Remembering The Times of Our Past

Kaplan Herald
A prominent business personality...Ivan J. Bourque

Editor's note: This article was published in the Kaplan Vermilion News on Thursday, July 24, 1969.

One of Kaplan's most outstanding business personalities is Mr. Ivan J. Bourque, who began his working career as a shoe shine boy, then a delivery boy, next an employee of O.G. Hebert's Grocery, and finally the sole owner of Lafitte Wholesale Company.

Mr. Bourque is one of seven children, his father, Ulysses Bourque, now being one of his employees. Mr. Bourque stated something that may be of interest to the younger generation (the largest pay that I have received before I opened my own business, was $15 a week).

Mr. Ivan Bourque certainly accomplished a rapid climb to businessman. He began in the wholesale business on May 15, 1939, when he was only 19 years old. About a year and a half later, on the day that he was 21 years old, Dec. 5, 1940, he married the former Mary Louise Romero. Today, with the help of these three children, Charles, a graduate of USL with a business degree; Genny, now Mrs. Russell Pierce of Houma, who works part-time during the summer and Joey—his wife and a large staff of employees, he has one of the largest wholesale businesses in the state. Mr. Bourque states, "From year to year, after my business was established, I invested in other businesses. I am a previous co-owner of Bourque-Simon Insurance Agency and I served as councilman for the City of Kaplan for 16 years. Today, I am president of the Lafitte Wholesale Drug Company Inc., president of the Kaplan Loan and Investment Inc., a director of the Kaplan State Bank, a director of Washington Life Insurance Company, and a director of KATC TV3 Lafayette. I am also a notary public.

He is a very busy man attending three or four meetings each week. But as the saying goes, "If you want something done, always ask a busy person." This old adage certainly applies to Mr. Bourque, for he still finds time to belong to organizations. He comments, "I have been in just about every organization in Kaplan. I am a previous JC member, a member of the Lions Club and a past Lions President, a charter member of the Knights of Columbus, a member of the 4th Degree K of C, and a member of the Cattleman's Association.

Ivan J. Bourque

The original building of Bank of Kaplan on the corner of Cushing and 2nd Street. Opened as Kaplan State Bank March 17, 1928. Original building still within walls of present bank.
This photo was taken on the east side of Cushing Avenue on Feb. 3, 1913...the wedding day of Jules Henry Deshotels, Sr. and Amelie Daire Fontenot. Charles Saint and his wife Aimee Daire Mouillaud. They are the last four people on the right. Mr. Saint was the station manager of the Kaplan Southern Pacific Railway Depot. Mrs. Saint was a pharmacist, owner and operator of the Drug Store, soda fountain, restaurant and hotel located at the corner of Cushing and First Street. Mrs. Deshotels and Mrs. Saint were first cousins and direct descendants of Louis Juchereau, St. Dennis, founder of Natchitoches, Commandant of the Force and upon whose plantation land Northwestern La. is located. In the early days, the area was bare of trees, but many trees lining the south side of Abbeville to Gueydan were planted by these two ladies. Also in the photo, there is two of the most efficient and expeditious modes of transportation in that day...a version of both the deluxe covered carriage and the open air convertible. Mr. and Mrs. Jules H. Deshotels Sr. were the parents of Howard, Leo, Jules Jr., Mamie, Norbert, Curtis and Manning. Mr. and Mrs. Saint were the parents of Dr. Charles Saint, the first Kaplan native medical doctor, Hugh Saint. He served as the Port of New Orleans Immigration and Customs Supervisory Officer.

Kevin Guidry was the dark room supervisor at the Kaplan Herald in 1975.

This photo was taken in 1940. Ms. Hazel Feverjean stands in front of Kaplan's first taxi cab service.

This photo was taken at Connie Kaplan's bar mitzvah. The year is 1943.

Kevin Guidry was the dark room supervisor at the Kaplan Herald in 1975.

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This photo was taken in 1940. Ms. Hazel Feverjean stands in front of Kaplan’s first taxi cab service.

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In Perry, Louisiana, John Edward Fletcher served 16 years as Chief of Police. In Perry, Louisiana, John Edward Fletcher was born on July 23, 1883 and attended school there with his parents, John Albert Fletcher and Clara Stansbury Fletcher. In Perry, John Edward Fletcher had the distinction of operating the first electric light plant in the state of Louisiana.

On Sept. 10, 1908, he married Miss Pauline Eleazar, who had been born in Pont St. Esprit, Gard, France, in 1880, and grew up in Bayou, La., before moving to Kaplan.

In 1910, Mr. Fletcher purchased his father's lumber business. Later in 1918, he purchased a model T from Germany.

