

## CHAPTER SEVEN: THE ECONOMY AND FINANCES

In the first half of the eighteenth century, a few traders and trappers may have traveled through the Carencro District. By 1750 there was talk of a new industry. A report told of "the beautiful and fertile prairies of the Attakapas (wherein) the opportunity to taking land should not be neglected . . . for the raising of cattle. . . ."1

With the influx of the Acadians, the new industry of cattle and horse raising thrived. Jean and Marin Mouton, Charles Peck, and other early pioneers made their livelihood this way. Vacheries, meaning "cattle ranches," were established on the newly acquired land grants, the most famous being that of Louis Pierre Arceneaux founded in 1765 at Beau Bassin.

On February 18, 1770, Spanish Governor O'Reilly decreed that "a grant of forty-two arpents in front by forty-two in depth could be issued only to those applicants who owned one hundred head of tame cattle, some sheep and horses, and two slaves to oversee them."2 Soon herds of cattle that were turned loose on the green pastures multiplied and grew fat. Occasionally the newborn calves had to be rounded up and branded. O'Reilly's decree made it mandatory: "All cattle shall be branded by the proprietors, and those who shall not have been branded at the age of eighteen months cannot thereafter claim any property therein."3 The names and brands of some of the earliest cattlemen in the area are preserved in the Brand Book for the Attakapas and Opelousas Districts (1739 to 1888) at the St. Martin Parish Court House (St. Martinville). The brand of Pierre (fils) Arceneaux of Beau Bassin, for example, is

dated 1815; that of Pierre (fils) Arunaury (1789) was transferred to Numa Breaux of Carencro on May 27, 1859, and so forth.

In 1769 Juan Kelly and Eduardo Nugent, in a report to O'Reilly on the Attakapas and Opelousas districts, stated that "the inhabitants maintain everything imaginable in the way of livestock, such as cows, horses and sheep."<sup>4</sup> A later observer in 1793 noted thousands of cattle in the immense prairies of the Attakapas and Opelousas.<sup>5</sup>

William Darby (1816), Samuel Lockett (1869), Daniel Dennett (1876), and William Perrin (1891) described in detail the verdant pastures and fat cattle that they found at Beau Bassin and Carencro. Some of the largest stock raisers in Carencro in that century were Pierre R. Breaux, who died in 1864; his son Numa Breaux; Placide Guilbeau, whose occupation was the cattle industry until his death in 1865; Neuville Broussard (circa 1869), who was also engaged in the trade; and Charles Claudel Brown, who came to Carencro in 1875 and was engaged in stock raising until just a few years prior to his death in 1908.<sup>6</sup>

The development of another industry in Carencro, the sugar industry, began in the 1830's. Many farmers had their own cane patches and a small mill to produce either sugar or syrup. The industry did well until the Civil War when it suffered a setback; recovery was a slow process. By 1889 Carencro had two sugar factories: those of Mr. J.C. Couvillon and Mr. G.L. Singleton.<sup>7</sup> Mr. Victor E. Dupuis was probably the most successful planter and manufacturer of sugar in Carencro. Through his efforts the Carencro Sugar Company, Limited, came into existence in 1894. A document tells of its establishment:

Before me, Octave Guilbeau, Notary, personally appeared, Victor Dupuis, Charles C. Brown, George E. Brown, residents of the Parish of Lafayette and Jules Jeanmard, resident of St. Martin Parish.

Who Declared that availing themselves of the provisions of the laws of Louisiana--to limited liabilities company they by these presents form and constitute themselves a joint stock company with limited liabilities under the following conditions:

To wit--the name shall be Carencro Sugar Company, Ltd. by which name the company shall have authority to sue and be sued.

The capital stock of the company, \$12,000.00 provided, furnished and paid by each an equal share of \$3,000.00.

The affairs of said company shall be managed by a business manager selected by members of said company.

The purpose of said company is to build and operate a sugar mill in the town of Carencro, Louisiana and domiciled in said town of Carencro.

Witnesses

G.H. Guilbeau  
E.L. Estilette

Signed

Victor Dupuis  
Charles C. Brown ✓  
George E. Brown ✓  
Jules Jeanmard ✓

June 14, 1894  
Octave Guilbeau  
Notary<sup>8</sup>

The sugar refinery was located directly on Morgan's Railroad Line. Its officers were V.E. Dupuis, president; G.D. Von Phul, vice-president and general manager; and C.C. Brown, secretary-treasurer. The other directors listed were Jules Jeanmard of Breaux Bridge and C.C. Bird of Baton Rouge. The refinery consisted of a six-roller mill and steam train and was making only syrup in 1894. By 1898 many additions were made. The six rollers were replaced by a nine-roller mill having two engines, seven boilers, six clarifiers, two Brush pans, and four Hepworth centrifugals. The refinery had 135 sugar wagons; a LeBlanc and Nadler trolley for handling cane; cane chutes, resembling those in Gramercy, Louisiana; two switches to bring the cane alongside the chutes; and a warehouse and lodging house combined and fitted with electric lights

