RUMORS THAT NAPOLEON was going to seize Spanish Florida spread among the American settlers of the area in 1810. Their teeth already on edge because of Spanish corruption and discrimination against them, the settlers of what are now the Florida parishes of Louisiana held a mass meeting June 23 of that year to unite against the foreign menace and to see what could be done towards a more honest and democratic government.

The boundaries of Louisiana, which Napoleon had sold to the United States in 1803, were ill-defined. But it was understood that the Floridas, which stretched along the Gulf as far west as the Mississippi, were not in the transfer since they belonged to Spain.

The Spanish governor, Don Carlos Duhaut de Lassus, pretended to concede the reforms the colonists sought but meanwhile made secret plans to crush the rebellious Americans.

On Sept. 20 the colonists intercepted a message de Lassus sent to the governor of Pensacola asking for troops to put down an insurrection.

Colonial leaders decided their only hope was to strike first. They determined to capture the Spanish fort at Baton Rouge.

By the time the Colonists arrived outside the town the night of Sept. 21, their number had increased to 75 heavily armed men, including horse and foot soldiers.

But the fort was a strong one. A nine-foot ditch and a high stockade wall, pierced by numerous cannon, surrounded it. And the commander of the garrison, Lt. Antonio Grand-Pre, son of the former governor, had been alerted by de Lassus' spies and was ready for a fight.

Obviously the Americans would stand no chance in a frontal assault. The answer was strategy.

The garrison kept cows, which grazed outside the fort during the night and returned for milking through an entrance on the river side at dawn.

This time when the cows came home, 21 members of the Bayou Sara Horse under Isaac Johnson came with them. A heavy early morning fog helped conceal them from sleepy sentinels and when at last the Spaniards realized something was wrong, Americans were inside the fort.

Lt. Grand-Pre ordered his men to fire but in the scattered shots that followed not a horseman was hit. The Americans returned fire, killing Grand-Pre and one of his soldiers and wounding several others. The Spaniards gave up.

De Lassus, who was in the town of Baton Rouge, heard the shooting and ran into the fort, sword in hand, to see what was wrong. When he refused to turn over his sword, an American clubbed him down with his musket and would have bayoneted him but for his superior officer.

By the dawn's early light the colors of Spain came down and a blue flag with a single star, the emblem of the Republic of West Florida, went up. Shortly afterward the United States annexed the territory, which was perfectly all right with the American colonists.


You are invited to submit unusual Deep South stories. $5 will be paid for each one used. Manuscripts cannot be returned unless stamped self-addressed envelope is enclosed. Indicate source of material.

DIXIE, January 17, 1960

The Trojan Cows of Baton Rouge