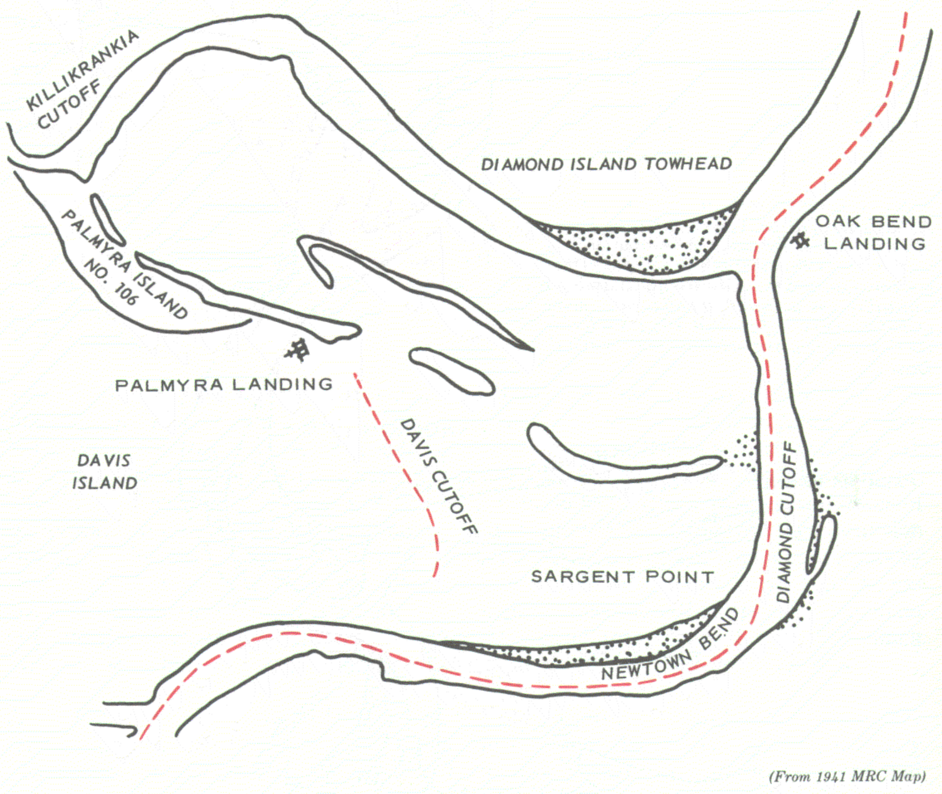
had sincerely believed in the right of a state to secede, and he saw no need to "repent" of actions undertaken in good faith.

Two years after the war had ended, a natural cutoff occurred, and the peninsula in Davis Bend became an island. The Davis Cutoff removed about 25 miles of navigation channel from the river, but the reach was an unstable one that soon began to change again. In 1904, the Mississippi broke through a narrow neck of land at Killikrankia plantation and reclaimed its old bed in Davis Bend. When Diamond Cutoff was opened in 1933 the old bendway around Davis Island filled at both ends and the river permanently abandoned it.

The oxbow lake that was once Davis Bend is called Palmyra Lake today, and has become a popular fishing and hunting area for both Louisiana and Mississippi residents. The homes of the Davis family no longer stand, and the island is now a vast plantation where beans, cotton, and cattle are raised. It is separated from Mississippi by the river, and from Louisiana by Palmyra Lake and swampy areas, and few people ever see it.



AFTER DIAMOND CUTOFF. After the construction of an artificial cutoff at Diamond Island, the Lower Mississippi abandoned its old beds in Davis Bend and Davis Cutoff and flowed into Newtown Bend, where it remains today. The above map was made in 1941, a few years after Diamond Cutoff.

BUCKRIDGE CREVASSE

Mile 413.5 AHP, Map 34
Right bank, descending

The crevasse at Buckridge plantation was the only major crevasse that occurred on the Lower Mississippi during the flood of 1916. The levee break reached a width of 1,800 feet, and 818 square miles were flooded in Louisiana.

About 2,000 farm laborers lived in the area affected by the crevasse. Most of them took refuge on rooftops and levees when the unexpected crevasse occurred, and many of them waited more than five days for rescue. One elderly black woman was found by rescue workers, clinging to a ceiling inside a flooded cabin. She had been there for 36 hours before they found her.

A congressional committee investigating flood control visited the flooded area during the crisis. They enjoyed a fine dinner in Vicksburg, toured the National Military Park, and took a brief look at the impressive crevasse from a government boat. They assured state and local officials that the Federal Government was going to do something to relieve them of some of the burdens of coping with periodic floods on the Lower Mississippi. The promises were honestly and sincerely made, and neither the committee members nor local officials knew that it would be another twelve years before an over-all plan for the protection of the Lower Mississippi Valley would be authorized by Congress.

BIG BLACK RIVER

Mile 408.6 AHP, Map 35
Left bank, descending

The Big Black River is about 270 miles long, and drains approximately 3,000 square miles of west-central Mississippi. French explorers called it the "River Tioux" but the British and American settlers who came into the area around the time of the American Revolution called it the Big Black River.

In 1773 a large group of New Englanders who were loyal to the British King petitioned King George the Third for a large grant of land on the Big Black River. They would establish a new colony for him there, they promised, and the capital city would be located on the little tributary of the Mississippi.

Several years passed before tentative approval was given to the proposal, and only a handful of the Tory settlers ever reached the Big Black River. Indian depredations soon forced them to seek the safety of older settlements.

When the United States took possession of the territory, lawyers labored for years to

disentangle the conflicting claims of British, Spanish, and American settlers in the vicinity of the Big Black River.

During the steamboat era, the Big Black was considered a navigable stream, but only a few small steamers dared to try to navigate the channel that was obstructed by snags, rocks, and overhanging trees. In 1881 the Corps of Engineers began a project to improve the river for navigation, but the work was halted in 1894 when local interests constructed fixed bridges beyond which boats could not travel.

Today parts of the Big Black are almost as wild as when the first settlers arrived. The river basin is almost entirely undeveloped, with no large towns located along the river's twisting course. The stream rises and falls with great rapidity, and frequently floods the farm fields, pastures, and swamps that lie along its banks.

YUCATAN CUTOFF

Mile 407.3 AHP, Map 35

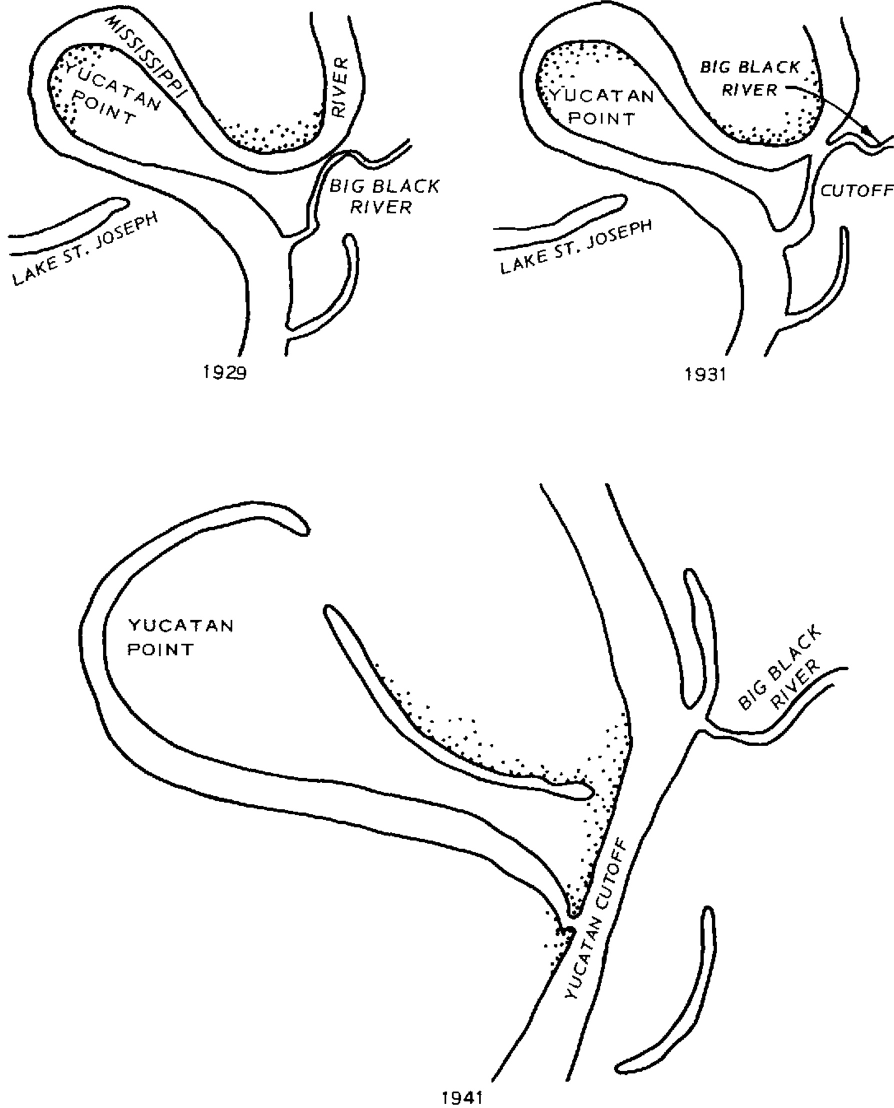
The Corps of Engineers did its best to avert a cutoff at Yucatan plantation in 1929, but the river engineers had two rivers working against them. Unlike most of the cutoffs on the Lower Mississippi, this one resulted from the coming together of two bends-one in the Mississippi and the other on its tributary, the Big Black. The cutoff occurred during a low water period, rather than at flood stage, and this too was unusual.

In the reach involved, the Lower Mississippi had meandered over a wide area for centuries. At one time, it had occupied the bed of what is known today as Lake St. Joseph, ten miles west of Yucatan Cutoff. Centuries later, it had moved eastward to the bluffs at Grand Gulf, Mississippi.

Before 1929, the mouth of the Big Black was located some distance below Yucatan and Hard Times Bend. When the east bank of Yucatan Bend began to erode, the Mississippi moved toward a big loop of the Big Black River. In the fall of 1929, the narrow ridge of land that separated the two rivers yielded to the pressures from both sides and collapsed. The Big Black poured into the Mississippi from its new mouth, above Yucatan Point. The big river then continued to change its course, appropriating the old bed of the Big Black below the new mouth, and Hard Times Bend became an oxbow lake, along with the old Yucatan Bend.

A boat with a famous name had met with a misfortune in Yucatan Bend in 1882. The steamer *Robt. E. Lee*, successor to the famous racing steamer of the same name, was rounding the point at Yucatan on October 30, 1882, when a fire broke out. Thirty of her passengers died in the holocaust that followed, and the 315-foot steamboat was a total loss. She had been built in 1876 and had carried some fantastic cargoes of cotton in her career, but by the time she went down at Yucatan the steamboat trade was virtually at an end.

Lake St. Joseph, which lies west of Yucatan and was an ancient bed of the Mississippi, was once the home of the Tensas Indians. The tribe had played host to some famous voyagers. LaSalle, Tonti, Iberville, Bienville, and countless French priests had called on the Tensas and visited their villages on Lake St. Joseph. The lake is a popular recreational and residential area today.



YUCATAN CUTOFF. The three maps above show the unusual cutoff at Yucatan Point, where the Mississippi and the Big Black River came together to make a new mouth for the tributary and a new channel for the big river. Yucatan Point, which had been a part of Mississippi, moved across the river and joined Louisiana.

GRAND GULF, MISSISSIPPI

Mile 407.0 AHP, Map 35
Left bank, descending

A high rocky bluff on the east bank of the Lower Mississippi, just below the mouth of the Big Black River, attracted the attention of all early voyagers on the river. LaSalle and Tonti, on their first voyage down the Mississippi, noted with apprehension the large and dangerous eddies at the foot of the bluff, and feared that their flimsy canoes and dugouts would be dashed to pieces.

Zadok Cramer, more than a century later, commented that the passage at Grand Gulf was a difficult one for flatboats. Hard rowing was required to keep the boat from being caught in the big eddy and dashed against the rocks at the foot of the bluff, he said, but competent boatmen need not worry about it.

There was a small settlement at the foot of the bluff during British and Spanish dominion, and it quickly grew into a flourishing village called Grand Gulf when the Americans took possession of the area.

Some years before the Civil War began, currents attacked the waterfront at Grand Gulf, and by the time the war opened many of its streets had already crumbled into the river.

When Admiral David Farragut brought the Union fleet up to Vicksburg in 1862, he found that the Confederates had also fortified Grand Gulf with a four-gun battery. He sent the *U.S.S. Brooklyn* to Grand Gulf to destroy the town. When the gunboat appeared in front of the little town, a group of citizens came out carrying a white flag.

