CROWLEY REMEMBERS

Mayors' Photos Collected

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CROWLEY — A stranger's impression of Crowley is that it is a small, but not sleepy, town whose quiet residential areas house a lot of nice people.

Many large, white-framed, houses of the turn-of-the-century type, show that the city has had its share of wealth; and the upkeep of the houses and lawns testify to the continued Crowley prosperity.

Another impression a stranger would have after talking to Mayor Joseph Gielen is that Crowley is a town that doesn't forget the men who have worked for 80 years through the city's government to make her grow.

The city hall was renovated last year, and in the modern dark-wood paneled court room the pictures of the past 17 Crowley mayors were hung. The collecting of the pictures began as a personal project of Gielen. At the time when he began to collect, there was not even a record of all the men who had been mayor.

Historian's Assistant
Helping Gielen was Paul B. Freeland, of Crowley, whose hobby is collecting historical information of the area.

As a result of their efforts, the list of mayors was compiled along with factual information on each mayor's length of office, projects during his term, and personal data. In addition, a picture of each man was obtained and hung in the court room.

Gielen hopes that the city will undertake the publication of a small brochure with the pictures and histories in it.

Faces of Mayors
Throughout the years, Crowley has had mayors of diverse backgrounds. There have been merchants, lawyers, a grocer, an editor, and the current mayor was an oil dealer. They have been from many different states, Kentucky, Texas, Mississippi, Alabama, and even a mayor from Minnesota.

The first mayor, Dr. Derrick Peterson January, was elected by the town council Jan. 6, 1888, and served until Nov. 8 during his tenure, Crowley became charted on Feb. 17. Born in Natchez, Miss., he was educated at the Kentucky Military Institute and the medical school of the University of Louisiana. He served as a surgeon in the Confederate Army and after the war in 1887, moved to Crowley and opened a drug store.

One mayor, A.R. Burkdoll, was editor of the Crowley Signal. He settled in Crowley in 1887 and became mayor of the town March 1, 1889, but his tenure was short-lived. Burkdoll, a Republican, and Will Chevis, editor of the Rayne Sentinel, entered into an editorial feud over the location of the Acadia Parish Court House which ended with Chevis challenging Burkdoll to a duel. Reluctant to fight, Burkdoll resigned and moved to New Orleans. In 1890 he established a newspaper, "The Republican," and was appointed Coiner of the Mint in New Orleans in 1891 by President Harrison.

Plans for the city's first electric lights and water works plant were completed during the tenure of Mayor Philip Jules Chappuis. Chappuis was mayor from Jan. 9, 1894 to Jan. 7, 1898 and again from May 6, 1902 to May 1, 1906. In 1903, Crowley was proclaimed a city with a population of 5,000. Chappuis was a native of Lafourche Parish and educated at Thibodaux College.

Crowley got its first city hall during the time that William Preston Campbell, a grocer, was mayor. The hall was on Parkerson Ave. at Court Circle and is now the American Legion Home.

The first sewage was laid in 1908 at the cost of $50,000 during the time that Shelby Taylor was mayor. And in William Michael Egan's term from May 6, 1910 to June 10, 1920, the first paving of streets was carried out. Parkerson Ave. was paved with creosoted wooden blocks and in 1913, the first "city lights" dazzled citizens' eyes when a "white way" of electric lights was constructed along the avenue.

The first Rice Festival was held in 1927 when Philip S. Pugh Jr. was mayor.

And bringing Crowley's history up to the present time Gielen has served as mayor since 1954. In September of 1963, Gielen became the first full-time mayor of Crowley. During his term, the Rice Festival building has been erected; the city hall renovated; a City Planning Commission created; and recently the city is working $2,000,000 street and drain program.