

# A Good Home for a Poor Man

Fort Polk and Vernon Parish  
1800 – 1940

*Steven D. Smith*



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1999

*Dedicated to*  
*Andrew Jackson “Jack” Hadnot,*  
*John Cupit,*  
*Erbon Wise,*  
*John D. O’Halloran,*  
*Don Marler,*  
*Mary Cleveland,*  
*Ruth and John Guy,*  
*Martha Palmer,*  
*and others who have wrest from obscurity*  
*the history of Vernon Parish.*

★ ★ ★

*This project was funded by the Department of Defense’s Legacy Resource Management Program and administered by the Southeast Archeological Center of the National Park Service under Cooperative Agreement CA-5000-3-9010, Subagreement CA-5000-4-9020/3, between the National Park Service and the South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of South Carolina.*

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## PREFACE

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*A good many new settlements have been made in Vernon since the war, and its inhabitants claim that it is a very good home for a poor man.*

— Lockett 1969:79–80 [1874]

Indeed, for a brief period from the 1870s to the coming of the lumber industry in the late 1890s, Vernon Parish was a very good home for a poor man. Away from the main courses of human migration and interaction, the sylvan countryside of the newly formed Louisiana parish offered its hardy settlers the “solitudes of the pine barren country” (Lockett 1969:29 [1874]). Their farms were scattered widely across this countryside, but generally clustered along the creeks that ran either south and west into the Sabine River or south and east into the Calcasieu. “Along the streams that flow into Sabine River...there are some very good and quite extensive farms. This is especially the case with regard to Anacoco Bayou and its

tributaries” (Lockett 1969:80 [1874]). But to the east, along streams such as Drakes Creek, Whiskey Chitto, Bird’s Creek, Six Mile, and Big Brushy, the soil was much less fertile. Called by its scarce inhabitants “Hog Wallow Land,” this region would one day be Fort Polk and the home of the United States Army’s Joint Readiness Training Command (JRTC).

Despite poor farmland, the region did have one asset of immense value to an emerging twentieth-century America and a South recovering from the Civil War. This asset was longleaf pine.

The following is a history of the men and women who made this pineland their home from the days of the first pioneers to 1940.



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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Over the long course of researching and writing this history, many kind people gave advice, encouragement, and assistance. Some went far out of their way to help me and occasionally “set me straight.”

First and foremost, I resoundingly thank Dr. David G. Anderson, the National Park Services’s technical representative, and James Grafton, Fort Polk’s cultural resource management coordinator for their patience in awaiting this book and for generously providing information, as well as for the time and space to conduct my research. This report simply could not have been possible without them. In this group, I also include my editor, Virginia Horak, who took a ponderous draft and made it comprehensible.

Dr. Harry Scheele, also with the NPS, generously assisted and advised me while acting as technical representative for three South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology (SCIAA) survey projects that occurred simultaneously with this contract. At Fort Polk, Dr. Charles Stagg, Chief, Environmental and Natural Resources Management Division, and Jackie Smith, Chief, Conservation Branch, deserve mention for their support of the project and its goals. On site, Robert Hays assisted me in coordination and use of installation resources.

Thanks go to Gerri Hobdy, Louisiana State Historic Preservation Officer, and Dr. Tom Eubanks, State Archaeologist. Old friends and colleagues at the Division of Archaeology, Philip G. “Duke” Rivet, Nancy W. Hawkins, Tammy Bridges, and Mike Mahady, deserve a special blessing for tolerating my tenure in their office (both as an employee and a contractor). My thanks also go to former state archaeologist (and former boss) Dr. Kathleen M. Byrd and her husband Dr. Robert W. Neuman for their hospitality during my two research trips to Natchitoches.

Mary Linn Wernet at the Cammie G. Henry Research Center, Watson Memorial Library, Northwestern State University of Louisiana, was very helpful in finding resources and expediting

the collection of maps and other documents. At the Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University, I was efficiently assisted by Judy Bolton, Archivist. Virginia Rogers Smith and Judy Smith at the Louisiana State Library were equally professional.

Mary Cleveland of the Museum of West Louisiana deserves a special thanks for her advice, direction, and patience during the long process of completing this book. Mary and, as she claims, an anonymous donor purchased copies of most of the photographs used herein. I am tremendously grateful for “their” assistance.