"The rascals begged so hard," the gunboat commander told Farragut, *"that I agreed not to shell the place but levied upon them a contribution of cattle, pigs, poultry, and wood for my ship."*

The payment of the unofficial "war tax" did not help the citizens of Grand Gulf much. A couple of weeks later, someone fired on a passing Union steamer and a detachment of Army troops came ashore and burned the town.

When Farragut withdrew his fleet after failing to capture Vicksburg, the Confederates moved back to Grand Gulf and erected stronger fortifications. When General U. S. Grant began his movement down the river, his transports had to pass the rebel guns at Grand Gulf as well as the Vicksburg water batteries. Grant asked Admiral Porter to take his gunboats down and silence the Grand Gulf guns.

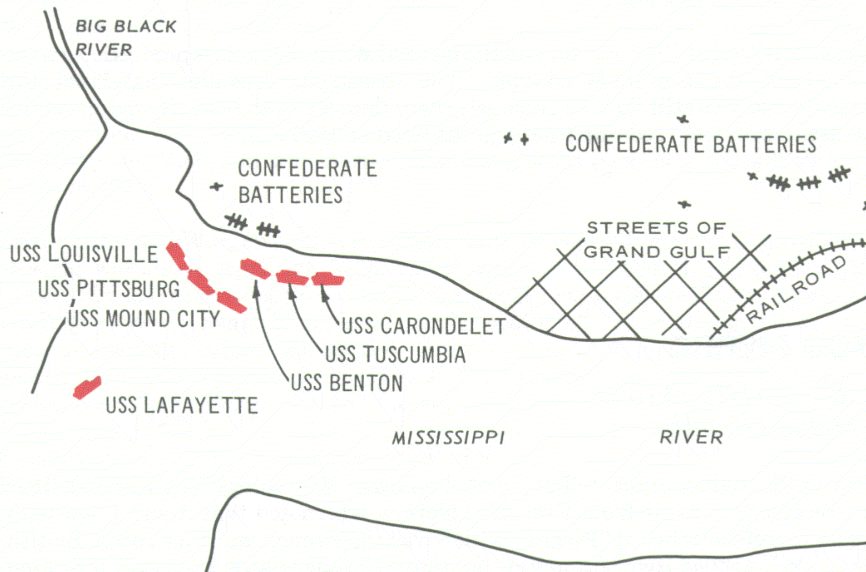
On April 29, 1863, the ironclads *Louisville, Pittsburg, Carondelet, Tuscumbia, Lafayette, Mound City,* and Porter's flagship, the *Benton* trained their heavy guns on Grand Gulf and poured thousands of rounds of ammunition upon the village and the fortifications. Several of the Union vessels were damaged in the engagement, and the rebel guns were not silenced. Eighteen of Porter's seamen were killed, and 56 wounded. In a second engagement, designed to occupy the rebels while Grant's army marched down the Louisiana side of the river past Grand Gulf, the gunboats again

failed to silence the batteries on the bluff.

When the Federal forces had crossed the river below Grand Gulf and approached it again from the interior, they found the batteries deserted and the town abandoned. The Union forces entered and took possession unopposed.

General Grant's intention originally had been to secure Grand Gulf as a base of operations against Port Hudson, Louisiana. When he rode into Grand Gulf with his army, the general had been on the march for almost a week. Joining Admiral Porter on the flagship *Benton,* General Grant borrowed some of the Navy officer's clean clothes, took a bath, and had the first hot meal he had enjoyed in days. Turning his attention to dispatches and paper work, Grant learned that General N. P. Banks would not be able to cooperate with him at Port Hudson. General Grant pondered the problem a short while, and changed his plans. He would leave his supply base behind and take his army through the interior. Perhaps he could approach Vicksburg from the rear, and trap the rebels there.

After the Civil War ended, the ruined town of Grand Gulf had further problems with the river. The Mississippi abandoned its attack on the Grand Gulf waterfront, and began to move westward. Soon the little village was landlocked behind a vast expanse of sand and mud, cut off permanently from the main channel of the Lower Mississippi.



ATTACK ON GRAND GULF. On April 29, 1863, seven Union gunboats under the command of Admiral David D. Porter bombarded the Confederate fortifications at Grand Gulf, but failed to silence the rebel guns. General U. S. Grant, who had planned to land his army there, had to find another landing place below the town. When he approached it a week later from the rear, he found it abandoned, and entered unopposed.

In 1962, the State of Mississippi acquired a tract of land at Grand Gulf and established a State Park there. Thousands of tourists have visited the little town every year, to browse in its fine museum and view the old cemetery and the fortifications that gave Grant and Porter so much trouble in 1863. The park has an excellent collection of old vehicles, including one very rare Civil War ambulance wagon. A "dog-trot" cabin, typical of the homes that early settlers built in the area, has been reconstructed on the park grounds. Made of hand-hewn timbers and roofed with cypress shingles, the house has two sections, separated by a roofed hall down the middle that is open at both ends. These pioneer dwellings were cool and comfortable, and the open hall in the middle was called a "dog-trot."

The Grand Gulf area was chosen as a site for a nuclear power plant being constructed by Mississippi Power & Light Company. After a century of dreamy isolation, the brooding bluffs are beginning to swarm with engineers, nuclear experts, and workmen engaged in the construction of the new plant.

WINTER QUARTERS CREVASSE

Mile 400.0 AHP, Map 35
Right bank, descending

On May 4, the flood of 1927 overtopped the levee at Winter Quarters plantation, on the west bank of the Lower Mississippi. The disastrous crevasse inundated the countryside and was still flowing copiously more than a month later. It was one of the 13 crevasses that occurred during the great flood of 1927.

BAYOU PIERRE

Mile 397.5 AHP, Map 36
Left bank, descending

The Bayou Pierre is a minor tributary of the Lower Mississippi. The sluggish little stream received its name from French explorers, who noted that it was filled with rocks and therefore called it "Pierre," which was the French word for rocks. British settlers called it Stony River for a time, but the old French name was never forgotten and is still in use today.

The first permanent settlement along the Bayou Pierre was made under British dominion, when British subjects were given land grants along its winding course. When Spain later seized the old Natchez District, Spanish officials encouraged

settlement in the Bayou Pierre area and the number of plantations increased. Among the first to take advantage of Spain's generous land policies were the Bruins of Virginia.

Bryan Bruin and his son, Peter Bryan Bruin, arrived at Natchez in June, 1788, with a party of 80 people from Virginia. The Spanish governor had promised each family 680 acres of land, with more to be made available if the settlement proved successful. The Bruins established their own plantation at the mouth of the Bayou Pierre, and Peter Bryan Bruin became one of the first territorial judges when the United States later set up a government for the Mississippi Territory.

The Bruin establishment became a favorite stopping place for distinguished voyagers on the river, and early in January, 1807, they received a visitor about whose head a storm of national controversy was then raging. Aaron Burr, a United States Senator from 1791 through 1797 had missed the Presidency of the United States by one vote in 1800. He had served as Vice President under Thomas Jefferson, had killed Alexander Hamilton in a duel in 1804, and had later resigned the office of Vice President and became involved in a mysterious scheme that many people believed would be a serious threat to the United States. It was widely believed that Burr and the motley crew of followers, less than 60 in number, who arrived with him at the Bayou Pierre in 1807 were engaged in a plot to seize New Orleans, foment disunion, and attack Mexico. Burr himself said mildly that he was only going to establish a settlement on some land he had purchased in the Ouachita River Basin of Louisiana.

When Burr conferred with Judge Bruin at Bruinsburg, he learned that the militia had been called out, and that eight armed U. S. gunboats were hurrying up from New Orleans. He promptly gave himself up to civil authorities, was later taken North and tried for treason, and was acquitted of the charges. General James Wilkinson, believed by many to have been a co-conspirator with Burr, was one of the chief witnesses against him. Burr went to England after the trial had ended in acquittal. He stayed there for some time, and later returned to New York, where he practiced law until his death in 1836.

During the Civil War, an army very different from Burr's landed at Bruinsburg. The landing was made April 30, 1863, and it consisted of about 40,000 soldiers under General U. S. Grant. General Grant had been told by an old slave that there was a good landing place at Bruinsburg, and that he could follow the wagon roads into the interior. Farragut's fleet had tried to enter the Bayou Pierre in 1862, but found it so obstructed with snags that the gunboats had to back out of the stream. Grant found the roads narrow and dusty, but quite adequate to carry his army into the interior of Mississippi. For the next thirty days the Union army skirmished its way through enemy territory from Bruinsburg, via Raymond, Jackson, Champions Hill, and the Big Black, to the rear of Vicksburg, where they settled down to starve the rebels into submission.

In 1864 two Union vessels collided with each other at the mouth of the Bayou Pierre. The *U.S.S. General Price* survived the accident, but the *Conestoga* went down with all her armament, machinery, and Navy stores still on board. The boat had carried two 30-pounder Dahlgren rifles, one 30-pounder Parrott rifle, and three 32-pounder and one 12-pounder Navy guns. The war vessel, with all these relics still on board was reported still visible near the mouth of the bayou at low water in September, 1864.

ST. JOSEPH, LOUISIANA

Mile 396.2 AHP, Map 36
Right bank, descending

The small town of St. Joseph, Louisiana, is the parish seat of Tensas Parish and was a river port until the Mississippi took away its waterfront and left it lying some distance inland. The St. Joseph Gage and Bulletin Board are now located at Gladstone Landing, several miles above the town. The town lies along a lake of the same name and has some interesting pre-Civil War buildings still standing.

RODNEY CUTOFF

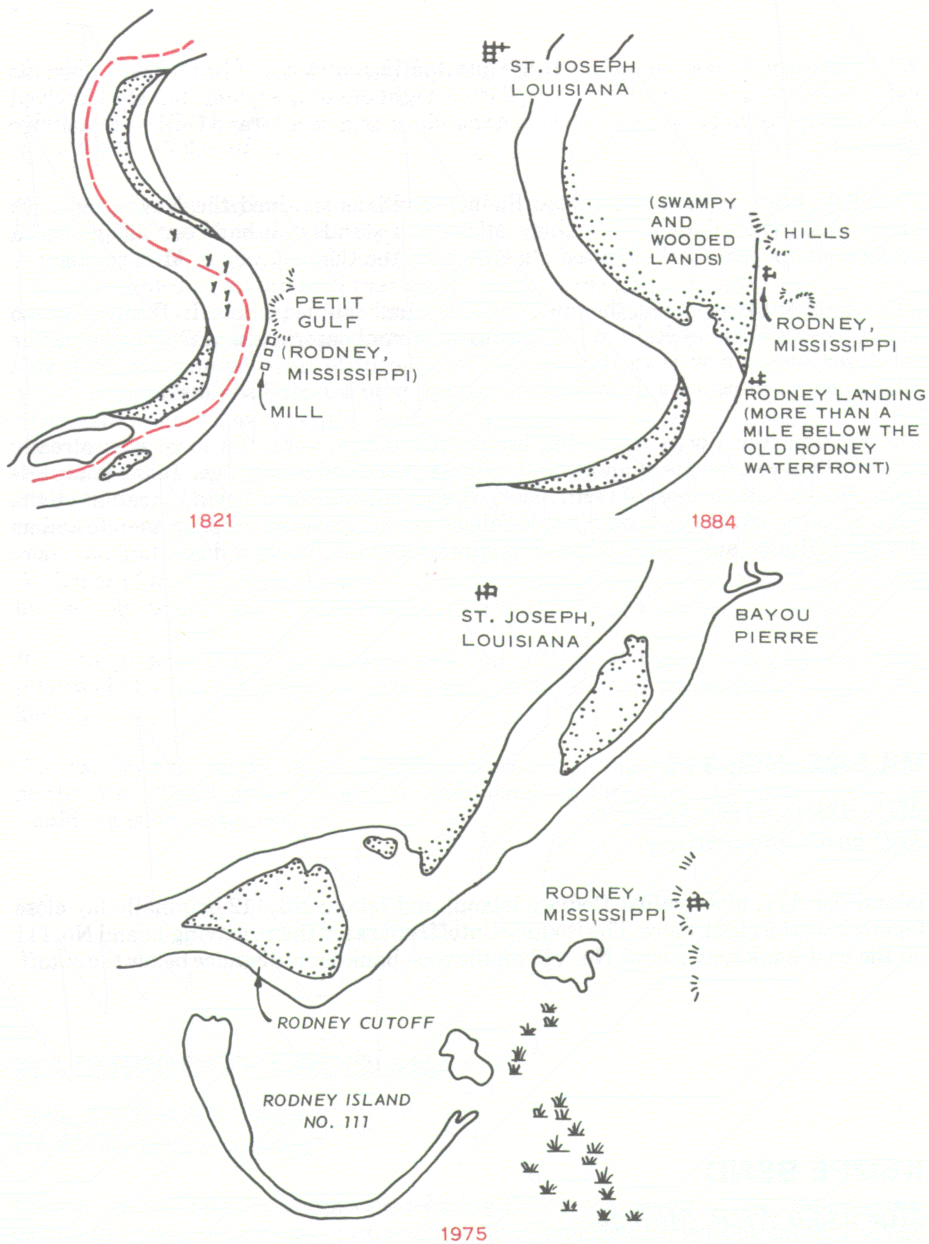
Mile 389.0 AHP, Map 36

The Army Corps of Engineers began the construction of Rodney Cutoff in 1935, and opened the new channel for navigation in 1936. Removed from the main channel of the Lower Mississippi were a troublesome old bendway and the small town of Rodney, Mississippi.

