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AN ADDRESS

"The Development of
Southwest Louisiana"

DELIVERED AT THE

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BY W. W. DUSON
CROWLEY, LA.



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THE
DEVELOPMENT OF
SOUTHWEST
LOUISIANA

Compliments of
W. W. DUSON
Crowley Louisiana

ADDRESS

When your arrangement committee placed me on this program for an address upon the development of Southwest Louisiana, they were evidently laboring under the impression that this convention would be in session for two weeks instead of two days, and that at least one week of that time would be allotted to me instead of a few minutes, for the reason, gentlemen, that you might listen to an address for an entire week regarding the wonderful development of the several parishes embraced in the term Southwest Louisiana, more particularly Calcasieu, Acadia and Vermilion, and even then the story would not half be told.

However, bearing in mind that the story of the world's creation was told in about two hundred words, I shall be as brief as possible in my remarks upon the development which has been accomplished in this, the garden spot of the great southwest.

Figures and statistics are usually very dry and uninteresting matter, especially for men like yourselves who must deal with them six days in the week, and, perhaps, dream of them during your Sunday nap. In fact, some one recently said in support of his claim as to the total absence of interest in figures, that statistics and the telephone directory were the only things in print not yet dramatized.

However, in some figures there may be found facts and results so astounding and so remarkable as to be truly dramatic, pregnant with the story of work, energies and efforts; of undying faith in spite of ridicule and doubt, but over which the triumph of success stands pre-eminent before you to-day.

It is such figures as these that I want to present to you today to show the development of Southwest Louisiana. In fact, owing to the vast ground which could be properly covered in an address upon the subject given to me, it is only by these figures that the story of the several parishes referred to,

—their condition a score of years ago and the present day, their development and their wealth of today, can be concisely told, and they will show you an improvement so rapid, so steady and withal so successful as to astonish even you who are accustomed to deal with big transactions and big results.

Inasmuch as the greater portion of that section of our state referred to as Southwest Louisiana is within the parishes of Calcasieu, Acadia and Vermilion, I shall, with your kind permission, devote these remarks and the figures mentioned to these three parishes; dividing the space of time during which their greatest development has been accomplished into two periods,—the first to be the ten years of what might be called “the period of awakening,” from 1886 to 1896; and the second, from 1896 to the present day, which I shall take the liberty of terming “a period of primary development,” for the reason that it is my firm belief that in Southwest Louisiana we have been and are at the present time merely passing through a primary period of develop-

ment, which is but the opening of the gateway to the great future which lies before this section of our state. By means of these two periods and the comparative figures in connection with the same, I shall endeavor to paint you a picture of Southwest Louisiana as it was twenty years ago, ten years ago, and what it is at the present day.

Since the real basis for all revenues and expenditures of the state, parochial or municipal governments must be the assessed valuation of the property within their respective boundaries, I know of no better basis than this to adopt as a means of showing you the increase in valuation of the property in the three parishes named; and, therefore, I would ask your kind attention to the fact that in 1886 the assessed valuation of Calcasieu parish (great in size as well as in development) was but \$3,191,125. In 1896 it was more than double that figure, amounting to \$7,379,455; and we also find that during her period of primary development Calcasieu has averaged even a little better

than her sister parishes of Acadia and Vermilion, the assessed valuation of the great border parish in 1905 having reached the enormous proportions of \$19,450,590, or considerably more than six times what they were twenty years ago, and even at that, you should bear in mind that within the boundary lines of the parish of Calcasieu there are thousands and thousands of acres of land still awaiting the march of this great development of the southwest.

That our little parish of Acadia has been equally as wide awake in the development of her fertile areas is shown by the fact that her assessed valuation of \$1,132,025 in 1887 (the first year of her existence as a separate parish from that of St. Landry) was more than doubled during the succeeding ten years and in 1896 amounted to \$2,624,110; and at the close of our period of primary development we find that, as a result of the development of her resources, the assessed valuation of Acadia parish had increased even more rapidly than during her awakening, and in 1905 amounted to \$6,-

430,895, or six times greater than it was in her initial year of 1887.