Local historian Martha Palmer also shared her knowledge of the region. Billie and John Guy, friends of archaeology and history in the Fort Polk region for many years, are also acknowledged. Lack of time precluded tapping into their wealth of knowledge, and this manuscript suffers for it.

Several western Louisiana residents shared their time and advice, including Pam Smart, Nick Polacia, and Howard Blackburn (who set me straight on Shay steam engines).

At SCIAA, University of South Carolina, I thank Dr. Christopher Ohm Clement and Ramona M. Grunden for their editing and for listening to me go on and on about the region’s history. Jill Quattlebaum ably helped prepare figures and typed the appendix. Keith Krawczynski conducted an initial bibliographic search. Sherry Bailey assisted with the project accounting. As always, Pat Hatcher with USC Sponsored Programs and Research got the contract wheels rolling in the right direction. I must also mention the librarians who worked daily miracles at the interlibrarian loan department in the Thomas Cooper Library at USC. This work simply would not have been half as complete without them.

Finally, thank you to all who deserve an acknowledgment but who, through my own inattention, remain anonymous. Despite all this help, I still undoubtedly made mistakes. Although nothing herein was discovered or written *sine numine*, remaining errors and omissions are mine alone.

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# Chapter 1

## BACKGROUND

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### THE PURPOSE OF THIS BOOK

In 1966, the National Historic Preservation Act (P.L. 89-665, as amended) recognized that “the preservation of this irreplaceable heritage [i.e., historic properties significant to the Nation’s heritage] is in the public interest so that its vital legacy of cultural, educational, aesthetic, inspirational, economic, and energy benefits will be maintained and enriched for future generations of Americans” (NHPA Section 1[b][4]). This act, its numerous regulations, and related legislation requires federal agencies, like the U.S. Army,<sup>1</sup> to inventory, preserve, and manage “historic properties,” also called cultural resources.

Cultural resources are archaeological sites, historic houses and other structures, and even objects of historic value. At Fort Polk, the U.S. Army has spent considerable time, effort, and money locating, identifying, and inventorying thousands of archaeological sites on its property or on property owned by the U.S. Forest Service where the army trains. These sites date from some ten thousand years ago to just before World War II. A major part of the army’s cultural resource management program involves determining the relative value of a site—can the site add to our knowledge of the past or is it less important and thus subject to increased levels of use for military training. Archaeologists naturally like to think that all sites have some value but recognize that some can tell them much more about the past than others. Sites considered very valuable meet criteria for the National Register of Historic Places and are determined eligible for listing on the register. These

sites receive greater attention and may be studied further. But the key question in this process is how to determine whether or not a site is eligible.

One method is to organize what is already known about the past into themes characteristic of the region, then focus on sites that can tell historians and archaeologists more about these themes, which are called “historic contexts.” The National Park Service’s Advisory Council on Historic Preservation advises other agencies regarding their historic preservation responsibilities. The Advisory Council has defined historic contexts as “an organizational format that groups historic properties that share similarities of time, theme, and geography” (1989:7). For historic period sites (dating from the days of Christopher Columbus to 1940), it makes sense to develop historic contexts out of a region’s (or installation’s) documented history (Derry et al. 1977:14–15). This brings us to the purpose of this Vernon Parish history.

Being an archaeologist by training, in 1994, I was given the opportunity, under a contract administered by the National Park Service, to research and write a historic context study for Fort Polk and the Joint Readiness Training Center (see inside front cover). This study would provide the context in which historic period archaeological sites within the installation could be evaluated for their eligibility for inclusion on the National Register. The study was to be constructed loosely along two lines of research. The first was to develop a chronological history of the regional settlement at Fort Polk. The second was to organize the fort’s historic resources into logical themes that characterized the culture and people living there, in short,

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<sup>1</sup> Army Regulation 420-40 sets forth army policy, procedures, and responsibilities for the management of cultural resources on army installations. This regulation ensures that army cultural resource management is consistent with national policies set forth in the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). For example, Section 110(a)(2) of NHPA directs federal agencies to establish a program to locate, inventory, and nominate all properties under the agencies’ ownership or control that qualify for the National Register of Historic Places.

