Recollection of Pirogue 125 Years Ago on Bayou Given

Attractive Homes Can Be Viewed on Landscape

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LOCKPORT, La. — Attractive homes can be viewed along the highway that runs from one end of Bayou Lafourche to the other, and as the lower part of the bayou country is reached, the stream becomes populated with water craft.

Although the many residences dotting the bayouside below Lockport were not part of the scene back in history 125 years ago, the boats were there, much smaller and vital to transportation.

That was truly the day of the pirogue and the idea of travel by any other means was scorned by its users.

A writer of the time, recalling in later years his memory of the Pirogue on the Bayou landscape, noted that “Everyman, woman and child that could stand alone could manage one of the little pirogues, and they moved up and down the bayou with great rapidity and ease in those canoes.”

LOADED DOWN

This was done, he pointed out, even when the pirogues were “loaded down to within an inch of the water edge.”

Writing about this 30 years later he said, “They have not yet, nor perhaps will ever, go out of use,” and called attention to their seeming “to be easily handled and governed so perfectly.”

Telling of his own experience in a pirogue, he wrote, “I never had the nerve to step into one but once and my happiness was complete when I stepped out about 19 seconds later.”

Writing in The Thibodaux Sentinel under the pen name of “Uncle Silas,” he touched on a matter of business that proved the old adages such as an ill wind blowing and somebody’s loss being someone else’s gain.

It was common in those days for boats and vessels to be wrecked on the shore near the mouth of Bayou Lafourche, opening up a business enterprise for those who were alert to the possibilities.

GATHERED FREIGHT

“To gather up the scattered freight was a lucrative employment, the salvage itself being profitable, but those primitive boatmen found it much more remunerative to run their recovered merchandise into some of the bayou and inlets,” he wrote.

Then, he stated, they would conceal it for a few months, “run it up the Lafourche to sell it to the inhabitants, who, finding the figures a little below those those of the market, purchased them without being very particular how the owners came by them.”

The Bayou Lafourche country below Lockport he described as a paradise of mosquitoes, which he spelled “musquitoes,” and alligators, sometimes 10 feet long, swimming on the water’s surface or sunning themselves in the sand or on a log.

The oyster trade in 1844 was believed by him to be as extensive in 1844 as it was in 1874, and furnished employment to a great number of persons.

PICTURE CHANGED

Today, the picture of lower Bayou Lafourche is a changed one. Men continue to go into the deep water to bring back the products of the Gulf, but their boats are large and other industries stand beside those old ones.

Now there are communities with such names as Golden Meadow, Galliano, Larose, Cut Off in the section below Lockport, and schools that are ultra-modern in design and teaching.

A look at today’s lower Lafourche demands a recollection of those pioneers who braved the wilderness bayou country to carve out of it the community life that has evolved.

He cited the growing of oranges in lower Lafourche in the 1840s as a coming financial bonanza. “The Orange trade also began to spring up until it now has increased to such an extent as to put thousands of dollars into the purses of the citizens of the Lower Lafourche,” he noted.

The Bayou Lafourche demands a recollection of those pioneers who braved the wilderness bayou country to carve out of it the community life that has evolved.
"They will fly away with you!" she said.

She always asked him if any of the buzzing pests had entered the bar. "What if they have?" he muttered. He said he would lie there and let each of the mosquitoes have a bite on him, after which they would leave him alone. Of course Gillis' mother was horrified, and if he left his bed for a moment she crawled in to kill any mosquitoes that might be lurking in the corners of the bar.

Soon after dusk came, she took the oil lamp and placed it on the porch, because she said the mosquitoes were attracted by light. She made a smudge from some rags in an old pie plate, and walked through the entire house smoking out the mosquitoes. There was only the front door for them to escape from, so they would soon be out of the house.

"Now be sure none of the windows are open!" she said to Gillis and me. "We don't want any more to come in."

And the rest of the evening we would sit around in the tightly closed house. Naturally, when M'sieu Volcar prepared for bed by throwing open the two side doors in the dining room, he undid all her efforts. She kept saying how, when they had a good potato crop, she wanted a door at the end of the hall way to shut off the dining room.

Then the mosquitoes will not fly away with the children," she said.