While Vermilion parish has not taken the strides accomplished by Calcasieu and Acadia during the past twenty years, yet even the increase in her assessed valuations are worthy of careful consideration, and of the plaudits due to great results. In 1886 her assessments showed a total of \$1,635,756, while ten years later, in 1896, they had been nearly doubled and amounted to \$2,804,796. During the past ten years her development has been sufficient to bring the assessed valuation in 1905 up to \$4,622,245; and it is quite conservative to say that, as a result of the great work of reclamation now being accomplished by the drainage enterprises actually at work within the boundaries of Vermilion parish, the next few years will find a more rapid increase in her assessments than ever before accomplished.

It is almost sufficient to say that these figures speak so loudly for themselves as to require no further comment, but before passing from this matter of assessments I would

like to call your kind attention to the fact that the assessments for the entire state of Louisiana in 1880 were \$177,096,459 and in 1905 they amounted to \$396,821,157. Truly a wonderful increase, but when it is taken into consideration that the total assessed value of the entire state increased during a period of twenty-five years only to the extent of a little over double, and that during a period of less than twenty years the assessments of Southwest Louisiana, especially Calcasieu and Acadia parishes, increased six times what they were at the beginning of that period, it can readily be seen that the development of Southwest Louisiana has been far ahead of the state as a whole, or any other individual section of it, no matter where located.

Naturally, the revenues received will also be found an advantageous basis for comparison during these periods of our development in this part of the state. Therefore I call your attention to the fact that in 1886 the taxes paid by Calcasieu parish amounted to only \$19,146.75, while during the following

ten years they were considerably more than doubled and in 1896 amounted to \$44,276.73; and we find that in 1905 Calcasieu's portion of the state's revenues had increased to the large amount of \$116,703.54—these figures, of course, referring only to the actual state taxes of six mills, and not including any special, parochial or municipal taxes.

We find very nearly the same increase in Acadia parish, her state taxes for 1887 of \$6,792.15 having been nearly doubled during her period of awakening, amounting in 1896 to \$15,744.66; and during the year 1905 the taxes of our little parish increased to six times what they were during the first year of her existence or \$38,585.37.

Vermilion parish in 1886 paid into the state treasury \$9,814.53 in taxes, and in 1896 increased that sum to \$16,829.85, while in 1905 her development and increased assessments brought her state taxes up to \$27,733.47.

It would seem almost unnecessary to go further than a presentation of these figures

on assessments and taxes to demonstrate to you the development of Southwest Louisiana, but there are so many other evidences that I desire to present a few more of them for your consideration. Take, for instance, the taxable area of the three parishes named twenty and ten years ago and at the present time. In Acadia parish in 1887 the taxable area amounted to only 216,287 acres and ten years later (1896) it had increased to 349,345 acres, while in 1905 her taxable area amounted to 386,988 acres. The increase during the past ten years was not greater for the reason that, having already been a portion of one of the best settled agricultural parishes of the state, there was left only a comparatively small area to be taken up and rendered taxable.

In Vermilion parish in 1886 the taxable area amounted to 647,311 acres and in 1896 to 736,851 acres, while in 1905 it had been increased to 791,000 acres, being, of course, a great increase over twenty years ago but it is in the figures for Calcasieu parish, even more than Acadia and Vermilion, that we

find the greatest increase and the best evidence of her development. In 1886 her taxable area was only 1,331,725 acres and during her period of awakening, ending 1896, the increase has been only comparatively small, that year amounting to 1,600,202 acres; but during the following ten years, ending in 1905, we find the figures of twenty years ago almost doubled, the taxable area of Calcasieu parish in the year just recently closed having increased to 2,388,291 acres of land, figures regarding which it is a mere waste of your time to make further comment.

In educational matters we can point with pride to the results accomplished in Calcasieu, Acadia and Vermilion parishes, both as regards the amount paid by Southwest Louisiana into the current school fund of the state, and also in the increased enrollment of our public schools, the number of teachers employed and the number of schools in existence.

Calcasieu parish leads in this respect, her school taxes having increased from \$2,-

746.54 in 1886 to \$8,225.50 in 1896, an increase during her period of awakening of over three times what they were in 1886, while in 1905 they were fourteen times greater, amounting to \$25,060.52.