Rodney had been established at the foot of what had been called "the Petit Gulf Hills." The bluff's name referred to a small but dangerous eddy that early travelers found in the river in front of it. There had been some British land grants in the area, and a few Spanish ones later, but the town was established by American settlers. By 1834 it was a flourishing little village and had its own newspaper, postoffice, hotel, school, church, and steamboat landing. As the country around it grew more thickly populated, it grew in importance and was becoming a vigorous rival for the older towns of Natchez and Vicksburg when the Civil War brought progress to a halt.

During the war, the town was not fortified, but a Union gunboat was stationed in front of it after the fall of Vicksburg, to prevent the smuggling of men and supplies from Louisiana into Mississippi. Admiral David Porter had given all his officers strict orders not to go ashore in hostile towns where the Army had not stationed a garrison, but the men on board the *U.S.S. Rattler* were bored with the tedious duty and decided one bright Sunday morning to disobey the Admiral's orders and go ashore.

When the 25 officers and seamen from the Union gunboat entered the Presbyterian Church in Rodney, their presence created a mild sensation among the townspeople. For a time the service proceeded as usual, but the Navy men were in for a big surprise. A ragged band of Confederate cavalrymen had been hiding out in the vicinity, and they were notified of the presence of the Union men at the church. The rebels surrounded the building, and a lively skirmish ensued. The congregation, composed mostly of women, children, and elderly men, joined the fray and helped subdue the startled sailors.



RODNEY IN 1821, 1884, AND 1975. Rodney, Mississippi, once an important river port, suffered the same fate that overtook several river towns as the river moved inexorably away and left it landlocked. Its population of more than 4,000 dwindled to less than 50, and it became virtually a ghost town—southern style. A brick church still stands, bearing battle scars from an unusual skirmish between the U. S. Navy and the rebels. Contemporary newspapers called it "the battle of the hymnbooks."

When Admiral Porter heard about the humiliating capture of 25 of his best men, his rage was violent enough to blow the *Rattler* right out of the water, but she survived long enough to find a watery grave in a thunderstorm near Grand Gulf on December 30, 1864.

The little brick church where the Rodney civilians subdued the Navy men with umbrellas, hymnbooks, and walking sticks still stands and has been adopted as a restoration project by the United Daughters of the Confederacy in Mississippi.

After the Civil War ended, the town of Rodney had double trouble. In 1886 the Yazoo and Mississippi Valley Railroad took away its steamboat trade, and shortly thereafter the river began a westward slide that left the little town hemmed in by a vast wilderness of impenetrable swamps and hugh mudflats and sandbars.

By the time the Corps made the Rodney Cutoff in 1935, the town was already practically deserted. Its abandoned buildings crumbled one by one. Today it has less than 50 inhabitants, most of them black. There are some hand-hewn log cabins on the edge of town, and behind one of these relics from the past is a quite up-to-date and no doubt profitable automated oil well, pumping away 24 hours a day.

ISLAND NO. 111

Mile 388.0 AHP, Map 36
Left bank, descending

Island No. 111, often called Rodney Island, and Island No. 112 originally lay close together on the right shore. The Rodney Cutoff separated them, leaving Island No. 111 on the east bank and Island No. 112 on the west bank some distance below the cutoff.

KEMPE BEND

Mile 385.0 AHP, Map 36

Kempe Bend was named for James Kempe, a native of Ireland who came to the Mississippi Territory and became a cotton planter. During the War of 1812, Kempe raised a company of volunteers and fought with Andrew Jackson at New Orleans. When Mississippi became a State, he was appointed a colonel in the militia. He died in January, 1820.

ASHLAND LANDING, MISSISSIPPI

Mile 381.0 AHP, Map 36
Left bank, descending

General Zachary Taylor, one of the heroes of the Mexican War, was nominated for President of the United States by the Whig Party in 1848. He was elected, and in February, 1849, the Whigs planned a triumphal tour up the river for the President-elect. He owned a plantation in the vicinity of Ashland Landing, and it was there that the steamer *Tennessee* expected to pick him up and take him to Vicksburg for the first of the many public receptions that had been planned for him by Whig party leaders.

When a steamboat whistled at the landing just before dawn, the old General was ready. He went on board, and retired at once to a stateroom where he could finish his night's sleep. After the boat was well on its way to Vicksburg, one of the General's aides discovered that the party had boarded the wrong steamer. They were travelling on the *Saladin*, not the larger and more elegant *Tennessee*. The deception at the landing had been deliberately carried out by young Captain Tom Coleman, Jr., who was only 24 years old and was a friend of the Taylor family. Coleman had greatly desired to have the honor of taking General Taylor on the first leg of his journey to Washington, so he had simply "kidnapped" the President-elect of the United States.

"Old Rough and Ready," as his admirers called General Taylor, was awakened and informed of what had happened. The young steamboat captain waited anxiously for his reaction.

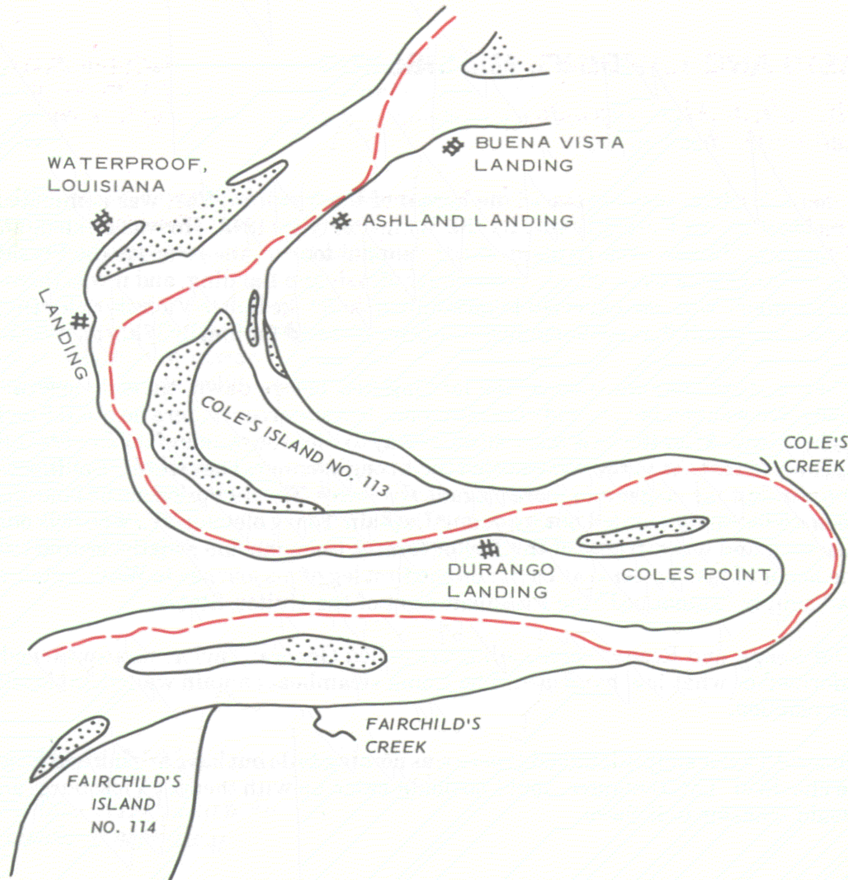
General Taylor simply laughed. There was nothing to do but have a drink and forget it, he chuckled. The *Tennessee* would no doubt catch up with them at Vicksburg, and he would transfer to it there.

WATERPROOF, LOUISIANA

Mile 381.0 AHP, Map 37
Right bank, descending

During one of the Mississippi's devastating floods, the people of one flooded rural community read a newspaper report that told them that everything in their whole region was under water "except one waterproof knoll." When the flood subsided, the community moved itself to the knoll, and the town acquired the name of Waterproof.

It was a name that gave the hapless reporter of another newspaper some embarrassing moments a few years later when he reported a local tragedy under the headline that read: "FOUR WATERPROOF PEOPLE DROWN."



WATERPROOF, LOUISIANA. A map of the Waterproof, Louisiana, area made just before the cutoff of 1884 occurred showed the deep bend below the town and the narrow neck of Coles Point, which was cut off a short time later.

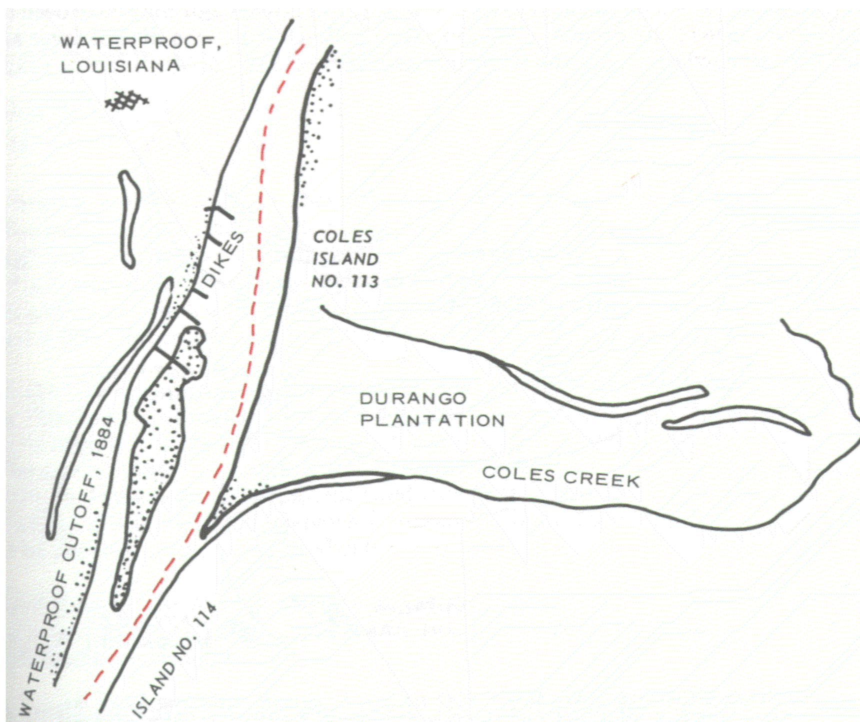
During the Civil War, a Union regiment of Ohio infantrymen set out on an expedition to Waterproof and captured mules, cattle, horses, cotton, money, and slaves from the plantations along the way. Arriving in the town, they skirmished briefly with Confederate cavalry. When a spy brought them word that more rebels were on the way, the Ohio soldiers boarded a Union transport and departed. The town was later garrisoned with black Union troops and there were several minor skirmishes in the area.

In 1870 a sidewheel steamer called the *Mississippi* hit a snag at Waterproof and sank in front of the landing. The boat's cabin, with all its fancy chandeliers burning brightly, separated from the hull and floated past Natchez, to the astonishment of the people who happened to see it floating majestically down the river. The boat had been

heavily loaded with livestock and produce for New Orleans. All the cargo was lost but the passengers and crew were saved. Four years later, the steamer *Henry Ames* fell over a snag in the same location and went down, with the loss of three lives and a cargo valued at $130,000.

Waterproof had originally been located on a great bend of the river, opposite Island No. 113 and several miles above Coles Creek Point. The bend below the town elongated, and the neck began to erode. Some local resident who was eager for the cutoff to occur tried to help it along by digging a ditch across the narrow neck, but the river refused to be hurried. For almost 30 years more the water ran through the ditch at every high water period, but it was not until May, 1884, that the Mississippi abandoned its old bend and formed the new channel that was known as Waterproof Cutoff. Coles Point was left on the Mississippi side of the river and soon became almost indistinguishable from the land around it.

About a year after the cutoff occurred, the sidewheel packet *R. R. Springer* hit a sandbar and went down in the head of the cutoff channel. The boat had been built in 1878 and was said to have had the first electric light plant installed on a western river steamer. The generator that furnished the power for the electric arc lights was operated by steam power.



WATERPROOF CUTOFF. The cutoff that occurred near the town of Waterproof, Louisiana, in 1884 caused a number of changes in the area. Eventually the town became landlocked, Island No. 113 and Island No. 114 joined the east bank, and Coles Point became a part of the Mississippi mainland.