to conduct a historic context study. Concurrent with this project, a separate, previously published technical synthesis of the cultural history of the Fort Polk site, spanning from 10,000 years ago to the present, was being revised by the National Park Service. Once my historic context statement was in draft form and under review, it was clear that an opportunity was available to address two important preservation goals. The historic context statement could provide the means for managing historic sites on the installation, while the historical information could be presented as a popular history of Vernon Parish. Both the people of Vernon Parish and the archaeological/preservation communities could benefit. Thus, with the enthusiastic approval of and additional funding from the U.S. Army and the National Park Service, this book was written. It is to the credit of the Department of Defense, Fort Polk, the National Park Service, and the U.S. Forest Service that they recognized the need not only to complete the technical study but to expand its scope to include a popular history for distribution to the people of Vernon Parish.

### **A LANDSCAPE APPROACH TO VERNON PARISH HISTORY**

In presenting their research and telling their story, historians and archaeologists are always faced with a dilemma. Some events may follow in a chronological order; others may occur simultaneously. Some impacts may be immediate; the effects of others may only be seen over time. Events occurring far from the region may directly influence local events. How does one organize a vast number of related facts, events, impacts, trends, and developments into a coherent narrative?

One way is to find a common or characteristic thread. For western Louisiana the common thread is obvious. The story of western Louisiana, Fort Polk, and Vernon Parish is the story of the transformation of its piney woods landscape. It was the landscape that influenced the region's settlement, culture, wealth, poverty, and industry—its past and future. No other theme better ties the people, their culture, and history together than through the per-

spective of its changing landscape. Having found this perspective useful for other regions, archaeologists have even given it a name—landscape archaeology.

Landscape archaeology is certainly not a new organizational method. Cultural geographers have found the study of the landscape to be a useful model for the study of man and land since the 1930s. “The cultural landscape is fashioned from a natural landscape by a cultural group. Culture is the agent, the natural area is the medium, the cultural landscape the result” (Sauer 1963:343). But archaeologists have modified the cultural geographers' approach by integrating facts gained from archaeological information along with theoretical perspectives of two other academic disciplines, namely anthropology and ethnohistory. Archaeologists would say that “the landscape is the spatial manifestation of the relations between humans and their environment” (Crumley and Marquardt 1987:1). Thus, landscape archaeology is a useful method of integrating culture history (Flannery 1974; Willey and Phillips 1958), culture geography (Kniffen 1960; Wagner 1974), spatial analysis (Clarke 1977; Hodder and Orton 1976), and settlement pattern (Chang 1972) research under a single, overarching theoretical framework or, in other words, from a single perspective.

The landscape approach views the changing land through time, space, and culture. As we occupy the land, we mark, scar, and modify it in ways that reflect our culture. As our culture changes, the land is altered, creating new landscapes. Furthermore, our culture is transformed by the challenges of living on the land. Thus, landscapes are formed as humans modify the land, and at the same time, the physical characteristics of existing landscapes influence human behavior. The result is very similar to what scholars see on old palimpsests. A palimpsest is an ancient document that over centuries has been written upon many times by different peoples. The writing of one time is overwritten by those of a later age until the paper can hold no more. Scholars study these parchments to see the relationship between old and more recent cultures. Our landscape is also a palimpsest. Today, across the same landscape, we can see new

buildings, structures built in the early twentieth century, and historic structures from the nineteenth century. In the ground are the remains of thousands of years of human occupation, resting layer upon layer. The land itself has been changed as virgin forests were cleared and then replanted; fields were opened, worked, and then left fallow; roads were opened and then abandoned. A study of the landscape can tell us much about our past.

The landscape approach is especially useful in providing an organizational framework for telling the Fort Polk and Vernon Parish story. In the following chapters, I attempt to relate the history of the region by “painting” the landscape prior to Euro-American settlement and then describe the changes that occurred as Euro-Americans occupied the region in gradually increasing numbers. Four chronological landscapes between 1800 and 1940 will be described. Within each of these, we will look at the development of settlement and population (including villages and hamlets), agriculture and industry, transportation, and social-political change. Special topics—the “Neutral Ground,” the Civil War, forestry, and the building of Camp Polk—will be discussed also. The landscapes provide the framework for interactions between people and the land and for reconstructing a sense of place in time and space.