Acadia parish in 1888 paid into the current school fund only \$1,171.40, but in 1896 this had been increased to a little more than double, being \$2,903.45, while in 1905 our payments into the state school fund were ten times what they were twenty years ago, or \$10,449.63.

Vermilion parish in 1886 paid into the current school fund only \$1,602.71, which was increased in 1896 to \$2,941.06, and considerably more than doubled during her primary development, amounting in 1905 to \$6,246.66.

While our payment into the current school fund from the parishes of Southwest Louisiana are a matter of much importance and show wonderful increases, yet the records covering the increase in school facilities and attendance and the great question of educating our young people, give the most satis-

factory showing for the three parishes named.

Calcasieu parish in 1886 had an enrollment of only 1,250 pupils, 37 teachers and 37 schools, but her development along educational lines during the following ten years showed a most satisfactory increase and we find that in 1896 she boasted of 7,141 pupils, 150 teachers and 141 schools; and in 1905 of 8,159 pupils enrolled, 183 teachers and 155 public schools.

In 1888 Acadia parish had only 1,013 pupils with 28 teachers and 29 schools, having one school for which no teacher could be provided. In 1896 the number of pupils had been increased to 1,614 with 39 teachers and 37 schools; while in 1905 we had in our public schools 3,495 pupils enrolled, with 76 teachers and 58 schools.

In 1886 there were in Vermilion parish 469 pupils, 17 teachers and 17 schools, which had increased in 1896 to 1,760 pupils, 44 teachers and 40 schools. There was a still further increase during the next ten years until in 1905 Vermilion had 2,398

pupils upon the rolls of her public schools, with 50 teachers employed and 46 schools.

As regards the banking facilities in Southwest Louisiana: While you gentlemen are no doubt considerably more familiar with that phase of our development than I can be, yet at the same time I cannot refrain from calling your attention to the fact that in 1886, twenty years ago, the only local banking facilities enjoyed in Southwest Louisiana parishes along the Southern Pacific, outside of the private banking business conducted in Lake Charles by the J. B. Watkins Banking company, was one regularly organized bank in New Iberia, being the little Merchants Bank of that city, doing business on a capital of \$15,000.00, while today there are in that section of our state extending from New Iberia to the Sabine river thirty-two regularly organized national and state banks, having an aggregate capital of \$1,577,150, a total surplus of \$991,450, and whose undivided profits in March of this year amounted to \$346,218.00.

Of these thirty-two banks eight are located in Calcasieu parish with an aggregate capital of \$472,500, surplus of \$184,750 and undivided profits of \$118,521; six of them are in Acadia parish with an aggregate capital of \$305,000, surplus of \$201,500 and undivided profits of \$54,428; and three of them are found in Vermilion parish with aggregate capital of \$150,000, surplus of \$117,500 and \$26,061 undivided profits.

And in regard to these present day banking facilities I wish to repeat (so as to impress it upon you) that twenty years ago there was not a single bank in existence in these three parishes except the private banking house of J. B. Watkins of Lake Charles already referred to.

Some of you may have thought that in handling this subject I would inflict upon you a lengthy discourse upon the rice industry, but in this you were mistaken. The history of the rice industry of Southwest Louisiana is so pregnant with big results and great development that it has been heralded abroad year after year until all who

are in the least interested in Southwest Louisiana know what the rice industry has accomplished during the past few years.

Therefore, suffice to say that lands which twenty years ago were valued at twenty-five, fifty or seventy-five cents per acre and considered as of value only for grazing purposes are today held at forty, fifty and sixty dollars per acre and are well known to be capable of raising any agricultural product or fruit which can be grown in our climate. These lands are held at these values as rice farms and in some instances where the property is nearby or adjoining our little cities, it cannot be bought even at these figures. Permit me to cite one individual instance of the rapid enhancement in the values of our lands: The Ferett tract of land, amounting to 174 acres, upon which now stands the city of Crowley, was sold in 1886 for the sum of \$80 or a fraction less than forty-five cents per acre; and the assessed valuation of the city of Crowley in 1905, just twenty years later, was \$1,602,900.

