THE SUGARCANE FESTIVAL

A Brief History
And
"Behind The Scene Look"
at
New Iberia's Annual Festival

By Connie C. Bourque

It originated with one man's dream.
Charles Stevenson, a native Californian, saw the economic potential of the sugar cane industry, and knowing how the people of this area had such a zest for life, launched the idea of having an annual festival where the sugar cane crop could be celebrated.

In 1937 when the million-dollar sugar plant for the Iberia Sugar Co-Operative was completed, the people of Iberia Parish set out to make Stevenson's dream into reality.

The president of the Chamber of Commerce, the late W.D. Reynolds, and Colonel Paul English took charge of the dedication ceremonies for the mill and assigned committees to work on various phases of the festival.

Area merchants and business men sponsored advertising space in newspapers, the townfolk were given the task of voting for the first Queen Sugar, and all of Iberia Parish waited in anticipation.

The big day was set for October 27, 1937 and it was Louisiana's fourth-ever festival.

The day began with the dedication of the new sugar plant where W.D. Reynolds praised the fundraising efforts (for the mill) of Mayor Joseph A. Daigre, Sheriff P.A. Landry, and Leon Landry.

At 2:30 pm the people gathered to witness the first Sugar Cane Festival Parade which featured several bands and the 11 Iberia beauties who were in contention for Queen Sugar.

Climaxing the celebration was the Grand Ball where, by the votes of the townfolk, Miss Alberta Mes-tayer, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Eugene Mestayer, was crowned Queen Sugar I by then Lt. Governor Earl K. Long who reigned as King Suc-rose I.

The joyous crowd danced until the early morning hours to the music of the Claiborne Swing Band.

"BEHIND THE SCENES"

Today's annual festival is a far cry from the one day celebration in 1937.

One day has grown into four during which many events are held to celebrate and promote our sugar cane industry. Some of these events are the "Blessing of the Crops", the Harvest Celebration, the Royal Reception, the Coronation Ball, various parades, and the street fair.

For the past two years the Southeast Tourism Society has named the festival as one of the Top 20 Events in the southeastern United States.

It would not be that way without the continued efforts of the Louisiana Sugar Cane Festival and Fair Association.

"Without the help of the volun-
teers and local civic clubs, there would be no festival," said Miriam Krepper, president of the association.

"These people all hold regular jobs, yet they donate most of their spare time to help organize events and raise funds for the festival. I am proud to be the president of such a dedicated group," she said.

She also mentioned more vol-
unteers are needed and she would be grateful for the additional help.

When asked who she thought has contributed the most to the asso-
ciation, Mrs. Krepper said it would be very hard to choose just one per-
son. "One of the festival's first presi-
dents, Dr. G.A. Ackal was instrumen-
tal in the construction of the Sugar Cane Festival Building," she said; "However, the one person who I think has made the festival what it is currently is Miriam Krepper.

Miriam Krepper
Louisiana Sugarcane Festival President

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today is Mr. Robert J. Miranda. As president of the association for 28 years, his efforts should not go unmentioned.

Robert "Bobby" Miranda served as president of the festival from 1956 to 1984 and was instrumental in making it one of Louisiana's largest state festivals.

In a recent interview he said, "The Sugar Cane Festival meant my life to me. I enjoyed promoting the Louisiana Sugar Cane industry and working with the festival and I'll always have memories of the King Sucroses and Queen Sugars and the Sugarlumps. They meant a lot to me and will always be a part of my life."

The "Sugarlumps" were the official goodwill ambassadors for the Sugar Cane Festival for many years. They were originated by Miranda and New Iberia dance teacher, Lester Mae Folse, and they danced and entertained at various events and festivals promoting the Sugar Cane Festival.

Miriam Krepper's contributions should not go unmentioned either. At 15 years-old she was chosen as one of the original six "Sugar Lumps" and has volunteered all of her spare time and efforts since. It was because of those efforts that she was voted in as president by the Board of Directors in 1984 when Mr. Miranda retired.

This year the association will be holding its first press conference. At this time they will announce the name of King Sucrose XLV.

When asked about the current membership drive, Mrs. Krepper said anyone may become a member. Annual dues are $25, and entitles members to two tickets for each of the four receptions held during the festival.

The proceeds from the membership drive, the festival receipts, donations, and money from fundraisers held throughout the year, all determine the quality of the next year's festival, and how the association is able to promote our sugar cane industry.

Part of those proceeds also go towards paying the year-long expenses of Queen Sugar who plays an important part in promoting the association.

The street fair, put on by Harry Burke Shows, is the association's largest fundraiser.

This year the festival is also holding a raffle of the original artwork of the 1985 Official Festival Poster painted by world-renowned artist Oscar Ortiz.

The drawing will be held during the Royalty Parade at the Gazebo, Bouligny Plaza, Main Street, in New Iberia. Tickets are now being sold and can be obtained by calling 369-9323 and leaving a message.