In looking at ourselves, it may be difficult to believe that we are a culture apart from others. What is distinctive seems to us common, normal, perhaps mundane, but certainly not exotic. Yet the people of Vernon Parish, overall, fit well within a unique American culture that cultural geographers first titled Upland South. The last chapter will look at Vernon Parish’s Upland South culture during the historic period.

## **SCALE AND DOCUMENTATION**

Initially, I was charged with researching the Fort Polk region. However, it rapidly became clear that to tell the story of Fort Polk, the scope of such a study would have to be expanded. There were several reasons. First, the present boundaries of Fort Polk are, historically speaking, artificial. That is,

the fort’s modern boundaries had no influence on the lives of those who lived there prior to its establishment. None of the historic political structure conforms to the modern Fort Polk boundaries. Second, Fort Polk consists of two areas, the Main Fort and the Peason Ridge Training Area, separated by some 15.5 miles (Figure 1). The Main Fort is totally within Vernon Parish. However, Peason Ridge is at the junction of three parishes—Vernon, Sabine, and Natchitoches. These parish boundaries did influence to some extent the political and social lives of the historic people living there, especially with regard to property locations and land use. This is documented in such records as deeds and tax assessments, for example.

On a larger scale, the Fort Polk area was, for a time, at the heart of a long-term boundary dispute between the United States and Spanish Texas. The unintended solution for both governments was to establish a neutral zone, leaving legitimate settlement in flux while the land was exploited by many lawless opportunists. For much of its history then, the region was a true frontier on the edge of two quite different civil governments and cultures. For a brief period during the mid-nineteenth century the land was opened to government-sanctioned settlement, but this process was interrupted by the American Civil War. Vernon Parish was established shortly after the war, in 1871, but much of the land within Fort Polk and Vernon Parish was immediately purchased by land speculators and timber interests. As a result, Vernon Parish was, from the beginning, sparsely settled. Within the Fort Polk region, it remained so; no major settlements developed. The region probably never reached its full population capacity, nor did settlements long endure. Thus a historian is faced with a real lack of primary source material regarding the Fort Polk area.

There are additional reasons why so little primary source material is available. A permanent civil structure for this region was established relatively late in Louisiana history. Prior to the creation of Vernon Parish, the area that is now the main installation of Fort Polk was part of western Rapides Parish. Twentieth-century historians of Rapides Parish, writing after the formation of Ver-