It was in 1886 that a small rice mill was

built in Rayne, being the first country mill in Southwest Louisiana; but it was not until 1893 that the real foundation for the rice milling industry of this section of the state was established by the erection in Crowley of a two story rice mill in a building 34 by 36 feet in size, equipped with what was then considered improved machinery. The engine for this mill was a fifty horsepower affair, used at a pumping station during the irrigating season and then hauled to the mill when ready for operations. This little mill, whose entire structure was hardly larger than the engine room of an up-to-date plant, was the nucleus of what has grown to be the principal industry of Southwest Louisiana, and which we find in this good year of 1906 has grown until there are today thirty-three large rice mills located within the confines of Calcasieu, Acadia and Vermilion parishes, our little city of Crowley being the principal milling center with its ten rice mills, all of which have been erected since our first experiment in 1893, the largest rice mill in Louisiana being

located here in Lake Charles. And you must also bear in mind that the feeble start made by us in Crowley was the beginning of the entire country rice milling industry, which now extends from Donaldsonville on the Mississippi river to Brownsville, Texas, on the Rio Grande.

The matter of rice irrigation has also taken great strides within a comparatively very few years. Prior to 1890, just sixteen years ago, such rice crops as were raised in Southwest Louisiana were dependent entirely upon the rainfall, which was stored until needed by means of levees built with shovels along the lower edge of the high lands, which were utilized as a watershed, the levees being cut and the water permitted to drain down upon the rice fields when the proper time for irrigation had arrived. The next step in the irrigation investigations was to dam up the gulleys or coulees and let them fill with water during the winter season, the water then being pumped out upon the rice fields when needed by means of small steam pumps, and which proved to

be the germ from which the great irrigating system of today has been realized.

From 1890 to 1894 continued experiments in rice irrigation were made, and in the latter year the first three miles of rice irrigating canals ever constructed in Southwest Louisiana was found in operation in Acadia parish. Prior to that time the acreage in rice in Calcasieu, Acadia and Vermilion parishes had been (comparatively speaking) very small, and twenty years ago it amounted to practically nothing at all. However, as a result of the successful experiments in upland irrigation, additional canals were rapidly constructed until today they stretch out like unto a network all over Southwest Louisiana; and there are, on a conservative estimate, in the three parishes named, at least thirty-four different irrigating canals with an aggregate of 399 miles of main canals, 580 miles of laterals, and a total acreage of 243,394 acres of as fine rice lands as can be found upon this earth, which are capable of producing a rice crop of approximately two and one-half million bags,

as against about 45,000 bags hauled by the Southern Pacific from Southwest Louisiana in 1886.

The discovery of oil in Calcasieu and Acadia parishes has, of course, been of great benefit to Southwest Louisiana and has contributed largely to increasing the wealth of her people and the value of her lands. In fact the oil industry of Southwest Louisiana has rapidly grown to such proportions as to become one of the foremost industries of our state. As its history will no doubt be fully covered by my friend Alba Heywood in his address upon "Louisiana and Oil," I shall make no further mention of the oil discoveries.

In addition to the rice and oil industries, there is, within the territory covered by my subject, another great industry whose development and increase has been very, very rapid, and which is daily increasing in its value, its output and its importance among the industries of our state. I refer to the lumber trade. But as the inauguration and development of this industry is a subject

which of itself is entitled to an address by one who can do it a great deal more justice than I could possibly hope to give it, and as it is located almost entirely in the parish of Calcasieu and should, therefore, be handled by one of the gentlemen from this great border parish, I shall not endeavor to touch upon the lumber business.

This also applies to the immense business being done in the sulphur produced within a few miles of the city of Lake Charles, the product of which mines is said to be the purest in the world and which is being shipped to all parts of the globe in competition with the refined article. This sulphur industry is also worthy of much more able comment than can be made by me.

