Quotes in Day-by-Day Living Accounts Contain La. History

Election of U.S. Senator in 1818 Described

By CLAIRE PUNKEY

DONALDSONVILLE, La.—That the published running account of today becomes the history of tomorrow, delighting those who delve into the files of research material, is demonstrated in many ways.

For instance, much history of this area is contained in the capsule quotes noted from the published accounts of day-by-day living as season followed season and year followed year.

The account of Judge Henry Johnson's election to the U.S. Senate from Louisiana in January, 1818, reads:

"The Legislature of this state yesterday proceeded to the election, by joint ballot, of a senator in the Congress of the United States. On the second trial, Henry Johnson, Esq., of Lafourche, having 30 votes, was duly elected."

An account in June, 1822 described the plantation of Antoine Peytaivin below here as follows: "The buildings of the sugar house are in brick, and well conditioned, the dwelling house large and commodious, and the fences in good repair. There is on that land a considerable crop of cane."

1823 DESCRIPTION

An 1823 quoted description of Donaldsonville, post town and seat of justice of Ascension Parish, reads: "It stands on the point formed by the Mississippi and the efflux of Lafourche River, below the latter; contains 30 or 40 houses, and from 150 to 200 inhabitants, 81 miles above New Orleans."

In 1827, historian Francois Xavier Martin wrote of this city: "This town though destined to be the seat of government, by act of the legislature, is but a small place. It has an elegant brick church, and contains the court house and jail of the parish. The Bank of Louisiana has here an office of discount and deposit, and there is a printing office from where an hebdomadary sheet is issued."

Gov. Henry Johnson in his final message to the Legislature, Nov. 17, 1823, is recorded as saying: "No subject requires your attention more than the state of our roads and levees... On Lafourche particularly, for a considerable extent, the roads have been impassable for years, during the season of high water."

That December it was noted that, "The river had risen considerably, and we may be able to announce that the bayou is navigable for steamboats."

Also recorded was: "The Steamboat Decatur, which some time ago was sunk a few miles below this village has, after indefatigable exertion, been raised."

RIVER RISING

And on Dec. 30, there was an account that "The Mississippi is rising gradually, and the Bayou Lafourche is now completely navigable."

Of Donaldsonville as the Capital City of Louisiana, a Jan. 6, 1836, account notes: "Agreeable to present prospects, the law establishing the seat of government at Donaldsonville will be repealed this year."

In February, a month later, a correction was made to reports that the state house had succumbed to fire. The corrected report came from Baton Rouge.

It read: "Persons always ready to exaggerate accidents have spread a report here that the Government House at Donaldsonville was burnt down. We have, however, since learned that only six feet of the flooring planks had been burnt around the stove — in fact we are told that the stove must have been red hot to render the hall even comfortable."

From Baton Rouge came this on Dec. 31, 1831: "Proposals will be received at this office for transporting the mail on horseback from this place to Donaldsonville on the west bank of the Mississippi..."

CROP REPORT

A June 21, 1832, local crop report read: "The sugar cane, on many plantations, looks like Eastern-Shore Corn that tassel when knee high — in some places, the discouraged planter has suffered the weeds to hide it."

Gen. Thomas Green, CSA, June 27, 1863, in a report described Fort Butler at Donaldsonville, stated: "The approach to the fort is through an open plain 900 yards, and the ditch around it is 16 feet wide and 12 feet deep, making it impossible to scale, except by having strong planks or suitable ladders..."

And in a Nov. 4, 1871, account of new daily train service here: "In a room occupied by an old Spaniard, Bart Cheramli, who kept a small fruit store in the downtown railroad and picking up the hats that blow from the heads of the passengers..."

And Christmas of 1899, turn of the century, was described in this way: "This town enjoyed a quiet and peaceful Christmas... too quiet to please the mercantile..."