GILES CUTOFF

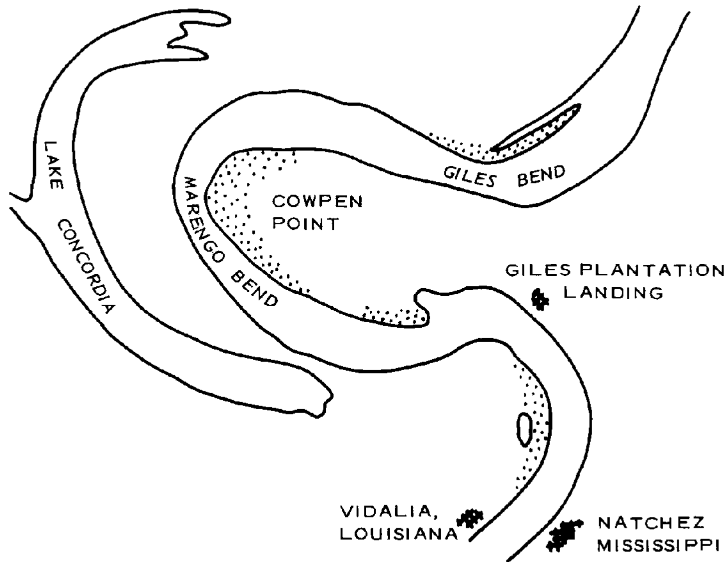
Mile 367.0 AHP, Map 38

Lake Concordia in Louisiana was an ancient bed of the Lower Mississippi. The newer bend in front of it was called Marengo Bend, and just above was Giles Bend.

In Marengo Bend, the river followed its usual pattern and the neck where Giles plantation was located became extremely narrow. Water flowed across Giles Neck in the floods of 1907, 1922, and 1927, and it became obvious that the river would soon abandon Marengo Bend. In 1933, the Army Corps of Engineers attempted to forestall the river's action by constructing an artificial cutoff that would bring the channel into better alignment than the river would achieve if left to its own devices.

Giles Cutoff was very slow to develop, and during the next low water period the engineers discovered why. Ancient cypress trees were embedded in the hard blue mud at the bottom of the artificial cut, and they were forming an effective obstruction to the low water flow. After several years of intermittent dredging, the natural dam was finally removed, and the river accepted the Giles Cutoff as its new bed.

Lake Concordia, a bed abandoned by the Mississippi centuries ago, may have been the last resting place of the Spanish explorer, Hernando DeSoto, who died of fever and exhaustion somewhere along the banks of the river in 1542.



LAKE CONCORDIA AND MARENGO BEND. In a map made long before the artificial cutoff at Giles Neck was constructed, Marengo Bend and an older bed of the Mississippi, Lake Concordia, are shown. Some historians believe that it was in this area of the Lower Mississippi that the Spanish explorer, Hernando DeSoto, died. The Spanish commander's followers, who wanted to keep his death a secret from the Indians, lowered DeSoto's body into the river that he had discovered.

DeSoto and his men had reached an Indian village that is believed to have been located near the present town of Ferriday, Louisiana, when DeSoto fell ill. He died a few days later, and his followers were afraid to let the Indians know that the man they had respected and feared was dead. They buried the Spanish explorer at night, near the gates of the Indian village. When the Indians saw the mound of fresh earth the next day, they were naturally suspicious, and they inquired about the expedition's leader, saying that they had not seen him for several days. That night, DeSoto's followers secretly disinterred the body, wrapped it in mantles weighted with sand, and dropped it into the river that would forever be associated with his name.

DeSoto died in the unhappy belief that his long ordeal on the North American Continent had been a failure. He had not found the treasures that he had sought. All he had found was a great river, and the river had claimed his tired body and ended his dreams of fame and fortune. He could not know, of course, that it was the discovery of the river that would make his name remembered centuries later.

NATCHEZ, MISSISSIPPI

Mile 363.8 AHP, Map 38
Left bank, descending

When the French brothers, Iberville and Bienville, explored the lower reaches of the Mississippi in 1700, they visited the Natchez Indians, whose villages were located on high bluffs on the east side of the river. The location appeared to them to be an ideal one for an outpost for the colony they were establishing nearer the Gulf Coast. In 1716 Bienville constructed the crude fortification that he called "Fort Rosalie" on the bluff, and a few French settlers built cabins nearby and began to cultivate the soil.

Most of the French colonists-priests included-looked on the Indians of the New World as "barbarous savages," and treated them accordingly. It was a policy hardly calculated to win the affection and esteem of the proud and intelligent Natchez tribe. For a brief time, the Natchez and the French coexisted uneasily on the bluff, but in 1729 the Indians lost their patience and rose up in revolt against their exploiters. The Natchez killed about 200 French soldiers and settlers before they fled across the river, to be pursued to their deaths shortly thereafter.

Fort Rosalie was strengthened, and the garrison was enlarged, but settlers were reluctant to return to the area, and it remained a weak outpost, unsupported by any substantial settlement.

A treaty by which the Natchez district became the property of Great Britain was ratified on March 10, 1763. Major Robert Farmer, a British officer, went up the river to inspect the Natchez post. He reported it to be in terrible condition, and British authorities ordered it repaired and sent a garrison of soldiers to occupy it.

British colonial officials did everything they could to encourage settlements around the Natchez post, but the district was still sparsely populated when the Spanish, taking advantage of Great Britain's preoccupation with the American Revolution, seized the Natchez post.

Spain's rule over the area was surprisingly benign. Liberal land grant policies encouraged settlers from other areas to take up plantations in the vicinity of Natchez, and a Spanish engineer laid out streets and planned handsome public buildings that were occupied by colonial government officials. The Spanish commandant of the district, Don Manuel Gayoso de Lemos, proved to be a fair, just, and affable gentleman and a popular administrator. The town and the district prospered under Spanish rule.

The citizens of the new American nation in the northeast were already looking westward, and they believed that free navigation of the river that drained the heart of the continent was their natural birthright. While American diplomats carried out delicate negotiations with Spain on the boundary dispute between the two countries, adventurers and Revolutionary War veterans plotted and conspired to either join the Spanish or drive them from the east bank of the Mississippi. Spain and the United States signed a treaty in 1795, and the east bank of the Mississippi as far south as the 31st parallel was declared to be American territory. Captain Isaac Guion, with a very small detachment of U. S. soldiers, arrived at Natchez in November, 1797. He set up a camp near the Spanish fort, and raised the American flag. It was March 29, 1798, before the Spanish garrison finally withdrew, leaving the Americans in the undisputed possession of the bluff.

A prompt influx of American settlers followed the withdrawal of the Spanish, and the town became the most important settlement in the new Mississippi Territory.

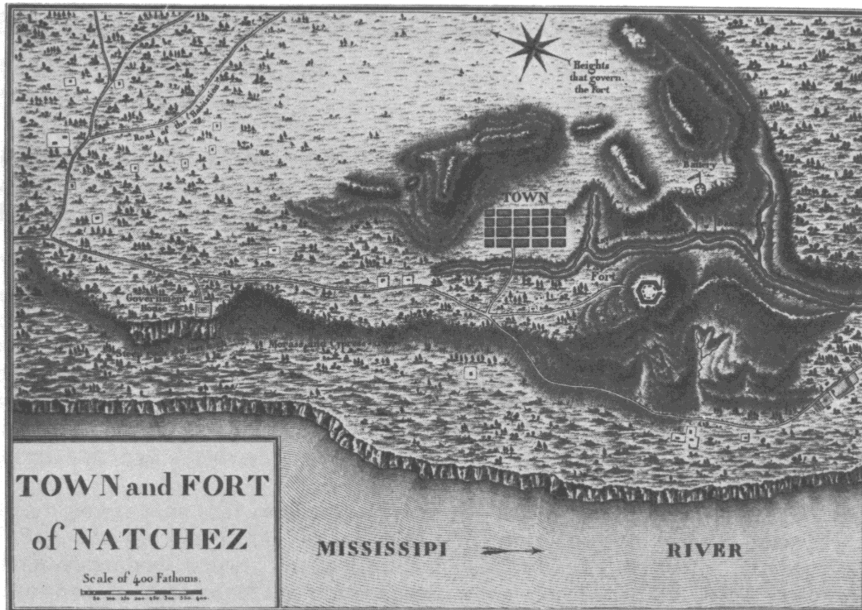
The steamboat era was officially initiated in Natchez by the arrival of the steamer *New Orleans*, on her maiden voyage down the Mississippi early in January, 1812. The first steamer ever to stop at the Natchez wharf picked up a small shipment of freight at Natchez and carried it down to New Orleans.

A few days later, an advertisement appeared in a New Orleans newspaper. It read as follows:

> *"For Natchez: THE STEAMBOAT New-Orleans. Will leave this on Thursday next, the 23d inst. For freight or passage apply on board, or to Talcutt & Bowers. Jan. 21."*

The notice inaugurating the steamboat trade on the Lower Mississippi was accompanied by a small cut of a sailing vessel. The idea of steamboats on the Mississippi was still too novel for the newspapers to have acquired any of the little steamboat cuts that would later decorate most of their river news columns and steamboat notices.

Most of the early voyagers on the Lower Mississippi stopped at Natchez, and gave accounts that seemed to vary according to their own moods or personalities. John Bradbury, an English scientist, saw it in 1812 and thought it remarkably wicked for its small size. John James Audubon in 1821 enjoyed his visit and called it a beautiful and romantic place.



NATCHEZ UNDER SPANISH RULE. The French general, Victor Collot, visited the Natchez post in 1796, and later published the above sketch of the town, government buildings, and fort that the Spanish had constructed. Collot described the post as "in the most wretched state" but thought the position had "a few feeble advantages" and could be strengthened. He described the district's inhabitants as divided in political opinion, except on one point: namely, that they would leave the district before they would submit to American rule.

Natchez was not fortified during the Civil War, and the town was surrendered to Farragut's fleet in 1862. Although it was occupied by Federal troops for the remainder of the war, little damage was done to its old buildings and beautiful homes.

Today thousands of tourists visit Natchez every spring to tour the mansions and get a glimpse of what the Old South must have been like before the Civil War impoverished the cotton planters who had made it the social and cultural center of the State of Mississippi.

The annual "Natchez Pilgrimage" gave the little river town an economic boost during the great depression, and continues each year to add to the economic health of the community. Some years ago, local interests constructed an industrial park and port terminal, and in 1968 the Corps of Engineers installed a floodgate, pumping plant, and levee designed to protect the port area from flooding. The port handled 1,162,865 tons of cargo in 1974. The products handled included grain, construction materials, wood and paper, and chemicals.

There is no marina for pleasure boats at Natchez, but fuel and other supplies are available on the waterfront at the foot of the bluff.

VIDALIA, LOUISIANA

Mile 363.3 AHP, Map 38
Right bank, descending

The Spanish established a small military post on the west bank of the Mississippi opposite Natchez around 1786, but abandoned it soon afterward. In 1801, Don Jose Vidal, formerly the acting governor general of the Natchez District, established a settlement there and called it Vidalia.

After Louisiana was purchased by the United States, Vidalia became the seat of government for Concordia Parish. When the currents of the Lower Mississippi attacked Vidalia's waterfront, the public buildings were demolished and some of its houses and commercial buildings were put on rollers and moved back from the river's edge. When a new levee was built, the old part of the town of Vidalia was left outside its protection and soon disappeared.

ISLAND NO. 115

Mile 357.5 AHP, Map 38
Right bank, descending

Island No. 115, also called Natchez Island, has joined the west bank of the river and is now attached to Louisiana. In 1942, the island was the site of one of the last steamboat accidents of the Lower Mississippi, when the old steamer *Tennessee Belle* caught fire and sank in the vicinity. The sternwheel packet had been built in 1904 and had carried freight and passengers on the river for 38 years before she was lost. The boat had been named the *Kentucky* originally, but a new owner renamed her in 1932.

ELLIS CLIFFS

Mile 348.0 AHP, Map 39
Left bank, descending

Richard Ellis brought his family into the Natchez District around 1785, when it was still under Spanish dominion, and established his plantation in the area that was then known as the "White Cliffs." When Ellis died in 1792, he had accumulated 6,000 acres of land, more than 150 slaves, and an impressive amount of other property. It took three years to settle the complicated estate and distribute the wealth among his heirs.

The high chalky bluff below Natchez was known as Ellis Cliffs by 1800, and was often mentioned by river voyagers.

ST. CATHERINES CREEK (OLD MOUTH)

Mile 347.3 AHP, Map 39
Left bank, descending

St. Catherines Creek, along which French plantations were established in the early 1700's, entered the Mississippi some distance below Natchez until local residents diverted its course around 1871, giving it a new mouth nearer the town.

One of the early steamboat disasters took place near the old mouth of the St. Catherine in 1825. The steamboat *Teche* had departed the Natchez wharf late in the afternoon, and tied up opposite the mouth of the creek when darkness fell, because there was a heavy fog. By 2:00 a.m., May 5, the fog had lifted and the steamboat had just pulled away from the bank to resume its voyage downriver when the boilers exploded and the boat caught fire. The passengers, awakened by the noise and smoke, became confused and panic-stricken. It was estimated that of the 70 or more people who had been on board, only half survived.

