Survey Recalls Coushatta’s Struggle

(Special to The Times-Picayune)

Baton Rouge, La.—Coushatta, La., parish seat of Red River parish, has managed to stay in existence approximately 80 years despite (1) floods that washed away its original site, (2) two disastrous fires, and (3) a riot that made history.

The history of the town and its parish is related in a survey of parish resources and facilities, published last week by the state public works department in cooperation with the parish development board.

The land on which “Coushatta Chute,” as it was then called, was originally established has long since, the history reveals, been destroyed by the meandering and treacherous Red River.

But the people of the town, the story goes, then, as now, were never discouraged by calamities. They moved their business houses and homes from the caving river banks.

The two major fires, the historical section of the survey reports, occurred in 1874 and 1918, and the last one resulted in a complete face-lifting for the town, including construction nearly entirely of brick.

The riot which nearly tore the town asunder is reported by older citizens of the parish to have resulted from a carpetbag plot that was simple: Negroes were to kill all the white men here and leave the community in their control.

There was some shooting, according to the history reports, but the plot leaked out, was foiled, and seven white men were arrested. They promised to leave the community and never return, and left in accordance with their promise. Only to be shot down by an armed group when they got about 40 miles from Coushatta.

This shooting was followed by others of the vengeance and feud variety, including some fancy marksmanship by “a stranger in a long black cloak” who rode into town and calmly shot enemies on a ferry crossing the river.

One victim of this shooting, who lost both arms as a result, asked for a federal guard and later, the history continues, was sent by the federal government to Canada.

“This event,” the history says, “marked the restoration of the rule of the parish to the white people.”