La. Agricultural Heritage Traced

Governors' Words

Feb. 27, 1964. C. 4-5

In 1963 sugar production reached an all-time high in Louisiana, yielding 780,000 tons of raw sugar from some nine million gross tons of cane. Cotton continued as the state's leading crop and farm income source in 1963, with its value to growers estimated in excess of $100 million.

Agriculture has always played a major role in Louisiana, and a look over pages of the past reveal the attention it has received over the years.

Enduring pictures of the situation in various areas have come down to the present time through the words spoken by Louisiana governors to state legislatures.

Agriculture in a particular time span can be gleaned by studying one of these eras, such as the time that began with admission of Louisiana into the Union of States and her withdrawal from it 49 years later.

The first governor of Louisiana, William C. C. Claiborne, at the opening session of the 1814 Legislature, was concerned with agricultural conditions.

He dwelt on the state's resources thus far, the inherent energy and industrial enterprise.

The Mississippi he saw as "a forest of timber universally prized with a fertile and everlasting yield products of inestimable value to growers." The Mississippi he pictured Louisiana "blessed with fertile lands, hardly a tenth is wasted." Agriculture was "an open career offered to our agricultural and commercial industry is not closed," stressing that "no convulsions of nature have destroyed the fertility of our soil, or turned away from our capital the stream of the Mississippi."

Gov. Alexander Mouton in January, 1844, was mindful of the recuperative power of Louisiana's agriculture, then as now a highly important part of Louisiana's economy.

Duty on foreign sugars had been lowered. Henry Clay's Compromise Bill had been adopted, and the governor trusted in the inherent energy and industry of Louisianians to make them "independent of this precarious decision of Congress."

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Roman, in his second term of office in 1842, noted that "the greatness of our resources has, for some years past, tended to lead us astray."

Concerning the aftermath of "undertakings and speculations far beyond our real strength," he told the lawmakers that "the wide career offered to our agricultural and commercial industry is not closed," stressing that "no convulsions of nature have destroyed the fertility of our soil, or turned away from our capital the stream of the Mississippi."

Gov. Robert C. Wickliffe used some hard statistics. "With 25 millions of acres of fertile lands, hardly a tenth is in cultivation," he said. A state with a seacoast one-third its length had a lumber in its "fanciful. Capable of producing "all the cotton needed for the British Empire, and all the sugar required for this great Confederation, we are as yet but laggards in their growth."

Finally he noted that with thousands of miles of internal navigation "our production frequently can find no market." "North and South Louisianians to strangers to each other." Discreet and timely legislation could do much to remedy those things, he said.

That was how it was the first time Louisiana was a state of the Union. Today in her second age of statehood, her agriculture is booming alongside a growing industrial enterprise.

with Louisiana produce accounting for $20 million of that total.

Congress came in for criticism by Gov. Edward Douglas White in 1835 for what he termed "vacillating legislation" regarding the sugar industry, then as now a highly important part of Louisiana's economy.

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