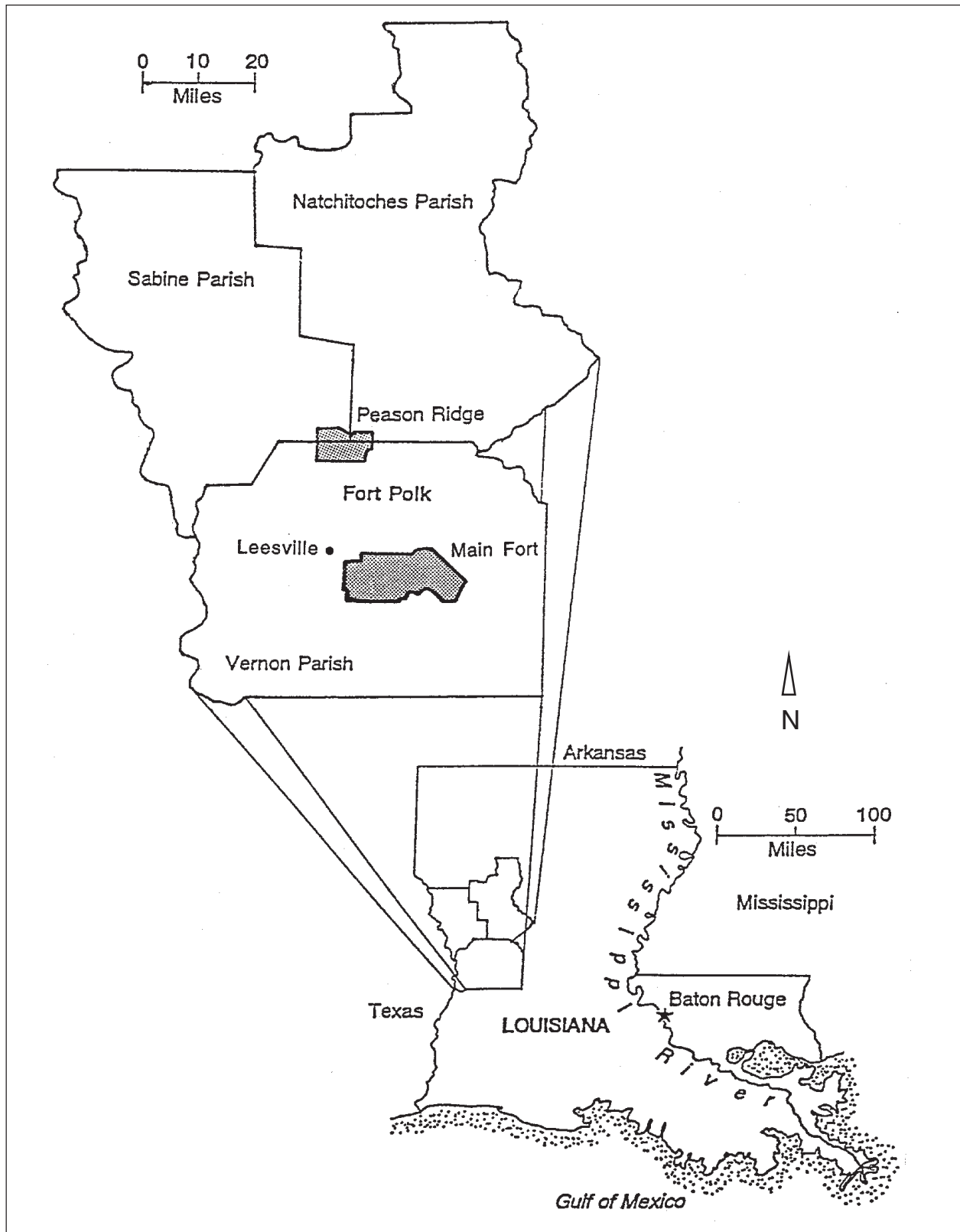


Figure 1 — Location of Fort Polk and the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC).

non Parish, emphasized the development of Rapides's eastern portion, especially along the Red River—an area of rich plantation land. They largely ignored the frontier. Thus, the written history of the historic people who lived in the area now known as Fort Polk is scant.

For the reasons discussed, this history of the Fort Polk area starts by looking at the larger western Louisiana region. As the book progresses, the focus sharpens, concentrating on events witnessed by people of the Fort Polk region. This larger perspective was especially necessary for the period from the seventeenth century to 1871, when historic settlement was quite sparse. Indeed, during the colonial period almost all settlement in western Louisiana was concentrated (if this word can be used) along the Red River and along the road north of Vernon Parish leading west from Natchitoches to Nacogdoches, Texas. As the discussion in the following chapters progresses into the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, more information becomes available on the area now specifically bounded by Fort Polk.

This broad approach to Fort Polk history is valid because the lives of the people within the Fort Polk region obviously were influenced by historical and cultural events that took place outside the boundaries of Vernon Parish. For instance, the world wars greatly impacted the region's populace. The changes seen on the landscape, the occupation of the landscape, and the evolution of the regional culture all occurred very gradually. Those living within the boundaries of Fort Polk in the 1930s participated in a cultural system and used a material culture very similar to that of their nineteenth-century ancestors. This makes the history of west-central Louisiana and of Vernon, Sabine, and Natchitoches Parishes especially relevant to the region bounded by Fort Polk. Furthermore, the development of Leesville and other smaller villages in the area greatly influenced the lives of people living within the boundaries of Fort Polk. Thus, the scale of this history does shift, broadening in some instances and narrowing in others, but always with the goal of bringing to life the story of the people within the Fort Polk area and those events that so greatly influenced their lives.

