Port of Baton Rouge...

(Editors’ Note: This is the third in a series on transportation in Baton Rouge. Previous articles have discussed water and railroad transport, and the final article will deal with air transportation.)

For those persons who have lived near its banks for many years, it’s easy to take the Mississippi River for granted. They’re always aware of it, but usually as a landmark, a thing to be crossed over, an ever-present but seldom-used part of the area’s geography. With modern spillways and control methods, there’s not even the tenuous fear of flood that was felt by earlier residents. But to those involved in the business of transport of goods the river is something else—a highway, a broad and busy road from Minnesota to Louisiana and out into the Gulf of Mexico. And to Baton Rouge it has become the basis for one of the main foundations of the economy—world trade.

Deep Water...Big Ships

The position of Baton Rouge on the river is an enviable one. Here the river channel is deep enough to allow ocean-going vessels to travel, so the city can benefit from both barge and ship traffic.

As a writer in the May issue of Holiday magazine pointed out, Baton Rouge marks the point where the Mississippi River starts to become part of the sea. And in recent years the Port of Baton Rouge—less than a decade old—has become a port of major importance.

From the standpoint of total waterborne commerce moving through the port area, Baton Rouge today ranks as the ninth port in the nation. In grain exports it ranks third, behind two other Louisiana ports, New Orleans and Destrehan. The main port facilities, located one mile south of Port Allen, include a general cargo dock, a grain elevator and wharf, and a no-lassee terminal.

More than 180 ocean-going ships visit the Baton Rouge docks each year, and in 1960 the deep sea traffic—exclusive of scrap steel—amounted to more than 180,000 tons.

As C. W. Herbert, executive director of the Port of Baton Rouge, remarks: “Without fear of contradiction, I say that more tonnage went over our dock last year than any comparable facility on the entire Gulf.”

Link to the World...

“We are a truly international port in every sense of the word,” Herbert said. “There is no section of the world that is not served from Baton Rouge. For the past three years I cannot think of any established steamship line serving the major Gulf ports that does not have vessels calling at our port.”

The New Port Allen Locks

Last year the port had 59 line vessels to the Far East, 42 to South America, 37 to the Mediterranean and Middle East, and 25 to Europe. Ships from the Port of Baton Rouge also went to Africa, Mexico and Central America.

Three regularly advertised steamship lines, serving Europe and South America, put ships into Baton Rouge at regular intervals, and another regular service serving a different area of the world is expected in the near future.

The Port property has 15 miles of railroad, much of it serving the 7.5 million-bushel grain elevator leased by Cargill Co. Last year, according to the Association of American Railroads, the port handled more than 22,000 cars.

The port handles more than 46 different commodities through the transit shed, ranging from flour to crossties, milk to lead.

Now...More Expansion

But the Port of Baton Rouge is not standing still. A $9 million expansion program has just been undertaken, to be completed next year. A new wharf and transit shed will give the west bank facility space for an additional 10,000 tons of cargo as well as a minimum of two additional berths for general cargo vessels.

Also being constructed is a central transfer facility, which will use a conveyor system to enable loading or unloading directly between ship and barges and between rail cars, trucks and barges or ships.

Herbert points out that the conveyor system can be enlarged to make it possible to run from the central transfer facility dock and connect with any new industry located on the port property, which comprises nearly 400 acres on the west bank site. Such industry can then receive raw materials coming from the water directly, and ship out the finished product over the conveyor system.

But the West Bank port is only one facility of the Port. In addition to the older East Bank docks near downtown Baton Rouge, the Baton Rouge Barge Channel and terminal to the north of the city serves barge traffic, and handled 113,000 tons last year.

The Barge Canal is a 2½-mile channel with ultramodern barge terminal facilities and a 50,000-square-foot public commodity warehouse. The canal, a new “arm” of the river, serves such industries as W. R. Grace, U.S. Rubber and Foster Grant with close, convenient water transportation, and makes plant location in the area even more desirable.

Barges are also benefited by the new Port Allen-Morgan City Cut-off Canal, which saves some 163 miles of winding river travel for barges to and from points west. The channel leaves the Mississippi River at the Port Allen Lock, largest structure on the 1,100-mile Intracoastal Waterway, and joins the great Gulf waterway at Morgan City, which runs west to Brownsville, Tex., and east to Carabelle, Fla., near Tampa.

At Burnside, the port commission operates the Ormet Docks, as a bulk terminal, handling bauxite for the Ormet plant as well as other ores and dry bulk materials. This year the dock will also handle coal, which last year amounted to 125,000 tons.

In all, Herbert estimates that total waterborne movement through Baton Rouge’s port exceeded 28 million tons in 1962.

Ingredients for Growth...

Commenting on the role of the river in the future growth of Baton Rouge, the port director says: “Everything necessary for industrial expansion is either already in the area, or can be secured close by. The principal ingredients are, of course, inexpensive water transportation and plenty of usable water for industry. There are over 300 billion gallons of fresh water per day passing Baton Rouge. In addition there are ample supplies of natural gas, salt, sulphur, lumber and an abundant labor supply, to name just a few.

“lt is small wonder, then, that what has happened in Baton Rouge in the past is but a pale imitation of what can be expected in the future.”

Like that O’Man River, the economy of Baton Rouge “just keeps rolling along”... upward.

Ship loading ore at the Ormet Docks