In the late afternoon, she progressed through the house to make the beds. The mosquito bars were pulled forward and tucked under the three sides of the mattresses. She climbed through the fourth side to look for lurking mosquitoes. "There! Always in the corners!"

Gladys crawled in after her. Just as her mother slapped her hands at the mosquitoes, she would flap. But the mosquitoes were so high up that she had to jump up and down to reach them. And it happened to be M'sieu Volcar's bed, the springs gave her such momentum that sometimes she was thrown right out of the bed, all entangled in the bar.

"Oh Gladys!" her mother wailed. "The good bobbinet!"

The other mosquito bars were made out of ordinary netting, but this bobbinet was something very special, and only M'sieu Volcar's bed had it. (When they had a good potato crop, she planned to have all the bars made of bobbinet.) She was always worrying about its getting torn, and having Gladys fall through it was really not the best thing for it.

Singed Wings

It was on account of the bobbinet that she never let Gillis and me use the candle at night. Suppose we set it afire! In spite of all her efforts in the afternoon, a few mosquitoes succeeded in getting in when we went to bed. She would come along with her candle and declare war on the buzzing things. The light served not only to reveal the mosquitoes clinging to the inside of the bar, but to scorch off their wings.

"There now!" she said with satisfaction as she cornered each mosquito, and darted the candle flame at them so that they fell to the base of the candle holder. "There is another mosquito that will not fly away with you!"

"All that trouble over so small a thing!" muttered M'sieu Volcar.

"What is a little mosquito bite?"

After his mother had tucked the bar in again, warning us not to disturb it, Gillis and I placed our hands against the bobbinet. The game was to see which would be bitten first through the cloth. Of course to cry out at the sting meant we had lost the game. If Gladys slipped in to join us at the game, she always lost, because she never could stand to have the mosquitoes bite her palm without letting out a squeal.

"Cry baby!" Gillis taunted her.

The Thing Walks

She would complain of the heat, just like her grandfather, and insist upon having her cradle dragged to the dining room where it was cooler. She promised that she would not be afraid because there was her grandpa snoring loudly under his table. But Gillis always told his mother not to do it, because Gladys got scared no matter what she promised.

"Not tonight, I won't." Gladys said. And her cradle was moved.

But when everybody had fallen asleep in the house and it quieted down until the frogs on the bayou bank could be plainly heard, there would begin the sound of a mouse gnawing the wall. Graw! Graw! Graw! Gladys began to scream: "Mama! Mama! I hear the Thing! Mama, come get me!"

Her mother assured her it was just a little mouse, making a little hole in the wall so that it could walk in and out like the cat through the back door, but that only scared Gladys the more. "The Thing is eating the house mama! It's eating the house!"

And she had a nightmare of the mouse eating through the wall until it could not support the roof, and the roof would come tumbling down upon the heads of everybody in the house.

"It can't touch us," Gillis said. "The sky of grandpa's bed would stop it."

"And the roof can't touch your grandpa, because he's under the table," I said.

"But your cradle can't stop roof," Gillis told Gladys. "It will fall right on your head."

Gladys cried and cried, and M'sieu Volcar awoke and was very cross, and warmed his scared with everybody. Gillis and I ran back to our room, closing the door behind us. The hubbub ended with Gladys being taken to bed with her mother to spend the rest of the night there.

M'sieu Volcar's bed took a lot of worrying for, and in the morning after Gillis' mother had finally aroused us, we would climb to the top of the footboard and sit there to watch as she made it up.

First of all she rolled back the mattresses and reached down into the cornshuck paille to smooth it out. (There were slits cut in the ticking through which she could thrust her hands.) Then she told Gillis, "The broomstick now."

She used the stick to smooth out the sheets and where not a single wrinkle remained she beat them into pillows with it. There were lace covers to slip over the pillows, and finally she tugged back the bobbinet bar to tie it back with a red ribbon bow.

"No more jumping!" she warned as she left the room.

But Gillis and I waited until she was safely in the kitchen before diving off the footboard. With three mattresses, it was wonderful! The spring caused us to bounce so high that we nearly touched the red cotton "ceiling." Of course we took the precaution of smoothing out the bed again, so that no evidence of our game remained.