Quiet Bayou Lafourche Banks Were Once Scene of Warfare

Visit to Ascension Parish by Taylor Recalled

By CLAIRE PUNEKY
DONALDSVILLE, La. — Veterans Day is a time to pause and reflect on the sacrifices made by Americans in defense of their country and to measure the courage and loyalty that went into their response to the call to duty.

Such a reflection from the quiet banks of Bayou Lafourche, once the scene of devastating warfare, brings the realization that the state of Louisiana and a war that would reach its southern tip were both born in the same year.

Louisiana, admitted to statehood on April 30, 1812, was only seven weeks old when war was declared between the United States and Great Britain on June 18, 1812.

This war would eventually reach into the Bayou Lafourche country and draw many of its men into what would be the Battle of New Orleans, an unnecessary conflict because it came after peace was declared. But a communication lack kept the news from reaching the battle scene.

SPEAKER NAMED

In 1812, Stephen A. Hopkins of Ascension Parish was elected speaker of the Louisiana House of Representatives. Later he would be an officer on the staff of Gen. Andrew Jackson at New Orleans, then return to Donaldsonville to die at the hand of an assassin.

He was fatally shot in October, 1815, after he had won a case for his client. The man a judgment was brought against sought Hopkins out and shot him.

Capt. E. F. Nicholls led the men of Ascension Parish into ranks of the military in the Mexican War in May, 1846. They left Donaldsonville by steamboat and arrived at New Orleans where they embarked for the battlefront to join Gen. Zachary Taylor.

Gen. Taylor repaid the people of Ascension Parish for their help when he visited here later and a reception was held in his honor.

TAYLOR THANKED

The legislature in April, 1847, adopted a resolution of thanks to Zachary Taylor and those under his command, and mentioned in the resolution by name was E. F. Nicholls and his brother, both of Donaldsonville, for gallantry in capturing Monterey, Mexico.

The following year Edward F. and Robert W. Nicholls received from the people of Donaldsonville swords of honor for their action in the Mexican War.

The next war would be within the nation itself and would last for four years, leaving the South devastated and its people in poverty.

The year before the war began, in 1860, the Donaldsonville Cannoniers, which had come into being some years earlier, continued their drills and gunnery practice. There were rumblings that war was imminent.

FIRST GUN FIRED

Early in 1861 came the Secession Convention and on April 12, 1861, the first gun of the Civil War was fired on orders of a Louisiana, Confederate Gen. P.G.T. Beauregard.

Donaldsonville was bombarded and burned in 1862 and that year fire destroyed the Ascension parish courthouse. Fort Butler went up on the outskirts of the city, named for Gen. Benjamin Butler of the Union Army. Alternately it was occupied by both sides.

Up and down Bayou Lafourche battle raged, and extended to plantations where once-flourishing sugar cane was trampled beneath booted feet. There were Ascension men at Vicksburg when its surrender to the Federal forces came.

War ended, and 1866 found Donaldsonville enlarging its boundaries. Gradually it made its way back and had an opportunity to live in peace until once again a call to arms came for those who, again part of the United States citizenry, would defend their country.

BOARD STEAMER

In the spring of 1898 the call came. This time it was to the Spanish-American War, and a contingent of local boys boarded the steamer Gracie Kent for Burnside across the Mississippi River. From there they moved to the war zone.

In May an additional number of volunteers left for the war that was to be for them the last conflict of the 19th century.

But the 20th century had battles in store for those of Bayou Lafourche who would come after them. Each time the bugle sounded many local men answered it. They responded to World War I, then to World War II. Then there was a call to Korea which they answered.

Today they are answering the call to Vietnam and, like those in earlier conflicts, some of them have responded with their lives.