Steam power was still relatively new to the inhabitants of the Lower Mississippi Valley, and the loss of the *Teche* caused some uneasiness among the general public about steamboat travel. The sensational details of the sufferings of the victims, published by contemporary newspapers, were soon forgotten. Many hundreds of persons would die in explosions and fires before the public would demand measures to ensure the safety of the passengers.

GLASSCOCK CUTOFF

Mile 345.0 AHP, Map 39

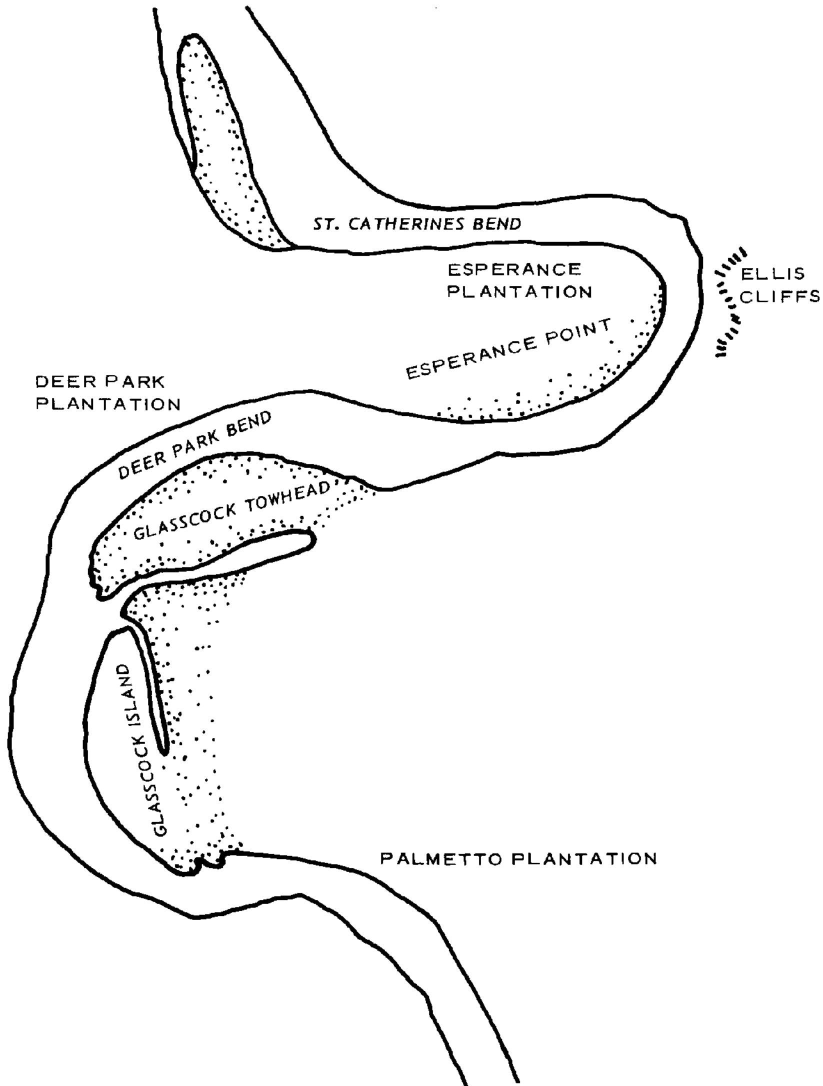
From St. Catherines Bend to Dead Mans Bend, the Lower Mississippi was in a constant state of change until the Army Corps of Engineers constructed the cutoff across Glasscock Point in 1933.

The river had threatened to make a natural cutoff as it eroded the neck of land that lay between St. Catherines and Deer Park Bend. A natural cutoff might have solved some of the problems in the area, but it would almost certainly have created new ones below. The Corps undertook to construct the cutoff by the longer and more difficult route across Glasscock Point. It was designed to bring the channel into better alignment, and to eliminate costly revetment work in Deer Park Bend.

The artificial cutoff at Glasscock was slow to develop. A part of the new channel ran through the bed of an ancient lake, where a plastic, greasy mud stoutly resisted erosion. At low water, the new passage would simply close, and the water would again flow around Deer Park Bend. After several years of corrective dredging, the

cutoff was finally accomplished and the new channel became the permanent bed of the river.

Islands No. 116 and No. 117 were in Deer Park Bend. They disappeared after the cutoff.



BEFORE GLASSCOCK CUTOFF. Before the construction of the artificial cutoff at Glasscock Point in 1933, the Lower Mississippi was threatening to make its own cutoff across Esperance Point, opposite Ellis Cliffs. An 1884 map showed Esperance Point occupying an area considerably north of the area it was occupying some years later when the Corps made Glasscock Cutoff. By 1933 Esperance Bend had moved southward, and the currents in Deer Park Bend were attacking the west bank and threatening the levee line.

JACKSON POINT

Mile 332.8 AHP, Map 40
Left bank, descending

In April, 1912, the Steamboat *Concordia* was engaged in flood relief work, evacuating farm laborers and livestock from the flooded Louisiana plantations. At Jackson Point, the boat hit a snag and began to leak. The pilot ran her to the shore, where she sank very rapidly in about seven feet of water. An official report of the U. S. Weather Bureau estimated that about 22 people, many of them women and children, were drowned when the tragic accident occurred.

PALMETTO BEND

Mile 326.0 AHP, Map 40

The palmetto plant, for which this bend is named, is abundant in this area, and grows well in most of the hardwood forests and swamplands of southern Louisiana. Early settlers on the plantations found it useful for making bonnets and fans. The leaves were dried and pressed and braided into long pieces and shaped into hats or bonnets lined with cotton cloth. Making the fans was a simple process. The plant is fan-shaped, and had only to be dried and trimmed to the proper size.

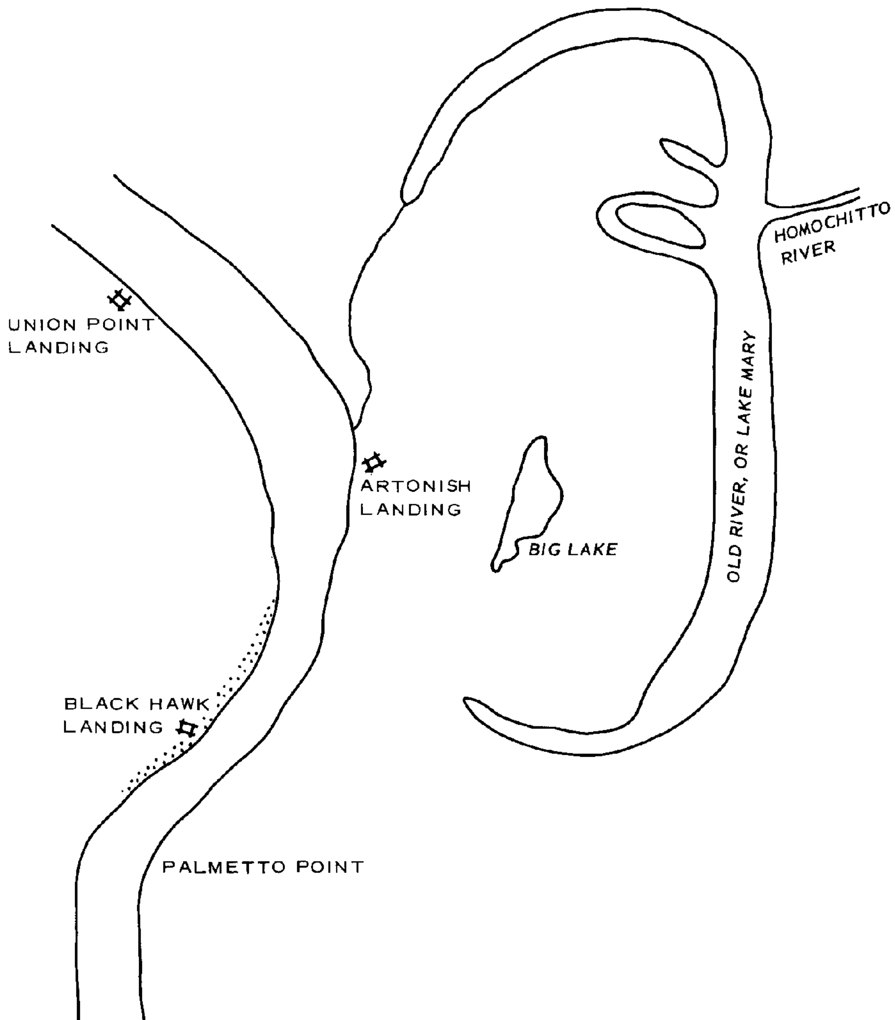
HOMOCHITTO CUTOFF

Mile 323.6 AHP, Map 40

Old River Lake, or Lake Mary, was a part of the main channel of the Lower Mississippi until the river made a natural cutoff in the area in 1776. The Homochitto River, one of the Mississippi's small tributaries on the east bank, had entered the river in the old bend. Today it finds its way into the Mississippi about 22 miles south of Natchez, by way of Washout Bayou.

The Homochitto was considered a navigable river and improvements to its navigation channel were authorized in 1899. About 20 miles of the lower channel of the river were improved, but no commercial traffic developed. The lower 35 miles of the river channel have also been improved for flood-control purposes.

Lake Mary is a very large oxbow lake that covers more than 5,000 acres. Its shoreline is still sparsely developed, and the big lake has an abundant population of fish and wildlife.



HOMOCHITTO CUTOFF. In 1776, the Mississippi cut across a neck of land and abandoned its old bend where the Homochitto River, a small tributary, had entered the big river. The cutoff also created a 5,000-acre lake that is known today as Lake Mary, or Old River Lake. Lake Mary, now 200 years old, has an abundant wildlife and fish population and its shores are still sparsely populated. It is one of the few large oxbow lakes that have not been blighted by the fishing camps and tacky cottages and trailers that make some of the other old lakes so unattractive.

BLACK HAWK POINT, LOUISIANA

Mile 320.1 AHP, Map 41
Right bank, descending

Black Hawk Point was the scene of two remarkable steamboat accidents, and the first gave the point its name. The steamer *Black Hawk* was southbound on December 27, 1837, when she passed this point with a large number of deck passengers, some Army officers, and a shipment of government payroll money on board. When the boat's boilers all blew up at once, the explosion swept some of the passengers and a number of the boxes of government money right into the river. The steamer then caught fire and drifted downstream, leaking furiously and burning very rapidly. It was later estimated that about 30 people lost their lives. All of the passengers lost their personal belongings, and only a part of the government money was recovered.

Almost 20 year later, in March 1854, the steamer *John L. Avery* hit a snag at Black Hawk Point and sank. The boat was carrying a heavy load of freight. She had stopped at Pointe Coupee on her way up the river, to pick up some hogsheads of sugar. The sugar was stacked along the outside edge of the deck, effectively hemming in all the deck passengers. When the boat went down so rapidly, they were unable to escape, and it was estimated that 80 to 90 had drowned. Most of them were Irish immigrants, whose names had not been recorded.

OLD RIVER CONTROL STRUCTURES

Mile 314.4 AHP, Map 41

In the 18th Century, the Red River and the Atchafalaya River joined the Lower Mississippi in the same big bend. The Red River was one of the Mississippi's tributaries, but the Atchafalaya was a high water outlet, a distributary that carried excess flows from the Mississippi to the Gulf of Mexico, through the Atchafalaya Basin.

In 1831, Captain Henry Shreve attempted to improve navigation on the Lower Mississippi by cutting off the big bend in the vicinity of the Red and Atchafalaya Rivers. The cutoff caused the Atchafalaya to fill with drift and debris, and it soon became unnavigable. In 1839, it was reported that the head of the Atchafalaya had grown so small that in low water people could walk across it on a plank 15 feet long. The State of Louisiana, in an effort to keep the Atchafalaya from closing completely, had the huge raft of drift and debris removed, and the Atchafalaya immediately began to enlarge and deepen its channel.

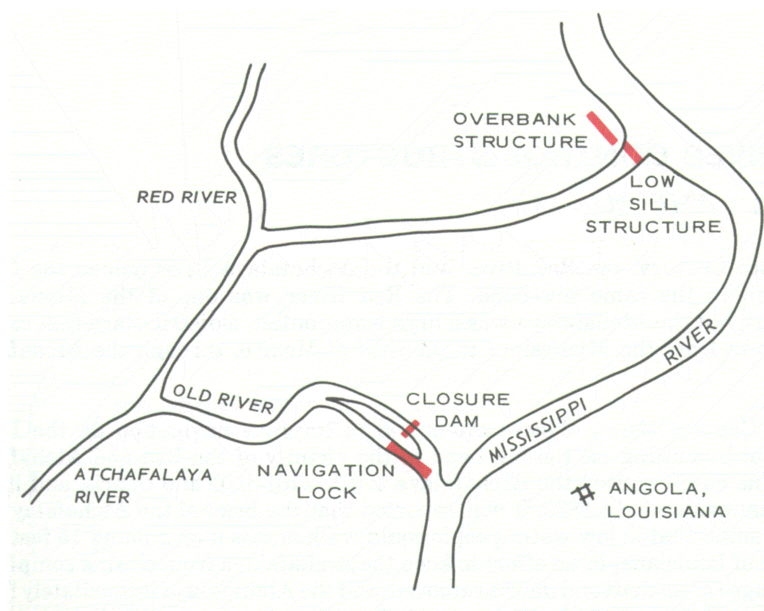
Shreve's Cutoff caused other changes in the area. The upper part of the old bend of the river began to fill, closing itself off from the Mississippi. The lower arm of the bend

became the Atchafalaya's connection with the Mississippi. In 1872, Red River changed its course, abandoned its old mouth, broke through into the old riverbed, and joined itself to the head of the Atchafalaya. With the channel that had become known as "Old River" as the only connection with the Mississippi, the flow was either westerly or easterly, depending upon the respective stages of the Red and the Mississippi.