A few words of warning. The first concerns the reliability of the sources used. Presently, there is no detailed scholarly history of Vernon Parish, although there have been several laudable attempts by avocational historians to write one. The reasons for this are numerous. First, early explorers and settlers bypassed the area following easier, more accessible routes west. Second, until 1821, the region was caught up in the rivalries of three countries, Spain, France, and the United States. Third, the parish was established relatively late in Louisiana's history, so, as previously mentioned, the documentary sources specific to the Vernon Parish region are few. Those that are available often focus on the histories of Rapides, Sabine, and Natchitoches Parishes. Culling information about the sparse early settlement along the western borders of these parishes is extremely difficult. Fourth, almost all of these parishes lost their early records during the Civil War or as a result of later courthouse fires. This has left the people of Vernon Parish to discover their history largely through stories and "facts" passed down from generation to generation and recorded by interested avocational historians. Frankly, the accuracy of some stories can not be verified. Traditionally, it is the job of the historian to sort through the "facts," rejecting those that cannot be verified and interpreting the larger meaning of those remaining. Such an endeavor, however, takes far longer than the time available for compiling this book. For this reason, I consider myself primarily a reporter and an assembler and, only secondarily, a historian. Thus, the following pages are a first attempt to consolidate all the known historical sources pertaining to Vernon Parish (with special emphasis on the Fort Polk area) and to assemble and summarize them as a single narrative. I have attempted to verify many of the assertions made. Some, however, have not been rejected simply because their accuracy cannot be confirmed. They have been noted for the reader, and perhaps future scholars can address these.

Also, a cautionary note about the maps in this book. Readers familiar with Fort Polk will find that the maps and historical descriptions herein do not always precisely conform to the current in-



stallation boundaries. Some liberties have been taken to adjust boundary lines on maps in which the scale has masked precise details. Because the installation boundaries have changed since 1941 and will continue to change in the years to come, the effect of these adjustments are not considered significant to the purpose of this study.

It should also be noted that in researching this book, I found that family and place names were often spelled differently in the historic documents.

I have attempted to consistently use the most common spellings, although some variations may still occur, as in direct quotes, for instance.

Thus, the following pages present a compilation of events and trends that occurred in a region known as the “Hog Wallow Land” but also in a parish called Vernon in western Louisiana. It was and is today a land of magnificent pines, and its history is of a rugged people who built a culture and tradition around the use of this resource.



# EXPLORATION AND INITIAL SETTLEMENT TO 1821

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*It is eminently and entirely a longleaf Pine Hill parish. But there is some diversity in its surface and soil....In the middle and southern part of Vernon a large number of streams take their rise and flow into the Calcasieu River. The narrow valleys of these numerous streams cut up this portion of the parish into exceedingly rough, wild, and intricate country. The hills are elevated and steep, covered with sand-rock and petrifications; the streams are bold, rapid, and pellucid; the valleys narrow, gorge-like, and tolerably fertile, so that on the whole, it is quite a picturesque and interesting country. From Huddleston, or Petersborough, in the western part of Vernon, to the mouth of Flactor Creek in the eastern is a belt of the sticky Hog Wallow Land. It is from three to four miles in width. From Huddleston northward there are scattered tracts of this same land until we reach Anacoco Prairie. This is very similar to Pendarvis Prairie in Catahoula Parish, and, like it, is on the outskirts of the Hog Wallow lands. The soil is black in color, rich in lime, and produces very fine crops of corn. The prairie is nearly surrounded by hills, and, with its nearly level surface covered by dark green crops and waving grass, presents very much the appearance of an inland lake....They [isolated prairies] are with but rare exceptions very fertile, as much so as the best Alluvial Lands....They [small prairies] are nearly impassable in winter, become friable in the spring and summer when cultivated....Along the streams that flow into the Sabine River, in Vernon Parish, there are some very good and quite extensive farms.*

— Lockett 1969:79–80[1874]

Samuel H. Lockett's 1874 description of Vernon Parish is particularly valuable to historians as it describes the western Louisiana landscape at a critical juncture. Sometime before 1791, Juan Baptiste D'Artigau settled along the Anacoco Prairie, and, in 1797, he was granted title to two leagues of land by the Spanish government. He was quite possibly the first legal landowner, if not

actual settler, in the land that Lockett would call Vernon Parish (Wise 1971:4).<sup>1</sup> Although D'Artigau was joined by John Baptiste Lecomte in 1797 and Ambroise Lecomte in 1808, few others followed. The land would remain practically a wilderness throughout the antebellum years; and what little development was taking place would be abruptly halted by the Civil War.