In 1925, Jack Kaplan and his brother-in-law, Abe Tartak, started the rice mill. It was called Liberty Feed Mill. That same year, Liberty Feed Mill became known as Liberty Rice Mill, Inc. By 1935, Liberty had become one of our state's largest rice growers, owners and merchants.

In 1927, during the mill's first year of operation, the mill produced 1,000,000 barrels of rice. By 1935, Liberty had produced 1,500,000 barrels of rice.

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Jack Kaplan had the vision of greater things to come in the rice industry and it's development of growing rice in the area. He then put in place an irrigation system for rice farmers, with the main source of water coming from the Vermilion River.

Kaplan quickly became a pioneer in the rice industry and the development of Southwest Louisiana. He decided to ask his nephew, Jack Kaplan, to come to America. Upon his arrival from Poland in 1914, Jack was enrolled in school to learn English.

In 1914, Jack came to Kaplan, where he immediately began his career in the rice industry as warehouseman. Working his way through the ranks, Jack was made manager of Liberty Farms, which was acquired in 1929.

In 1938, Jack Kaplan and his brother-in-law, Abe Tartak, acquired Liberty Feed Mill. That same year, Liberty Feed Mill became known as Liberty Rice Mill, Inc. By 1950, Liberty had become one of our state's largest rice growers, owners and merchants.

During 1970, through the untimely deaths and retirements, Mr. Kaplan had a new management team in place. J.R. Vincent was promoted to Sales Manager and Secretary/Bookkeeper of the operations. In 1971, the growth of Liberty Rice Mill continued. The mill's annual production of rice increased to 2,000,000 barrels.

In 1974, construction began on the riverfront annex, a state-of-the-art rice mill. The Milling Department was completely remodeled that year, and a new modern machinery and a new electrical system was added.

In 1998, Jack Kaplan had served for over 30 years in the business. He was succeeded by his son John E. Kaplan. The late Mr. Kaplan's wife, Libby Blum Kaplan, remained active in the business and served as Vice-President until her death in 1993.

In 1984, a Russian-Jewish immigrant, Abram Kaplan, came to this area with only a pack on his back. The area was considered marshland and useless because it was wet with poor drainage.

Abraham Kaplan began to accumulate large portions of this land. He drained the land and encouraged people to settle here. He then put in place an irrigation system for rice farmers, with the main source of water coming from the Vermilion River.

The drive for better rice was always a goal of the Kaplan family. This goal was realized in 1984, when the rice mill was opened.

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In 2004, construction began on the riverfront annex, a state-of-the-art rice mill. The Milling Department was completely remodeled that year, and a new modern machinery and a new electrical system was added.

Today, the facility employs 125 people.

**HISTORY OF LIBERTY RICE MILL**

A 1948 aerial photo of Liberty Rice Mill.

The facility employs 125 people.

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**Mr. Fletcher owned and operated his own rice mill in the vicinity of J.E. Fletcher, Yvonne Fletcher, Brenda Fletcher and Summerfield Stansbury family and a pioneer settler in Southwest Louisiana.**

**Mr. Fletcher's paternal grandfather, James Fletcher, was the father of that farm's first baseball team. He was a member of the Maryland and lived in the vicinity of J.E. Fletcher, Yvonne Fletcher, Brenda Fletcher and Summerfield Stansbury family. Maryland, and lived in the vicinity of J.E. Fletcher, Yvonne Fletcher, Brenda Fletcher and Summerfield Stansbury family.**

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This photo, taken in 1960 of the Freezo in Kaplan, will bring back many memories to the baby boomers. Shown is Herman Bertrand who owned and operated the Freezo from 1958 to 1973.

Mayfield Adams

Mayfield Adam (Crawford), occasionally he changed his name to Adam, was born in 1829. He married Marguerite Hubert (daughter of Joseph Hubert and Marguerite Grimmer) in 1857. He died in Kaplan in 1934, while living with his granddaughter.

Mayfield had children when he left to serve in the Confederate Army during the Civil War. He was discharged in Shreveport. His brother-in-law was killed out of state so Adam selected the C.O. to bury him at the end of the street, so he could come back later to bring the body home. Having to walk home after being discharged, the widows are seen from the fields along the way, making the journey in a month's time.

Mayfield returned to the grave with an old dress cart and many blankets. He wrapped the body and started home. He said the stomach was overwhelm.ing. He became a attendant or faint healer. He would heal with prayers and practiced the most of folk life. He was very religious. In 1973 an 87-year-old woman remembered that he was a prophet of the farm. He had told a group of children, to whom he was teaching catechism, that they would live to see flying ships. After he had been home a short while from the war, there were matters to see about, such as burying the children. His daughter Ame was four years old when she was baptized.

