-to-wear store.

Within the last decade, Keller’s Bakery has disappeared from its old site across Jefferson from the old Southside training school building and transferred its operations to a spanking-new Oak ave. building.

Further down the street, the First National Bank is moving ahead on its expanded building. Across the street, the Old Moses corner has changed radically in the 1939-49 period.

What once was a home has been replaced by a modern drug store. A McCrory store has appeared—modern in every detail—in the middle of the block. Morgan and Lindsey, gutted by fire in 1946, has been rebuilt. A men’s store has been added to the “big bend” in Jefferson. Newstadt’s has just had nearly $20,000 spent on its storefront and interior, as has the Franklin store, just across the street. The La Parisienne building is slated for a renovation soon. A $50,000 contract has already been let, and Jefferson street will soon have another brand-new store front.

Heymann’s, too, has followed the modernization trend. During 1948 alone $200,000 was spent for modernization.

During the past 10 years, Abdala’s has gone into more modern, spacious and attractive quarters. The J. C. Penney store has been enlarged, remodeled and modernized. A recent copy of The Daily Advertiser advised that the Royal theatre must be removed, making way for another new building.

More progress on Southwest Louisiana’s fastest-growing white way. Lee Furniture co., once a small store, has expanded into a neighboring building and has modernized the exterior along with interior changes. The Daily Advertiser has moved two doors up Jefferson to a super newspaper plant, built at a cost of nearly a quarter million dollars.

The Evangeline hotel has caught the expansion fever, also. A 60-room addition, slated for completion the middle of next year, is going up behind the present building. Across Vine st., the lower floor of the Sonnier building has been converted into ultra-modern offices, while next door, a yellow-brick office building has helped to spark the north-end rebuilding of Jefferson st. facades.

Richard furniture store, too, has been remodeled to keep pace with the rising spirit of growth and expansion; while just next door a modern liquor store faces the area’s busiest thoroughfare.

However, the true story of a decade of expansion on Jefferson st. can’t be seen from the outside alone. Interiors of buildings have been brought up to date. Estimated conservatively, 85 per cent of Jefferson st. buildings are air-conditioned. New office furniture, new display cases, modern show windows—these all have given the Lafayette artery a “new look.”

Traffic volume has been almost doubled. Parking meters made their appearance as a partial answer to crowded parking conditions. Traffic lights have blossomed out with “No Turn” signs, while an increased police force is called on to direct traffic during rush hours and holiday seasons.

The spirit of growth is everywhere—but no where can it be seen more clearly than on Jefferson st., the curving brick-surfaced artery down which flows the life-blood of area trade.
Lafayette’s “great white way” wasn’t always paved. In the early 1920’s, a visitor remarked that the thoroughfare was either “covered by six inches of dust or six inches of mud.” At the left is the city’s only three-story building at the time the photograph was taken. Moss pharmacy has since disappeared, giving way to the present City pharmacy. Sidewalks were paved—pedestrians had it all over mud-bound motorists on wet days.

(Photo Courtesy of Alice Saloom)