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<sup>1</sup> Erbon Wise claimed that Ambroise LeCompte settled on the Anacoco in 1787, referencing a deed at the archives at Stephen F. Austin College in Nacogdoches, Texas, which the author has not seen (see also Dalehite 1963). However, in testimony to the United States for claims in the neutral strip when under Spanish control (conducted in 1824), an Ambroise Lecomte (not LeCompte) claimed occupancy from only 1808 (Crawford 1825:134). Meanwhile, John Baptiste Lecomte (spelled "Lecompte" once, but from then on "Lecomte") in the same document claimed occupancy to two full leagues of prairie land, ownership being established first by D'Artigau in 1797 and transferred to Marie Louise Lecomte Dame Porter, and then to John Baptiste. In this claim a witness states that D'Artigau had occupied the land for "more than 33 years preceding this date" (Crawford 1825:134). Counting back from 1824 (the date the Register of the Land District began taking claims), this would put D'Artigau's occupancy before 1791, making him the first known settler in Vernon Parish. Without seeing the Ambroise LeCompte deed, the author believes that Wise is incorrect.

By the time Lockett wrote about Vernon Parish, more than eighty years after D'Artigau's claim, the upheaval caused by the Civil War was slowly residing, and settlement in western Louisiana had entered what could be called a pioneering stage. Subsistence and market farmers were just starting to establish a backwoods community, evidenced by new schools, churches, and hamlets. The population was increasing, and, as a consequence, the new parish of Vernon was formed in what had previously been the westernmost fringe of the Rapides Parish and Sabine Parish pineland.

If the new breed of settlers described by Lockett could have envisioned the future, they would have seen their quiet farm and woodland landscape transformed beyond recognition. The earliest Euro-Americans generally avoided the Vernon Parish region prior to the Civil War partially because of politics, but largely because of the piney woods landscape. It is ironic that the area's imminent transformation was directly due to this same landscape.

### THE PRIMEVAL LANDSCAPE

The geologic foundation of Vernon Parish's pine hills landscape is the Kisatchie Wold, a resistant uplifted bedrock formation of the Tertiary period dating from two to sixty-three million years ago (Anderson et al. 1988:910; Cantley 1993:34; Cantley and Kern 1984:78; Rogers and Calandro 1965:4). In northern Vernon Parish, the Kisatchie escarpment underlies a rugged, rolling land with elevations reaching from three hundred to well over four hundred feet. Just southwest of modern-day Kurthwood (and within Fort Polk's Peason Ridge maneuver area) is the highest point in Vernon Parish, a 471-foot hill (referred to as Hill 471) (Vernon Parish Planning Board 1949:1). This rolling terrain is typical of the northern two-thirds of the parish. Towards the south, the land levels out into broad gentle uplands. Along the western border, the land falls again into the three-mile-wide Sabine River Valley (Rogers and Calandro 1965:4). Resting above the bedrock of the Kisatchie Wold are glacial deposits of sandstones,

friable sands, and gravelly sands (Campbell and Weed 1986). These sediments consist of red soils possessing strong ferric oxide. They are "deep, very acidic, low in organic content, and often highly weathered" (Cantley 1993:8).

For half a million years, but especially during the last 12,000, both the rugged northern region of Vernon Parish and the gently rolling region to the south have been incised and dissected by numerous drainages. Much of western Vernon Parish is drained by Anacoco Bayou, which originates just south of Hill 471 and continues south and west, meeting the Sabine River in the parish's southwestern corner. Two branches of Anacoco Bayou, Bayou Zourie and Liberty Creek, drain the parish's south-central portion. In the northwestern corner of this roughly rectangular parish, Bayou Toro helps the Anacoco drain the parish's western half into the Sabine. Other small creeks in the parish's northwestern section include Sandy Creek, Martin Creek, and McElvy Creek (Gremillion n.d.a:1). Trending south from Hill 471 is a narrow ridge that separates the Anacoco basin from that of the Calcasieu. Thus the headwaters of the Calcasieu River originate only about a mile over the ridge from the tributaries of the Anacoco. From there they flow east into Rapides Parish and then south all the way to the Gulf of Mexico. In 1816, William Darby described western Louisiana, writing the following:

