Abrom Kaplan, founder of the City of Kaplan

Among the more notable figures on the Southwest Louisiana scene during the past half century, a prominent place might well be given to the late Abrom Kaplan. Among the many stories that make up the history of the rice industry in Southwest Louisiana, there is none, perhaps, that is more inspiring than that of the late Abrom Kaplan. At all times, he stood as an able exponent of the spirit of his age in his efforts to advance progress and improvements.

The career of Abrom Kaplan is a story of such achievement as only American, the land of opportunity, makes possible to those who must start with little, at the foot of the ladder, and to those who possess intelligence, industry and integrity as well as courage and persistence.

Abrom Kaplan was born in Poland, then a part of Russia on Sept. 1, 1972 and came to America in his young manhood in search of the opportunity not to be had in his native land.

Upon landing in New York City in 1885, he began his amazing career by working as a packer in a cigar factory. From there, he became a repairer and reseater in a chair factory and later was a peddler in New York and parts of Connecticut. He soon overcame the many obstacles an emigrant boy must face and from observations and close application to the tasks before him, he became an earnest and useful young man.

He managed to save enough money from his meager earnings to move to Louisiana, where he again became a peddler in Pointe Coupee Parish and neighboring parishes. Through long hours of hard work and thrift, he progressed from a country pack-peddler to the owner of a mercantile business in Crowley, Louisiana. As his enterprise prospered, Abrom Kaplan became interested in real-estate. This interest and a desire to acquire and develop soon led to investment in farm lands.

Recognizing the great potential of Southwest Louisiana as a rice-growing center, years ahead of any show of progress in what was then marsh-land, he began a number of great development projects, and in the succeeding years, he became one of the greatest figures the rice industry had produced.

To enumerate all of Abrom Kaplan's contributions to the development and growth of Southwest Louisiana would be a difficult task indeed. His long and useful life was connected with every phase of the rice industry, and at the peak of his career, he was known as the largest producer of rice in the United States and at the same time he was one of the largest taxpayers in Southwest Louisiana.

Abrom Kaplan brought to this part of Louisiana an interest that enabled him to reclaim thousands of acres of land by huge drainage systems, and to build and develop the first rice irrigation system in the world. By constantly improving, building and developing and creating production where others feared to venture, he carved a vast empire out of the waste lands of Southwest Louisiana.

He erected and owned rice mills at Crowley, Estherwood, Gueydan, Abbeville and Donaldsonville. Later he acquired a large rice mill at De Witt, Arkansas. He spent vast sums on the drainage of waste marshlands, which through his insight were turned into productive rice lands.

As a pioneering leader, he led the way in making Southwest Louisiana the greatest rice producing center in the United States, and a great share of the industry's progress can be traced to his pioneering efforts.

As he progressed financially, Abrom Kaplan ploughed his money back into his projects to better the general welfare of the people of Kaplan, and his vision and courage carried forward as great leader, builder, and developer of this region.

The city of Kaplan was founded by Abrom Kaplan. It is a monument to the farsighted vision and ambition of this immigrant boy.

Late in the 1890's, Mr. Kaplan had a vision. He would build a town that would bear his name. The town would have homes, schools, churches, and the community would have railroad service.

This idea became a reality in 1902 with the founding of Kaplan. How well his dream was realized is apparent to the visitor of today. Situated in the heart of the great rice producing area from which Abrom Kaplan helped to create, the town of Kaplan owes much of its development to the rice industry. How well his idea was realized can be seen in the lovely homes, churches, school, rice mills, banks and other business enterprises.

One might write more of Abrom Kaplan as an industrialist, banker and developer. He was widely known for his contributions to banking in several communities in Vermilion and Acadia Parishes. His business affairs extended in all directions and he gave liberally to many worthy enterprises.

Abrom Kaplan was never too busy with his own industrial and financial enterprises to cause him to neglect his keen and vigorous interest in religious, humanitarian and related affairs. Jewish in religious faith, Abrom Kaplan was most broad-minded in his religious views and tolerance.

He was instrumental in the establishment of a Catholic Church in Kaplan, which has grown to a point that a quarter-of-a-million-dollar church has replaced the original structure. He assisted in the erection of churches of all denominations and was at all times genuinely interested in the welfare of the people in the community and state at large. He gave generously and financial support to the end.

Death came to Abrom Kaplan on March 30, 1944, at Crowley, Louisiana and thus ended a career that from every point of view was impressive and important to his day and generation.

His achievements, his contributions to the worthwhile endeavors of life and the door of opportunity that he opened to thousands less gifted than himself, all without ostentation or any seeking of limelight of public acclaim, are worthy of preservation in enduring form.

His mark as a pioneer in the development of the rice industry and as a developer of Southwest Louisiana, is indelible. He left a magnificent record of achievements to challenge and inspire those who follow. He was a great man in a great era of development in Southwest Louisiana.