West Lake Was Hub For West Calcasieu

WEST LAKE—Settlers pushing into southwestern Louisiana after the Revolutionary War usually stopped when they reached the Rio Hondo River, which was later named the Calcasieu River, lay a strip of neutral ground claimed by both Spain and France.

Although this territory between the Rio Hondo and Sabine River was in dispute, the Spanish allowed France to exercise authority in civil matters from the leading French settlement west of the Mississippi River — Natchitoches.

Shortly after the United States purchased Louisiana from France in 1803, hardy pioneers began to enter the neutral territory seeking to make permanent homes.

One of the first settlers in the territory west of the Calcasieu was William V. Smith who acquired title to 640 acres of ground that included the present site of West Lake.

Numerous sailing ships plied the Gulf of Mexico in the early 1830's and West Lake soon became a port of call for the schooners.

Without any settlement of note within 60 miles north, south or west, the town became the logical trading site for many pioneers settling in the Rio Hondo claim.

Lumber was becoming a thriving business in the area and in 1839 the King Lumber Mill was located near where the present Kelly - Weber Co. plant is built.

Allen J. Perkins organized and began operating a lumber mill in 1834 near the present site of the Lake Charles Harbor and Terminal District's rock crushing plant.

Planer Mill Was Located On Ryan

The lake Charles Planing Mill was established in 1888 by Grant Mutersbaugh and was first known as the Mutersbaugh Planing Mill.

In May 1886 the mill was purchased and chartered as the Lake Charles Planing Mill and had $25,000 of "paid in" stock.

The officers of the new firm were Grant Mutersbaugh, president; N. D. Pope, vice-president; E. Irwin, secretary; Louis J. Bell, treasurer, and Herman W. Rock.

The plant was located on Ryan Street with 135 feet of frontage and extended into the block to Coin Street. It was near the corner of Clarence Street and was in touch with the St. Louis Watkins and Gulf freight depot.

West Lake Ferry Boat 'Hazel'

The commissary of the Perkins - Miller Lumber Co. became known as the most complete store west of the Calcasieu, if not in the entire parish.

Heavy freight wagons from all points west of the Calcasieus poured into the town to take on supplies from "the big store on the west side."

In 1896, Arthur Wachstein purchased the merchandising part of the Perkins-Miller operation while Rudolph Krause and W. H. Managan took over the mill operation.

The first school here was built by E. H. Green in 1847 on a building in a swamp area near the present Olin Chemical Co. plant. Molly Jenkins later became a teacher at the school.

When the talk of dividing Calcasieu Parish began, the community here was well established and one of the most prosperous in the state.

With the location of this mill the area now known as West Lake began to thrive.

The settlement centered around the Bagdad community which boasted two businesses of its own, Grout's Shingle Mill and Smart's Lumber Co.

Soon after Perkins began his operations, he was joined by Charles Miller to form the Perkins-Miller Lumber Co.

The large operation which could turn out 100,000 feet of lumber daily immediately attracted additional families to the area.

Some of the early families moving into the area were the Managans, Landrys, Escoubas, Churs, Goss, Hampsons and Johnsons.

These early settlers were engaged in numerous businesses and occupations and carried on extensive trade in the area.

In 1883, Perkins subdivided a 160-acre tract and established the site of West Lake proper.

Five years before Perkins laid out his subdivisions, the United States established a post office here and named it West Lake Charles.

The old Hortman's Ferry for which operated from the Bagdad community to the foot of North Byram Street in Lake Charles was replaced by the steam ferry "Hazel" in 1890.

The "Hazel" was the largest boat on the Calcasieu River and made hour-long trips between its dock here at the Perkins Street and the ferry landing on Pujol Street in Lake Charles.

The ferry was owned and operated by Capt. A. W. Weber who came to the parish two years after the end of the Civil War. He later helped form Locke - Moore Lumber Co., which was located near the present site of Pittsburgh Plate Glass Chemical Co.

The town received added growth in 1889 when C. E. Heisler established a large machine shop here.

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In 1894, a group of individuals built a railroad in West Calcasieu and named it the Calcasieu, Vernon and Shreveport Railroad Co. The railroad operated for many years bringing timber from West Calcasieu and West Beauregard to the mills along the Calcasieu.

With one of the world's greatest supplies of timber at hand, it was logical to establish a shipyard in the area.

Shortly after 1900, the Clooney Towing and Construction Co. established one of the finest shipyards in the world in the Lockport community.

This new industry eventually became the largest in the area employing almost 400 men at its peak. The four main schooners made at the shipyards with lumber grown and processed here became famous in every southern port of the Western Hemisphere.

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