(Edison system). The refinery then had a capacity of grinding three ton of cane daily.<sup>9</sup>

Several others like Onez. H. Breaux and the Conque Brothers operate private mills and made syrup "in the good old fashion way without adulterants." The product was said to have won an enviable reputation on the market. Shortly after 1900 the growing of cane in the area dwindled necessitating the closure of the refinery and private mills.<sup>10</sup>

The planting of cotton, another enterprise in Carencro, steadily increased after 1830. The most successful nineteenth-century cotton planters included Pierre Bernard, Numa Breaux, Alcee and Neuville Broussard, Charles C. Brown, Professor A.L. Guilbeau, Aurellin LeBlanc, and others.<sup>11</sup> Prior to 1876, cotton gins were operated by horsepower. According to the Lafayette Advertiser (May 3, 1873), Clemille and Ursin Cormier operated one of these gins in Carencro, but Carencro was privileged to have the first steam-powered gin in Lafayette Parish. Built by Avignac Arceneaux, it had a capacity of five bales per day.<sup>12</sup> In 1887 A.C. and J.A. Guilbeau opened a gin; C.C. Brown and Alcide Broussard also operated a gin. These two gins had a capacity of approximately forty bales per day. In 1890 Deeglise, Francez and Co. was running its own gin. The Carencro Union Ginnery, Limited, was chartered in 1891. The corporation was established by Numa Breaux, Charles C. Brown, Clemille Cormier, Victor E. Dupuis, Jean P. Francez, Armas J. Guilbeau, Valery Guilbeau, Constant Leger, Louis G. Stelly, and Henry E. Toll.<sup>13</sup>

In 1889, 1,800 bales of cotton were shipped from the Carencro Station; in 1891 the shipment included 10,335 pounds of cotton valued at

\$85,081.25; 12,230 pounds of seed cotton worth \$29,767.50; and 5,880 pounds of cotton seed valued at \$1,470.<sup>14</sup>

In the first half of this century (1945), Carencro had four cotton gins: Cotton Products Co.; Farmer's Gin Co., Inc.; Esteve Martin Gin Co.; and People's Gin.<sup>15</sup> As of 1965 Cotton Products Co. and Farmer's Gin Co. were still in operation.<sup>16</sup> But by 1975 even these two had been closed, and the growing of cotton vanished.

Other agricultural products from Carencro that have disappeared from the scene include grapes,<sup>17</sup> lemons,<sup>18</sup> rice,<sup>19</sup> and tobacco.<sup>20</sup> Still grown in the area are corn, garden crops, soybeans, and orchards of figs, peaches, pecans, and so on.

The lumber industry, another pursuit, is nothing new to the Carencro area. Small sawmills existed in Carencro long before the Civil War.<sup>21</sup> In 1889 G.L. Singleton opened a lumber yard in Carencro.<sup>22</sup> In 1890 Romain Joseph Francez, Jr., began dealing in timber and did well in this line. In addition to operating a lumber yard, he was a special timber agent for the District of Louisiana.<sup>23</sup> In 1894 A. Chaffer operated the Carencro Lumber Yard.<sup>24</sup> Whereas today no sawmills are in operation (Maurice Olivier at Vermilion Bayou was the last in the area), the Carencro Builders Supply Co. and Lowe's have successful businesses. The C.J. Richard Lumber Co., which had been in operation approximately one hundred years, recently closed its doors.

In addition to the industries discussed above, Carencro possessed several notable financial institutions. A branch of the Interstate Building and Loan Association was organized in Carencro by A. Dugas, a traveling agent, on June 7, 1890. The organization, while it functioned, had a solid membership: D.A. Dimitry, president-agent; Victor E. Dupuis,

vice-president; W.R. Elliott, secretary; Charles C. Brown, treasurer; and seven directors: Gaston Blot, George E. Brown, L. Deleglise, Jean P. Francez, Maurice Francez, Romain Francez, and H.E. Toll.<sup>25</sup>

Carencro maintained a Wells, Fargo & Co. express office where money orders could be obtained. D.A. Dimitry was agent in 1894.

The Bank of Carencro, with a capital stock of \$10,000 and a surplus of \$8,000, was founded in 1906. Odon Guidry was its president; S.P. Brown, first vice-president; Louis Tapissier, second vice-president; and George J. Melchior, cashier. The bank flourished, and by 1920 it had increased its capital to \$20,000. In that year, however, it was absorbed by the Bank of Lafayette and Trust Co.<sup>26</sup> The Angelle Insurance Agency now occupies the old bank building on St. Peter Street. Today Carencro is served by a branch of the Guaranty Bank and Trust Co., a branch of the First National Bank of Lafayette, and others.