Report Shows Vertical Rays of Sun Never Hit Ascension

Parish Average for Rain Is 60 Inches a Year

By CLAIRE PUNKEY

DONALDSONVILLE, La. — The vertical rays of the sun never strike Ascension Parish. This is one of many interesting findings in a report just completed by the Parish Council on Economic Development. On the rainy side, the parish average for a year is 60 inches, occurring most heavily in July and August, with October the driest month.

Ascension Parish has more women than men, a trend that began around 1950. In 1960, when the federal census was tabulated, the female population of the parish was 14,061, while the males trailed with a count of 13,846. However, back in 1940, in many age groups the women outnumbered the men. In 1960, the ages from birth to 14 showed a slight preponderance of males, and among the 45-to-49-year-olds men had an edge.

MEDICAL AGE

Ascension, according to the report, has a relatively young population. The median age in 1960 was about 22, three years below that of the state, which was 25, and far below the national median age of 29½.

Ascension Parish has shown a tremendous change in its rural-urban population in the 20-year period from 1940 to 1960. In 1940 Ascension Parish was 47.5 per cent rural. Ten years later the rural percentage had dropped to 34.5 per cent, and by 1960 it was down to 5.6 per cent.

In 1960 the Town of Gonzales joined Donaldsonville as an urban area. Until then Donaldsonville was the lone representative in the parish of the urban way of life.

RELATIVELY FLAT

There are 312 square miles in Ascension, a total of some 197,000 acres in what has been described as “the terrace and Mississippi flood plain region of southeast Louisiana.” The land is relatively flat in the southern part of the parish.

In some areas the elevation rises, reaching 20-35 feet toward the north. Divided by the Mississippi River into two parts, the parish has 80 per cent of its land east of the river and 20 per cent west of the stream.

In the east are Bayou Manchac, the Amite River and Blind River. The principal outlet for western Ascension Parish, the Gulf of Mexico is Bayou Lafourche.

The parish also has two soil regions, those of the recent Mississippi Bottomland and those of the Loessial Terrace.

RAPID GROWTH

In 1966 the parish’s estimated population was 34,000, an increase over the 28,000 recorded in the 1960 census because of rapid growth of industry here in the past several years.

The Louisiana Department of Public Works gives Ascension Parish a total of 197,120 acres, with forest lands making up more than half of the total for a count of 103,700. Agriculture has 70,005 acres and the water area comprises 7,120 acres.

Returning to population figures, a study revealed that 60 per cent of the parish population lived west of the Mississippi River in 1950, and 40 per cent west of it. In the next decade the west side population remained relatively stable, while the east bank population soared 36 per cent.

The Sunshine Bridge, although in St. James parish, links the parish of Ascension’s two sides and is credited with affecting the population’s return to a more equable ratio since it opened in October, 1964.

RANKED 30TH

Ascension ranked 30th among Louisiana’s 64 parishes in population in 1960, with 93 people per square mile. The committee making the parish study, headed by County Agent Claude Songy, found that the parish increased its population primarily through natural increase and assumed this population is growing from within.

The report shows girls better educated than boys in the parish with the median for females was eight years compared with the 7.6 years for males in 1960.

In agriculture, the number of farms decreased 40 per cent between 1950 and 1964. The remaining farms are larger. In 1968, important crops in the parish in order of economic importance were:

- Sugarcane, soybeans, corn, strawberries, tomatoes and other vegetables. Livestock rankings were: beef cattle, poultry, hogs and horses.

The report notes “The parish’s principal asset is its water resources which consist of both surface and ground water. Ascension, it records, “has the only bulk marine terminal on the Mississippi between New Orleans and Baton Rouge.”