The farm had flooded one year during the war, so Mayfield looked for another site to farm. They moved to the Garyan area. There the alligators were so abundant that some had to be killed so Mayfield could earn livestock. After his wife died, he went to live with a child near Bayou Que de Tete Bridge, south of Crowley, on the Kaplan-Crowley highway. This was the Bertrand farm, and his son Raymond had married Elaine Bertrand and had bought a part of the farm from his father-in-law.

His next move was to the Masou area between Kaplan and Abbeville. There he lived in his little house and grew fruits and vegetables and treated people. He never lacked companionship and was highly respected. One of the neighbors was a young man who remembered Mayfield and spoke of him with great respect. He said he grew beautiful peaches and melons, and helped plant the first signs of the Cross. Mayfield never smoked, chewed, or drank liquor. He always went to bed early and woke up early. He claimed to have seen the Blessed Virgin Mary three days before he died.

While walking on his way to somewhere, she told him he would die in three days. So he immediately turned and walked back to the place. Three days later he was found dead.

Mayfield had 27 grandchildren, 29 great grandchildren and 23 great-great grandchildren at the time of his death.
Abrom Kaplan, founder of the City of Kaplan

The city of Kaplan was founded by Abrom Kaplan. It is a monument to the foresight and courage of its father, Abrom Kaplan, who had a vision that a quarter-of-a-million-dollar church be erected in Kaplan, which has grown to a magnificent and important structure.

In his vision, Kaplan brought to this part of Southwest Louisiana an interest that enabled him to reclaim thousands of acres of land by huge drainage systems, to build and develop the first rice irrigation system in the world. By constantly improving, building and developing production where others feared to venture, he carved a vast empire out of the waste lands of Southwest Louisiana.

He erected and owned rice mills at Crowley, Breauxbridge, Opelousas, Abbeville and DeRidder. Later he acquired a large rice mill at De Witt, Arkansas. He spent vast sums to drain the waste marshlands, which through his insight were turned into productive rice lands.

As a pioneering leader, he led the way in making Southwest Louisiana the greatest rice producing center in the United States, and a great share of the industry's progress can be traced to his pioneering efforts. Kaplan was a great leader, builder, and developer of this region.

The Kaplan Herald, January 2000, Page 9
Jack M. Kaplan, co-founder of Liberty Rice Mill

Jack M. Kaplan was born in Poland, then a part of Russia, December 27, 1899, son of Milton and Ida Kaplan who were both natives of Poland.

His father died at a comparatively early age in his native land and, following his death, Jack M. Kaplan's widowed mother came to America in 1919 and settled in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. She later married the Rev. Taylor, a Jewish Rabbi, and liked out her life in New York City.

Jack M. Kaplan passed his early boyhood in his native land and in 1914, at the age of 15, he came to America at the invitation of his uncle, Abrom Kaplan, who had attained a place of eminence as a pioneer in the rice industry and as a builder and developer of Southwest Louisiana.

Upon coming to America, Jack M. Kaplan landed at Galveston, Texas, and soon after his arrival, he entered St. Mary's Seminary at La Porte, Texas, where he continued his education in English for the following two years.

He then entered the University of the South, Sewanee, Tennessee, where he continued his education in the rice industry and as a builder and developer of Southwest Louisiana.

In 1913, he served his apprenticeship in all phases of the rice milling industry in association with A. Kaplan Industries.

In 1930, he was made manager of the Liberty Farms, Inc., another Abrom Kaplan investment consisting of 10,000 acres of land in Vermilion Parish, principally devoted to rice growing.

In 1934, Jack M. Kaplan and his brother-in-law, Abe Tartak, acquired the Liberty Feed Mill in Kaplan and converted it into what is now known as Liberty Rice Mill, Inc. The business was incorporated in 1934 with Jack M. Kaplan as President and Abe Tartak as Secretary and Treasurer.

In addition to his activities in the rice industry, Jack M. Kaplan was prominently connected with other phases of business life in Kaplan. He was a member and Vice President of the New Iberia Jewish Temple.

On June 26, 1927, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Jack M. Kaplan married Libby Blum of Milwaukee. They were the parents of three children.

(1) Conrad M. Kaplan
(2) Beverly Ruth Kaplan
(3) Brian Howard Kaplan.
You are looking down Cushing Boulevard facing north. The old Charles Hotel was located where Thrifty Way is now located. The two individuals are unidentified. The year is 1915.

Colins T. Broussard and his wife Emedina
Colins was one of Kaplan's first settlers. On August 1, 1902 he bought, from Irving Irrigation Company, the lots on what is now Church Avenue. Like other, he lived in "Tent City" while construction of his house was in progress.
After completion of his house, he moved his wife and six children to their new home. Colins was one of the first voters who signed a petition to incorporate Kaplan.