The changed conditions caused the Atchafalaya to enlarge rapidly near its head. In 1880 it was reported that water was no longer flowing into the Mississippi from either the Red or the Atchafalaya. The current in Old River was flowing into the Atchafalaya at all stages of the water.

In the years that followed, many efforts were made to limit the flow from the Mississippi into the Atchafalaya, but they were all unsuccessful. It soon became obvious that the Atchafalaya, if left to its own devices, would capture the full flow of the Mississippi at Old River, creating a permanent diversion. The effect of the diversion on Baton Rouge, New Orleans, and the heavily populated and highly industrialized areas below Old River would be disastrous.

On September 3, 1954, Congress authorized the Army Corps of Engineers to construct permanent control structures at Old River to avert the threatened diversion of the Mississippi. The problems had been under intensive study for many years, and the construction of the project began almost immediately.



OLD RIVER CONTROL STRUCTURES. Control structures constructed by the Corps of Engineers regulate the flow from the Mississippi into the Atchafalaya. The distance from Old River to the Gulf of Mexico is about 320 miles via the Lower Mississippi, but only 140 miles through the Atchafalaya. A navigation lock provides passage for boat traffic.

The first structure to be completed was the low sill structure, and it was designed to maintain the flow that was considered normal at the time the structure was built. An overbank structure was then added to take care of excess water in major floods. So that boats would not be cut off from the Atchafalaya and Red Rivers, a navigation lock was constructed. It was opened to navigation on March 15, 1963. With all the control structures in place, Old River itself was completely closed by a huge earthen dam. The uncontrolled flow of water from the Mississippi into the Atchafalaya ceased completely on July 12, 1963.

For the next decade, the Old River control structures functioned satisfactorily. During the major flood of 1973, however, a wing wall collapsed in front of the low sill structure. When the flood waters subsided, surveys revealed severe damage to the structure. Emergency repairs were made, and the engineers began another long battle to keep the Atchafalaya from capturing the Mississippi. An extensive rehabilitation program is being developed by the Corps, while studies continue on permanent solutions to the complex problems at Old River.

Since most of the problems at Old River arose after Captain Henry Shreve constructed his cutoff in the area in 1831, it has often been argued that Shreve was responsible for the difficulties. It seems entirely possible, however, that the river would have effected a cutoff of its own without Shreve's assistance. Samuel Cumings, in *The Western Pilot*, commented in 1829 that the river was rapidly wearing away the neck of of land in the bend, which was then only 200 to 300 yards across. Islands No. 119, No. 120, and No. 121 (called the Three Sisters) had already been completely washed away, Cumings said, and he predicted an early cutoff.

FORT ADAMS, MISSISSIPPI

Mile 311.9 AHP, Map 41
Left bank, descending

The high bluff where the little village of Fort Adams, Mississippi, is located today has borne several names during its past history.

In the early 1700's French colonists called the bluff Davion's Rock. It was here that the Tunica Indians had settled for a brief time after they left the Yazoo River, and with them was the French priest, Father Antoine Davion.

In 1763, the British acquired the former French colony, and took possession of the settlements the French had made. In 1764, Major Loftus, a British officer in command of a small detachment of soldiers, was sent up the river to take possession of the Illinois settlements. He and his party were ambushed by Indians as they passed Davion's Rock, and retreated after suffering heavy losses. The British settlers began to call the bluff Loftus Heights.

When General James Wilkinson arrived at Natchez on August 26, 1798, to participate in the transfer of the Louisiana Territory to the United States, he concentrated all the American military forces in the area at Loftus Heights, where he constructed a fort that he called Fort Adams.

Fort Adams was garrisoned until after the annexation of West Florida, and a river traveler noted in 1810 that a handful of American soldiers were still there. By 1819, the blockhouse had been abandoned and the garrison withdrawn. A small rural community had grown up around the site of the old fort, and it still exists today, preserving the name of Fort Adams.

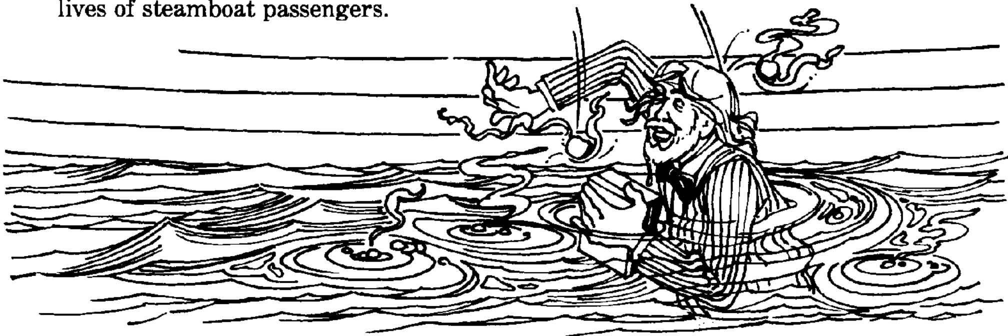
The river in front of the town of Fort Adams was the scene of a spectacular steamboat explosion on May 9, 1837. The steamer *Ben Sherrod* was the boat involved, and the explosion that sank her shook the country for miles around. It was a long, long blast. First the boiler blew up; then some kegs of whiskey and brandy; and then a cargo of gunpowder that the boat was carrying.

P. R. Bohlen was one of the passengers on board the *Ben Sherrod.* He had been down to Baton Rouge with a flatboat load of coal and ice. The sale of his cargo had brought him $2,000 in gold coins, which he carried with him when he embarked on the steamboat for the trip back up the river. Awakened by the first explosion, he had hurried out on deck. Carrying the box that contained his gold coins, he leaped overboard and clung to the burning hull of the boat until hot coals began to fall on his head. Then he dropped his box, and swam for the shore. He was luckier than most of the passengers, for he made it to safety. Of the 300 people on board, it was later estimated that only 70 had escaped with their lives.

In addition to Bohlen's box of coins, a shipment of money destined for a Tennessee bank and $18,000 belonging to another passenger, went to the bottom with the *Ben Sherrod.*

The usual horror stories were told about the accident. It was said that the boat had been engaged in a race, that the crew were all drunk, and that the engineer had deserted his post without stopping the engines. It was also reported that a southbound boat had passed and had run over some of the people who were struggling to stay afloat and had then gone on its way, refusing to stop and assist in rescue work.

The explosion of the *Ben Sherrod* was one of the major tragedies that led to the passage of the Steamboat Act of 1838, a well-intentioned but ineffectual effort to protect the lives of steamboat passengers.



OLD RIVER NAVIGATION LOCK

Mile 304.0 AHP, Map 42
Right bank, descending

Excavation for Old River Lock began in July, 1958, and the first towboat was locked through in March, 1963. The lock and navigation channel provide passage from the Mississippi into Old River, and thence into the Red-Ouachita and Atchafalaya River systems. The lock is 1,185 feet long, 75 feet wide, and has a controlling depth of 11 feet.

In 1974 about 4.5 million tons of cargo were towed through the lock. Most of the products are chemical or petroleum products.

ANGOLA, LOUISIANA

Mile 302.8 AHP, Map 42
Left bank, descending

The State penal institution at Angola was established in 1890, when the State of Louisiana purchased the plantation on the east bank of the Mississippi and moved the State prison from the city of Baton Rouge. The prison farm covers about 18,000 acres of land, much of it in sugar cane, and has in recent years been the center of a continuing controversy about prison conditions and housing facilities.

On the point where the prison farm is now located, Pierre LeMoyne, Sieur d'Iberville, visited the Houma Indians who occupied the heights behind the Lake of the Cross in 1699. The lake received its name when Iberville and his party erected a huge wooden cross on its banks. The following year, in 1700, Father Paul du Rhu, a French Jesuit priest, built a chapel for his mission among the Houmas and planted another large cross in the middle of the village square. The Houmas were driven from their homes a few years later, by the Tunica Indians, and settled farther down the river.

The bluff behind the lake, and the big bend of the river in front of it, took the name of the Tunica Indians. Tunica Bend was the scene of a great deal of naval activity during the Civil War. When David Farragut, commander of the Union fleet that captured New Orleans, made his first trip up the Mississippi in 1862, his flagship, the *U.S.S, Hartford* ran aground in Tunica Bend and stuck fast in the mud. To dislodge the ocean-going sloop from the mudbank, the Union seamen lined up on one rail and ran madly across the deck to the other rail. Running back and forth, back and forth, they tried to roll the ship off the mud as they had rolled it off the sands of coastal waters. The effort was a failure, and the sailors finally had to resort to the backbreaking job of unloading 100 tons of coal and most of the ship's 25 guns before they could lighten her enough to get her back into the deeper water. Admiral Farragut confided to a friend that the mental strain of navigating the treacherous Mississippi had made him physically ill and that if he did not get back to the ocean soon he would be a nervous wreck.

In November, 1864, a near disaster was averted at Tunica Bend when the Union sailors on board the Union vessels *Lafayette* and *Ozark* discovered that some bold Confederate swimmers had attached torpedoes to the bows of their ships. The chagrined sailors removed the deadly contraptions without mishap and afterwards kept a sharper watch on the vessels at night.

RACCOURCI CUTOFF

Mile 299.4 AHP, Map 42

When Shreve's Cutoff failed to alleviate navigation problems on the lower reaches of the Mississippi, the State of Louisiana in 1848 resorted to more of the same, constructing another cutoff below, that came to be known as Raccourci Cutoff. The new cutoff shortened the navigation channel by 19 miles, but failed to bring about much improvement in the reaches above.

Raccourci Island was the scene of what Federal authorities called "a horrible murder" during the Civil War. When the commander of the Union vessel, the *Nymph,* went ashore at the island, he was surprised and killed by a Confederate force in the area. Four Union gunboats were sent to Raccourci, and the Union men landed and destroyed corn, sugar, molasses, storehouses, and everything else that they could find in the vicinity that might be "rebel property."

HOG POINT, LOUISIANA

Mile 298.2 AHP, Map 42
Right bank, descending

Confederate forces erected a battery in the woods on Hog Point in November, 1863, and engaged several Union gunboats as they attempted to pass the point. A Union transport was hit and set afire by an exploding shell, and heavy retaliatory fire drove the rebels out of the area for a time. Later in the war, the steamer *Joseph Pierce* was fired upon by a rebel battery in the same area. When the Confederates learned that their target was a private vessel with ladies on board, they silenced their guns and moved away again.

The Hog Point crossing has long been one of the troublesome places on the lower river, and requires a great deal of maintenance dredging by the Corps of Engineers.

MORGANZA FLOODWAY

Mile 285.7 AHP, Map 43
Right bank, descending

Before the Morganza Floodway was built, the levee system at Morganza had been notoriously difficult to maintain. In 1874 a major crevasse swept it away, and the gap remained open for the next ten years.

In 1884, the State of Louisiana expended a large sum of money on the closing of the mile-wide gap at Morganza, and had just turned the new levee over to the Parish to maintain when the flood of 1884 threatened its destruction. Sixty or seventy workmen were rushed to Morganza to strengthen the new levee, but on March 14, it began to slough away. More men were hurried to the area, but at about 5:00 p.m. the same afternoon a fountain of water began to spout from the ground about 60 feet from the base of the embankment. The new earthwork was rapidly undermined, the levee collapsed, and a gap appeared. It was soon more than a mile wide.

Under the direction of the Mississippi River Commission, and with the help of about $40,000 in Federal funds, the new crevasse was closed before the high water season of 1887, but three years later the flood of 1890 overtopped the Morganza levee and created two new crevasses.

When the Corps of Engineers adopted the Mississippi River & Tributaries flood-control project in 1928, Morganza was chosen as the site for a control structure to divert excess flows from the Mississippi into the Atchafalaya Basin Floodway when necessary.

MORGANZA CONTROL STRUCTURE. During the major flood of 1973, the Morganza control structure and floodway were put in use for the first time. In the above photograph, taken during the flood emergency, the Lower Mississippi is on the left, and the floodway is on the right.

