UP the lazy Mississippi River, about 60 miles from New Orleans, is the city of Donaldsonville, La., the seat of Ascension Parish.

Three hundred years ago, this thickly wooded area where the Mississippi River joined Bayou Lafourche was inhabited by the Chitimachas and the Houmas Indians. But in 1756, the exiled Acadians from Nova Scotia in Canada found their way to the bayou country of South Louisiana. Here, they cleared the land for farming, fished in the streams and hunted in the woods. Here they found a home.

But it wasn't the Acadians who gave the town of Donaldsonville its name. A young Englishman, resident of New Orleans, William Donaldson, had a dream of building a city many miles away on the Mississippi River. Although he thought of himself as a planter, he was also an industrialist and civic promoter. He chose the upriver land, bought it for $12,000 and established his town in 1805. He called it Donaldson.

A zealous man, Donaldson saw to it that the village expanded. He gave streets their names, and managed to get the first post office in Ascension Parish. He even got the legislature to incorporate the town. It was he who felt the town was a better location for the Louisiana capital than New Orleans or the proposed site further upriver at Baton Rouge.

He died in 1822 and the legislature...