The rest is well-known history—how Napoleon, despairing of holding his American Empire against the British and Spanish, suddenly made an all-or-nothing offer of the whole of Louisiana for $15,000,000; how first the negotiators and then the president gulfed their constitutional scruples and fears of what Congress would say and closed the deal. The transaction doubled the area of the United States and insured the country’s expanding to the Pacific, but it was consumed mainly for the Isle of Orleans.

Bayou Manchac, about fifty miles north of New Orleans, remained an international boundary after the purchase, for Britain and Spain intermittently asserted claims to West Florida, which extended along the present Mississippi Gulf coast and to the Mississippi river north of the Louisiana Purchase line. The British improved the stream, making it navigable for large-draft vessels.

Then in 1810 West Florida revolted and set up a republic with Baton Rouge as its capital. The bayou divided two independent American states until West Florida was annexed to the growing republic.

Four years later Andrew Jackson, preparing the defenses of New Orleans, realized that the alternate waterway from the Gulf to the Mississippi might enable the British to flank the city or reach Baton Rouge, so he ordered Manchac closed at its junction with the great river.

But until river packets grew too large the bayou continued as a commercial artery and thousands of bales of goods were transshipped from Mississippi to bayou boats at its head, across the narrow spit of land separating the streams.

There were persistent proposals, too, for connecting it again with the Mississippi. The last was made by a Louisiana congressman in 1891 and the House rivers and harbors committee ordered a survey to determine the possibility of making the bayou a link in the intracoastal waterway. The report was that a prospective tonnage would not justify the expense.

The engineers now have settled the matter with 460,000 cubic yards of earth, putting a geographic seal to the union of isle and republic which Jefferson perilously wangled 137 years ago.