The reinforced concrete structure and the Morganza floodway are designed to divert a maximum of 600,000 cubic feet per second from the Mississippi. The structure was completed in 1954, and was operated for the first time in 1973, when it helped relieve the pressure on the damaged Old River low sill control structure, and protected the Mississippi River levees downstream. The maximum discharge through the Morganza structure during the 1973 flood was 142,000 cubic feet per second, or only a fraction of its design capacity.

ST. MAURICE, LOUISIANA

Mile 271.5 AHP, Map 43
Right bank, descending

Rivermen could never mention the steamboat *J. M. White* without using superlatives. They called her "the finest river boat in the world," and even the owners of competing boats had to admit that she was the most beautiful and elegant steamer that had ever been seen on the Lower Mississippi. She was the last of three boats that had been named for a prominent St. Louis merchant, and she was probably the fastest and finest of the three.

Built in 1878, the boat was 320 feet long and was lavishly furnished with every convenience for her passengers. She made her debut the same year that the yellow fever epidemic of 1878 struck the Mississippi Valley. Hard times followed the epidemic, for the South was still reeling under the economic disasters of the Reconstruction Period. The *J. M. White* never had a real opportunity to test either her speed or her full carrying capacity.

The big boat was still on the river when she caught fire December 13, 1886, at St. Maurice, and sank. Several lives were lost. The wreck of the fine old steamer could be seen for many years afterward, in low water periods, but the river finally buried the *J. M. White* in a hugh sandbar near the old landing.

ST. FRANCISVILLE, LOUISIANA

Mile 265.5 AHP, Map 44
Left bank, descending

The little town of St. Francisville was established around 1790 by British and American settlers who had received grants of land from the Spanish government. When the remainder of Louisiana became American territory by virtue of the

Louisiana Purchase in 1803, the St. Francisville and Baton Rouge districts were retained by the Spanish because they were considered to be a part of the Spanish colony of West Florida, and not a part of the Louisiana colony.

The pro-American element in St. Francisville and the surrounding region did not agree, and they staged a mini-rebellion, captured the Spanish fort at Baton Rouge on September 23, 1810, and set up the "Republic of West Florida."

West Florida's independence was short-lived, for the United States promptly annexed the area, claiming that it had belonged to the United States all along. Some of the leaders of the rebellion against Spanish rule grumbled about the high-handed American action, complaining that they should at least have been consulted, but the opposition was weak and the majority of the people in the area had wanted all along to become a part of the American nation.

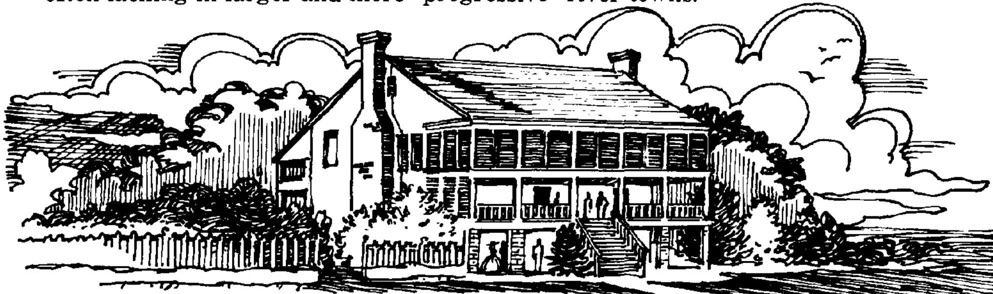
St. Francisville was strung out along a high ridge overlooking the river, and a rival town grew up at the foot of the ridge. Bayou Sara, located on the river bank, threatened to take all of St. Francisville's trade away, since it had control of the only river landing in front of the older town.

During the Civil War, St. Francisville was said by Union officers to be "a hotbed of secession," and when a civilian agent of the Federal Government was captured and detained in the town, a gunboat retaliated by bombarding it for several hours. The accurate gunfire did considerable damage to the houses and buildings of St. Francisville.

Bayou Sara was not molested by the Union forces, because they believed that most of its citizens were loyal to the Union, but after the war the rival town fell on hard times when the river's currents attacked it and carried away most of its buildings.

St. Francisville has survived to enjoy moderate prosperity in recent years. An annual Audubon Pilgrimage in the spring is a tourist attraction. John James Audubon lived in the vicinity in the 1820's and some of his famous bird paintings had their origin in West Feliciana Parish. Many of the fine plantation homes and interesting buildings of the town are opened for tours during the spring pilgrimage.

St. Francisville has so far escaped the doubtful benefits of modern urban development and has therefore preserved much of its early charm. Its neat small houses, gracious mansions, and interesting public buildings have given it a flavor and character that is often lacking in larger and more "progressive" river towns.



POINTE COUPEE

Mile 265.5 AHP, Map 44
Right bank, descending

Pointe Coupee (French: Cut Point) was the site of some of the earliest sugar plantations in Louisiana, and early travelers on the river often noted that the extended settlements that began at the Pointe resembled "a village 20 miles long." The French had established a military post there, but by 1796 all trace of the old fort had disappeared and the Spanish garrison at Pointe Coupee consisted of one officer and one soldier.

The very first steamboat explosion on the Lower Mississippi occurred just off the west bank near Pointe Coupee in 1817. The steamboat *Constitution* had been built the previous year, and had originally been called the *Oliver Evans*, but her name had been changed some time before the accident occurred at Pointe Coupee.

The boat was rounding the point when a boiler exploded, wrecking the front part of the cabin and killing or wounding some 30 passengers. Damage to the boat itself was apparently not great, for the following notice appeared in a New Orleans newspaper on July 19, 1817:

> *"For ST. LOUIS, The Steam-Boat Constitution, R. P. Guyard master. Will be ready to receive cargo on the 25th inst. The Constitution, having been completely repaired and put in charge of a careful and enterprising commander, with an experienced engineer, leaves little doubt but that she will perform the voyage in a very short time, with perfect safety to passengers and cargo."*

The public was apparently reassured by the promise of "perfect safety" and the *Constitution* continued to be engaged in the river trade until 1822, when she was abandoned for the simple reason that six years of service on the Mississippi had worn her out completely.

FAUSSE RIVER CUTOFF

Mile 258.5 AHP, Map 44

Although current navigation maps give the date of the Fausse River Cutoff as 1722, there is considerable doubt among historians as to the actual date of this event.

When Iberville and Bienville explored the river in 1699, one of the accounts of the voyage, written by a member of the expedition, noted that the French explorers were told by Indians that they could save time by portaging their canoes through the cutoff in this area that was already developing in 1699.

When Father Pierre Charlevoix came down the Mississippi in 1721, he noted that the old river bed was dry except in time of flood, and that the cutoff channel had been "sounded with a line of 30 fathoms, without finding any bottom."

The French called the bend that had been removed from the river channel "Fausse Riviere," or False River, and it was soon lined with homes constructed by some of Louisiana's wealthy sugar planters. One of the most influential and admired was Julien Poydras.

Poydras had been born in France, and had come to New Orleans in 1768. Carrying a pack on his back, the young Frenchman peddled his goods until he accumulated funds to buy a plantation of his own in Pointe Coupee Parish. Poydras was a well-educated and capable man who soon became extremely wealthy. He took an interest in local politics and was president of the State's first Constitutional Convention and twice president of the State senate of Louisiana. At the time of his death, he was the owner of 1,000 slaves and six plantations. Much of his wealth was left to charitable institutions.

False River lake covers more than 4,000 acres and is today one of the favorite hunting, fishing, and boating resorts of residents of the area. Several of the old plantation homes in the vicinity of the lakefront have been preserved.

PORT HUDSON, LOUISIANA

Mile 256.0 AHP, Map 44
Left bank, descending

Port Hudson before the Civil War was a flourishing little town that had the good fortune to have both a river landing and a rail line to the interior. It was fortified by Confederates in 1862, and became one of the focal points of the Union effort to gain control of the Lower Mississippi River.

Admiral David Farragut had taken his small fleet past Port Hudson without hindrance early in 1862, but when he tried it again in March, 1863, only two of the Union boats suceeded in passing the fortifications the rebels had constructed. General Nathaniel P. Banks, with a Union force of about 13,000 troops, had moved against the rebel stronghold as the boats attempted to pass up the river, hoping to create a diversion that would allow the fleet to pass safely. The whole affair turned into a Union fiasco, with several of the Federal gunboats and transports disabled and the Union steamer *Mississippi* totally destroyed.

Late in May, 1863, General Banks besieged Port Hudson, and a Union fleet bombarded it for 43 days. Attacks on May 27, June 11, and June 14 were repulsed, but when the defenders of Port Hudson learned that Vicksburg had surrendered on July 4, 1863, they gave up Port Hudson as well.

Admiral David D. Porter, commander of the Union fleet, was jubilant. *"The Mississippi is open from end to end,"* he wired the Secretary of Navy. Porter then went down to see the place that had given General Banks and Admiral Farragut so much trouble. He wondered what all the fuss had been about, he said. Compared to Vicksburg, Port Hudson appeared to him to have been poorly fortified and hardly strong enough to stop a regiment, much less an army. Banks and Farragut replied indignantly that Port Hudson had been the strongest fortification on the entire river.

Today the Federal Government maintains a National Cementary at Port Hudson, where 3,804 Union soldiers are buried. Only 582 of the little stones bear names; the remainder are numbered and marked "Unknown."

PORT HUDSON CEMETERY. The National Cemetery at Port Hudson contains the graves of 3,804 Union soldiers. Only 582 of the bodies were identified; the remainder are buried in graves marked "Unknown." Confederate soldiers were buried in family graveyards and churchyards in the area.

PROFIT ISLAND

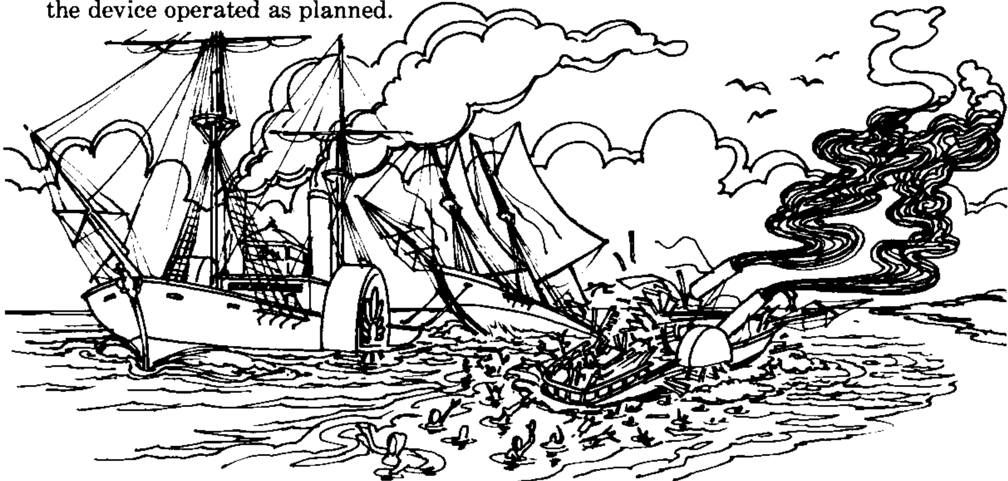
Mile 249.5 AHP, Map 45
Left bank, descending