Now let us for a few moments consider the means which have created and made possible these great industries in Southwest Louisiana. What were they? You must bear in mind that the efforts which were put forth by the little band of men who have worked so hard and so faithfully to build up from year to year a magnificent and pros-

perous farming community, the social and financial integrity of which would be without a blemish, were not always along smooth roads. In the beginning exactly the reverse was their experience. They had to cope with a prejudice not only on the part of the residents of this entire section, but a deep seated belief on the part of almost the entire business world of our state upon whom we had to call, that the parishes comprising Southwest Louisiana could not be made to yield a satisfactory return for the money invested. There are gentlemen sitting in this convention today who will clearly recall that when approached for financial assistance to be used in our efforts they made the advances most reluctantly, not so much from a fear of failing to have the indebtedness liquidated, but in the belief that by lending us their money they were merely helping us to increase what they felt could only be severe financial losses.

The men who have labored for the upbuilding of Southwest Louisiana not only risked their money and their reputations as ,

business men but their very existence besides because of the opposition and unbelief from all classes of people; and it was not only necessary to overcome local prejudices but also imperative that they create at least a small degree of confidence in their undertaking before results worthy of the name of progress could be shown. The residents of this section of the state in general did not feel that they hoped for development pictured to them by the co-workers in Southwest Louisiana's progress could be accomplished, and it was only by the most earnest efforts that their co-operation was secured. In fact, I might say, the first real accomplishment was to overcome their opposition.

This much done they were gradually induced to lend their aid. Our first small successes created an interest, then a confidence, and before our period of awakening was well under way the good people of Calcasieu, Acadia and Vermilion parishes rallied under the common flag of progress and development, and to this day have so manfully con-

tinued to contribute their aid, influence, financial means and their energies as to command the admiration of all who know the history of Southwest Louisiana.

In fact, it was because of this "shoulder-to-wheel" co-operation of the residents in general that the confidence of outside capital was gained and their aid secured. This, of course, was half the battle won but even then we were face to face with another very grave question. We had demonstrated to our own people and to outside financial interests what could be done with our lands and what wonderful resources lay within our grasp, but it was necessary that we should have the people to develop them. New blood was necessary, immigration must be had to develop new lands, and we found ourselves facing the problem of turning the great tide of western immigration into Southwest Louisiana.

When you take into consideration the fact that the lands to be developed lay entirely along the line of a single railroad, the management of which at that time had no faith

in this section of the state, and, in fact, no interest in its development, you can readily realize by what great difficulties we were handicapped in our proposition to bring in new settlers to open up our fertile prairies and reap the harvest which merely awaited the successful and progressive farmer. At that time the Southern Pacific company had no immigration department whatever, and so far as can be learned, did not even contemplate its inauguration; and it was due entirely to the persistent efforts of the workers in Southwest Louisiana in their determination to bring new people into Calcasieu, Acadia and Vermilion parishes that the establishment of what is today one of the most complete railroad immigration departments in existence was made absolutely necessary.

Gradually the confidence of the railroad officials was gained. Changes in management were made and new men took charge who had greater faith in our country, and greater foresight than their predecessors, until finally the Southern Pacific manage-

ment was found marching hand in hand with the progress of Southwest Louisiana, lending every aid possible to assist in the great work we are doing; and today they stand ever willing and ready to take any steps necessary for the betterment of that very section in which at one time their management had not the slightest faith or interest whatever.

The results for the past twenty years speak for themselves and require no further comments from me, but in closing I want to say this: Inasmuch as all that which has been accomplished in Calcasieu, Vermilion and Acadia parishes was done only after surmounting every possible obstacle which could confront those who were endeavoring to develop what was then almost a bare prairie, it is safe to say that the development already accomplished is but the forerunner of what can and will be done in Southwest Louisiana within the next ten years. The majority of our lands are now owned by progressive and up-to-date planters. Instead of hamlets struggling for existence.

Southwest Louisiana boasts of several progressive little cities. New railroads are projected throughout this entire section of the state and construction work is well under way in some of them. New enterprises are springing up on all sides and those already established are branching out and increasing their business. Our population is gradually being increased by a healthy and well-to-do immigration, and, therefore, I feel safe in prophesying that the year 1916 will find Southwest Louisiana in the vanguard, leading the entire gulf coast in the matter of development, increased wealth and the value of her products.

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