A BRIEF HISTORY OF CADDO PARISH

CADDOPARISH, in the northwest corner of Louisiana, was originally inhabited by the Caddo Indians, from whom its name is derived. Traders and trappers passed up and down the river, but, until about the time of the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, few white settlers established themselves in this portion of the Red River Valley.

A centuries-old log jam in Red River made the river unnavigable and isolated the Caddo territory. In 1833, Henry Miller Shreve, an intrepid river captain, and for whom Shreveport is named, was commissioned by the United States government to break "The Great Raft." This was an arduous and heart-breaking undertaking but, finally, however, proved successful. In 1835 the Caddo territory was turned over to the United States in a treaty with the Caddo Indians.

It was not until January 18, 1838, that Caddo Parish was actually created as a new parish of the State of Louisiana, by resolution and enactment of the Legislature of Louisiana. Previous to that time it had been a part of Natchitoches Parish.

Shreveport is the parish seat of Caddo, and the history and growth of the Parish and City run parallel. The Caddo Parish Police Jury is the governing body, and administrative offices are maintained in the stately Caddo Parish Court House building in the heart of downtown Shreveport. The Caddo Parish Police Jury is composed of representatives from the nine wards in the Parish, each ward being represented on a basis of population. The Parish has an estimated population of 223,900 and comprises 852 square miles.

Caddo Parish is rich in natural resources. Its forests, with varied kinds of timber, have brought great wealth. Its rich farm lands have encouraged astounding agricultural development. There has also been remarkable development in other fields, including industrial development. Oil came to Caddo Parish in 1905, on the shores of Caddo Lake, and since that time Shreveport and Caddo Parish have been outstanding in the petroleum world, for both oil and natural gas have been discovered in almost limitless quantities.

In addition to Shreveport, several other thriving towns are found as one drives along the modern highway system of Caddo Parish. It is the home of the great Louisiana State Fair, and is one of the few parishes to maintain a penal farm and detention home.

The Parish maintains a modern and well-balanced educational system, with schools located in all sections. A $20,000,000 bond issue was approved by the property owners of Caddo Parish in 1951 for a school building and improvement program on a Parish-wide basis, and work of new construction and rehabilitation moved along successfully. However, as Shreveport and Caddo Parish continued to grow apace, need for additional facilities became apparent. In 1956 property owner voters of the Parish again met the situation by approving a bond issue proposal of $17,500,000 to provide funds for a five year school building and improvement program.

The climate of Caddo Parish is rather mild, with temperatures usually ranging from about 10 degrees to about 100 degrees Fahrenheit. The rainfall in the area is usually fairly well distributed throughout the year. The average length of the growing season is 259 days.
Annual surveys of nationally accredited mediums have for years shown Caddo Parish in a consistently favorable position. On the basis of its estimated population, there are approximately 61,500 families in the Parish, and these families have a net effective buying income of $5,956.00 annually, and a per capita income of $1,732.00.

Gross farm income in Caddo Parish is approximately $9,500,000 annually. There are 269,000 acres of farm land, which constitute 47.3% of the 568,000 total acres in the Parish, and of that 90,000 acres are crop land. Cotton is the principal crop. There are approximately 5,000 farm owners. In recent years the production of livestock has increased steadily, and there are now in Caddo Parish, approximately 50,000 head of cattle, which includes 6,000 dairy cattle. The breeding of hogs and sheep has increased tremendously in Caddo Parish in recent years, and commercial poultry is also increasing steadily. Caddo Parish is one of the leading pecan producing areas in the country, and one of the few Federal pecan experiment stations is located here.

Shreveport, as the parish seat of Caddo, is also the geographical center of the rich tri-state trade area, known as the Ark-La-Tex, with an estimated population of two million. This vast wholesale and retail area affords a prosperous and promising market for the many and varied products of Shreveport and Caddo Parish.

Interesting it is to quote a few "Caddo First Things" from a list we find in our file. For instance, the first white women to come to Shreveport were Mrs. James H. Cane and Mrs. William S. Bennett, who arrived in January, 1836, and the first white Caddo child was born to Mrs. Bennett in March of 1836. The first certificate of marriage was issued April 3, 1838. The first parish court was opened August 6, 1838, but the first Caddo Parish Court House was not built until 1860. The first school opened in 1842. The first recorded religious service was held in Shreveport on March 24, 1839, by Bishop Leonidas K. Polk, missionary bishop of the Episcopal Church. In 1845 the Episcopalians organized a permanent congregation, and three other Protestant churches were established by the Presbyterians, Methodists and Baptists. The first hotel was the Catfish, established in 1848. It was not until 1861 that the first dispensary was built, and 1881 when the first telephone was installed in Shreveport.

Parish and Police Jury are terms peculiar to Louisiana alone. This, no doubt, has prompted the oft heard question: "Why does Louisiana have parishes instead of counties?" The parish was a division created for ecclesiastical purposes and indicates French and Spanish influence. Boundaries of Louisiana parishes are said to be, in many instances, those of the earlier Spanish ecclesiastical parishes, and thus it has been suggested that ecclesiastical parishes are the origin of the term "parish" as the local government subdivision. In all other states of the Union the political subdivisions are referred to as counties, where Boards of Commissioners perform duties similar to those performed by Police Jurors in Louisiana. The Police Jury enjoys broad powers as a local legislative, administrative and quasi-judicial body.

Compiled by Civic Department
Shreveport Chamber of Commerce

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