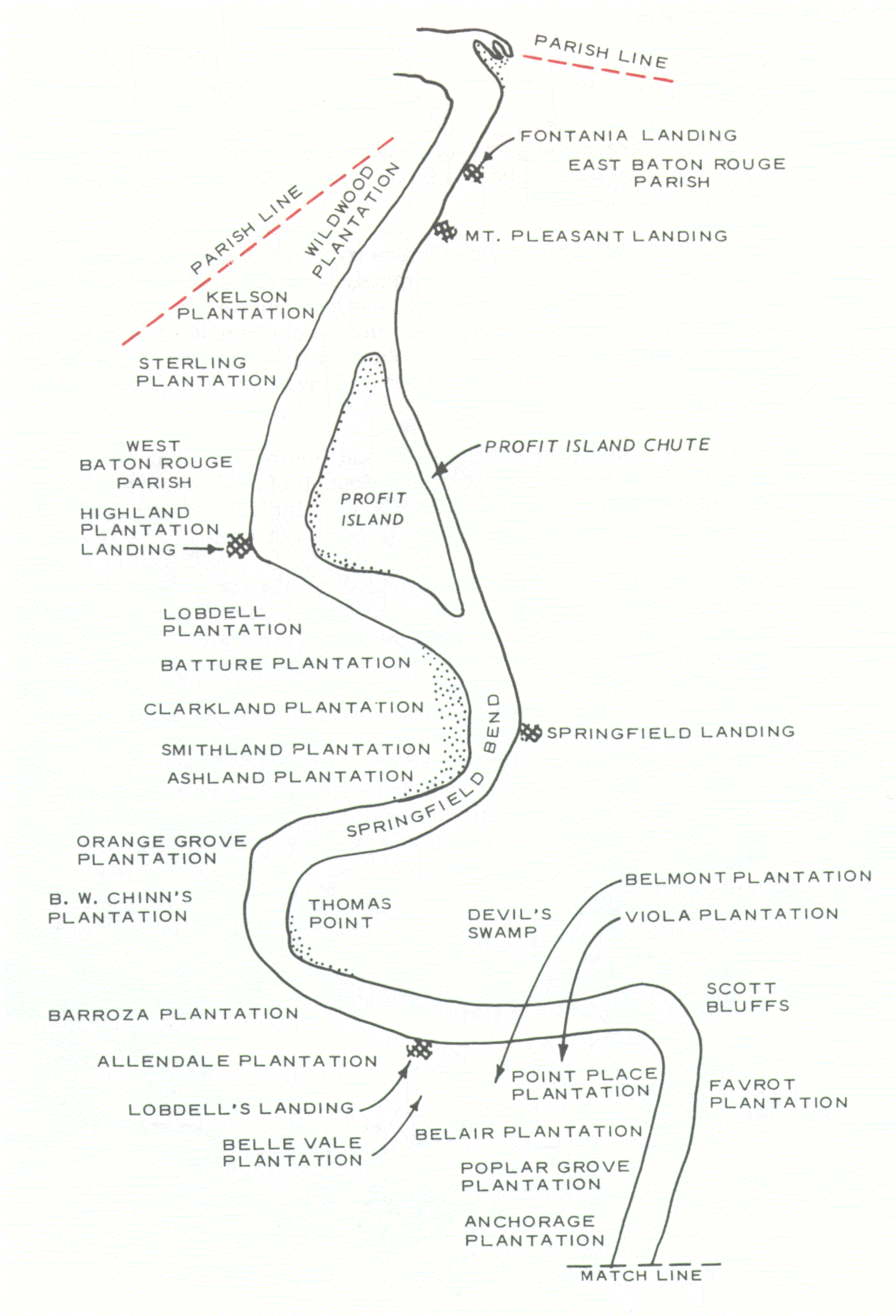
The large island that is known today as Profit Island was formed from two small ones, Islands No. 123 and No. 124. It is named for an early settler in the area and was originally spelled "Prophet Island."

When the United States was transporting Indian tribes out of the boundaries of the new southern frontier in 1837, a gruesome tragedy occurred at Profit Island. The steamer *Monmouth*, a relatively small river boat, had been chartered to take about 700 Creek Indians up to the Arkansas River, where they would be sent to the Oklahoma territory for resettlement. Northbound at the island with a heavy load of passengers, the *Monmouth* collided with a sailing vessel called the *Trenton*, which was being towed downstream by the steamer *Warren*.

The collision caused the *Monmouth* to break apart, and hundreds of frightened Indians were precipitated into the water. Contemporary accounts of the accident were vague and very brief, but it was estimated that "300 to 400 of the Indians were drowned." The toll may have been higher; no one really seemed to know or care.

During the Civil War, the Union ironclad gunboat *Essex* had a narrow escape at Profit Island. Commander William Porter reported that his vessel had been headed upstream when it ran over some strange object in the water. Turning back downstream to investigate, the boat ran over the object a second time. Porter ordered the gunboat to the shore and sent two seamen in a small boat to take a look at the mysterious object. The sailors discovered that it was an explosive device, attached to a line strung between the east bank of the river and the island, straight across the navigation channel. If the "infernal machine" had worked properly, it would have destroyed the *Essex* and killed everyone on board, the shaken commander reported. He took the device up to the top of a nearby levee and detonated it, shuddering at the force of the explosion as he reflected that he would have been one of the casualties had the device operated as planned.




PARISH LINE
FONTANIA LANDING
EAST BATON ROUGE
PARISH
PARISH LINE
WILDWOOD
PLANTATION
MT. PLEASANT LANDING
KELSON
PLANTATION
STERLING
PLANTATION
PROFIT ISLAND CHUTE
WEST
BATON ROUGE
PARISH
PROFIT
ISLAND
HIGHLAND
PLANTATION
LANDING
LOBDELL
PLANTATION
BATTURE PLANTATION
CLARKLAND PLANTATION
SMITHLAND PLANTATION
ASHLAND PLANTATION
SPRINGFIELD BEND
SPRINGFIELD LANDING
ORANGE GROVE
PLANTATION
B. W. CHINN'S
PLANTATION
THOMAS
POINT
DEVIL'S
SWAMP
BELMONT PLANTATION
VIOLA PLANTATION
SCOTT
BLUFFS
BARROZA PLANTATION
ALLENDALE PLANTATION
POINT PLACE
PLANTATION
FAVROT
PLANTATION
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POPLAR GROVE
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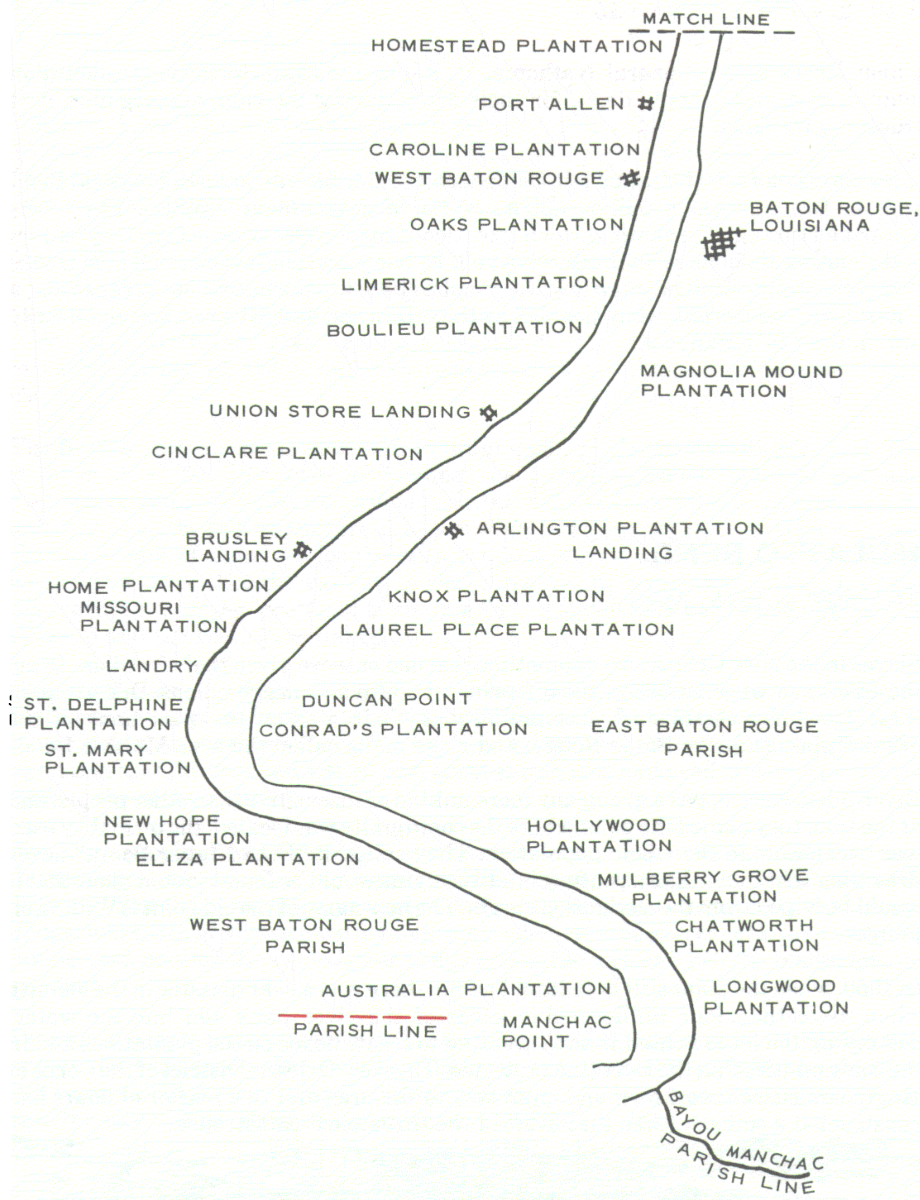


PLANTATIONS IN THE BATON ROUGE PARISHES. An 1884 map shows most of the Louisiana sugar plantations that were located on the banks of the Lower Mississippi in East Baton Rouge Parish and West Baton Rouge Parish. Many of them had been established by French colonial settlers long before the region had become a part of the United States.

SPRINGFIELD BEND

Mile 244.7 AHP, Map 45

Union forces under General Nathaniel P. Banks used the Springfield plantation landing as a main supply depot for their army during the campaign against Port Hudson, Louisiana.

A few days before Port Hudson fell, Confederates raided the depot in Springfield Bend and set fire to about a million dollars worth of government supplies. The rebels rampaged through the camp, throwing bottles of turpentine into the fires they had set and shouting their blood-chilling rebel yell. In panic and confusion, the Union troops that were supposed to be guarding the supplies fled into the night. During the raid, a Union boat, the *Iberville,* was disabled by the rebels and had to be rescued and hastily towed away by a gunboat.

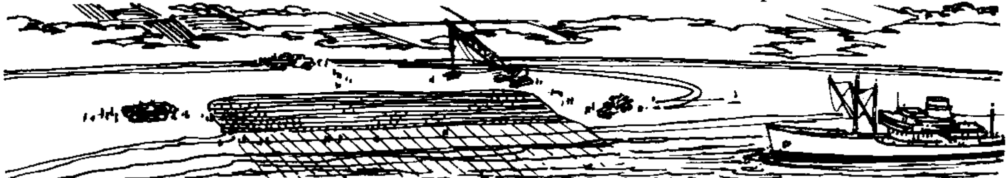
MULATTO BEND

Mile 236.6 AHP, Map 46

Slaves in the New Orleans area sometimes earned or were given their freedom. Often the freedmen were mulattos, the offspring of white and negro unions. One group of these freedmen established a community of their own on the west bank of the Mississippi just above Baton Rouge, and river pilots called the area Mulatto Bend.

River pilots were not as a group any more unkind or insensitive than other people, and at the time they named the point where the community was located, the term they used was acceptable to the whole population. They called it "Free Nigger Point," never dreaming that more than a century later the name would be found so obnoxious that it would be wiped from the navigation charts. The new name of the old point is Wilkinson Point.

In 1950, when the point still bore its old name, there was a near disaster in the vicinity when more than four million cubic yards of the river bank slid into the water, destroying the levee behind it and threating to create havoc on the plantations and in the communities that the levee line protected. The New Orleans District of the Corps of Engineers rushed workmen and engineers to the area and in a matter of hours had constructed a setback levee that averted the threatened catastrophe.



PORT ALLEN LOCK AND CANAL (Intracoastal Waterway)

Mile 228.4 AHP, Map 46
Right bank, descending

The Port Allen Lock and Canal, constructed by the Army Corps of Engineers between 1955 and 1962, cuts the distance from the Mississippi to the western branch of the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway by about 160 miles. From the Mississippi at Port Allen to the GIWW at Morgan City, the distance is now only 64 miles.

The Port Allen Lock, which replaced an obsolete lock at Plaquemine, Louisiana, was begun in 1955 and opened to navigation in July, 1961. In 1974, the traffic through the Lock amounted to 16.3 million tons. The canal has a channel 12 feet deep by 125 feet wide. The Gulf Intracoastal Waterway with which it is connected is 1,109 miles long and stretches from the Mexican border on the west to Apalachee Bay in Florida on the east.

The first steamboat on the Lower Mississippi sank just above Port Allen in 1814. The steamer *New Orleans* was northbound for Natchez, loaded with freight and passengers. She stopped at Baton Rouge on July 13, 1814, unloaded some of her cargo, and continued the trip up the river. A short while later, her captain decided to tie up to the west bank of the river for the night because the weather was bad. He landed alongside what he thought was a steep bank, and the passengers went to bed. Early in the morning, the crew prepared to resume the voyage. At daylight the engines were fired up and the lines were untied.

To the astonishment of her crew, the *New Orleans* seemed unwilling to leave her snug berth beside the river bank. She swung around in a circle, and refused to depart. On investigation, it appeared that the water had fallen some 16 to 18 inches during the night and that the boat had settled on a great stump that had been invisible under the surface the night before.

The boat's supply of fuel was heaved overboard, and the crew worked her off the snag. Immediately the *New Orleans* began to leak, and she sank so fast that it was with difficulty that the passengers escaped with their lives. They were taken back to Baton Rouge, where ten of them signed a public notice that later appeared in the newspapers, saying that neither the captain nor the crew of the boat had been to blame for the accident.

Two years later, another steamer called the *New Orleans* was running in the Natchez to New Orleans trade. The new boat had the engines salvaged from the old *New Orleans* and had the same hard luck that had struck her predecessor. She hit a snag near the city of New Orleans and sank, on December 1, 1818.