*The general surface of this region rises by very gradual elevation from the prairies into the hills of considerable height....The principal range of those hills pursue nearly the same course with the Sabine; twenty or twenty-five miles distance, divide the waters that flow into Red River and the Calcasu [sic], from those that flow into Sabine. The creeks that are formed from the western slope of those hills lose themselves in the latter river before coming to any considerable size, whilst those flowing from the eastern declivity below 31° 30' N. lat. [this line is just north of Fort Polk's Horsehead Limited Use Area in Natchitoches Parish] quickly intermingle and form the Calcasu River. (Darby 1816:24)*

As Darby stated, the Calcasieu and its tributaries drain the eastern half of Vernon Parish. A few small drainages, most notably Floctaw and Brushy Creeks, flow north into the Calcasieu. But in the south and eastern portion of the parish, where Fort Polk would one day lie, a series of smaller creeks called, in order from west to east, Bundick, Drakes, Whiskey Chitto, Birds, Six Mile, Little Brushy, and Big Brushy (Figure 2) flow south into modern Beauregard Parish where they converge into the Whiskey Chitto, then Bundick Creek, and finally join the Calcasieu. These creeks and small tributaries have cut most of the local relief in the eastern half of Vernon Parish, creating steep ridges in the northern portion and low-lying ridges and narrow streambeds in Fort Polk's Main Fort area (Cantley 1993:9). As mentioned, elevations in the north central part of the parish reach more than 470 feet, but in Fort Polk's Main Fort section, elevations range from a high of 443 feet to a low of 160 feet above mean sea level (Daigle et al. 1989:1). But even in the rough areas of southeastern Vernon Parish, the ridge slopes are only moderately steep, perhaps no more than 25 percent in the extreme.

D'Artigau's first view of the Vernon Parish prairies and pineland was one that had changed little since the very beginnings of human tenure. Evidence from archaeological and paleoecological studies suggests that some 7,000 years ago the weather was probably drier than today, and therefore the prairies of Vernon Parish were larger than those of D'Artigau's time or those seen today (Anderson et al. 1988:13; Cantley 1993:13). But beginning around 4,000 years ago, the longleaf pine woodland that D'Artigau saw dominated most of the parish. The land east of D'Artigau's Anacoco tract comprised sandy upland longleaf pine forests with bogs and seeps.

Thus the primeval landscape of D'Artigau's time was one of mixed pine forests and dry prairies. Close to the streams, hardwoods prevailed but "even there the pine often reaches to the water" (Darby 1813:86). The virgin longleaf pine, however, created a much different landscape than seen by modern Vernon Parish residents. In contrast to the tall, thin pines of today, the pines then

were thick trunked and extremely tall. Their first branches began some fifty to sixty feet above the forest floor. This created park-like woods of little underbrush with a surface of pine straw and grass. These pinewoods were dense in some spots (Haggard 1945a:1048), especially in the bottomlands where the hardwoods competed with the underbrush (Parker 1973:114 [1835]). But, overall, open woodland stretched for seemingly endless miles.

One early pioneer, Amos Parker, traveling east of the Kisatchie Hills region near Fort Polk's Peason Ridge maneuver area, wrote:

*This day, we traveled forty miles through an unbroken forest of pitch pine. The land is sandy, gently undulating, but seldom rocky. The trees were of good size, but not so thick together as to prevent the grass from growing beneath them; or the traveler from seeing a great distance as he passes along. (Parker 1973:112 [1835])*

This primeval, park-like landscape was not only characteristic of Vernon Parish but also representative of a broad stretch of land that antebellum travelers encountered between Missouri and mid-Louisiana. It had been this way for thousands of years and would last well into the nineteenth century when the woods disappeared via the saw (Figure 3). Although Parker passed through in 1834, piney woods natives of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw an identical landscape. Descriptions of the land from the antebellum period to the twentieth century read much the same:

*The fact is, all along Missouri, Arkansas, and Louisiana, after you get sixty or seventy miles west of the Mississippi river, you come to light, sandy, hilly land; generally covered with pitch pine; excepting a narrow strip on the margin of the streams; so that half of Missouri, three-fourths of Arkansas, and half of Louisiana, are poor land, hardly fit for cultivation. This is not what I had supposed; but from my own observations, and the information of travelers, I believe this to be fact. (Parker 1973:116 [1835])*

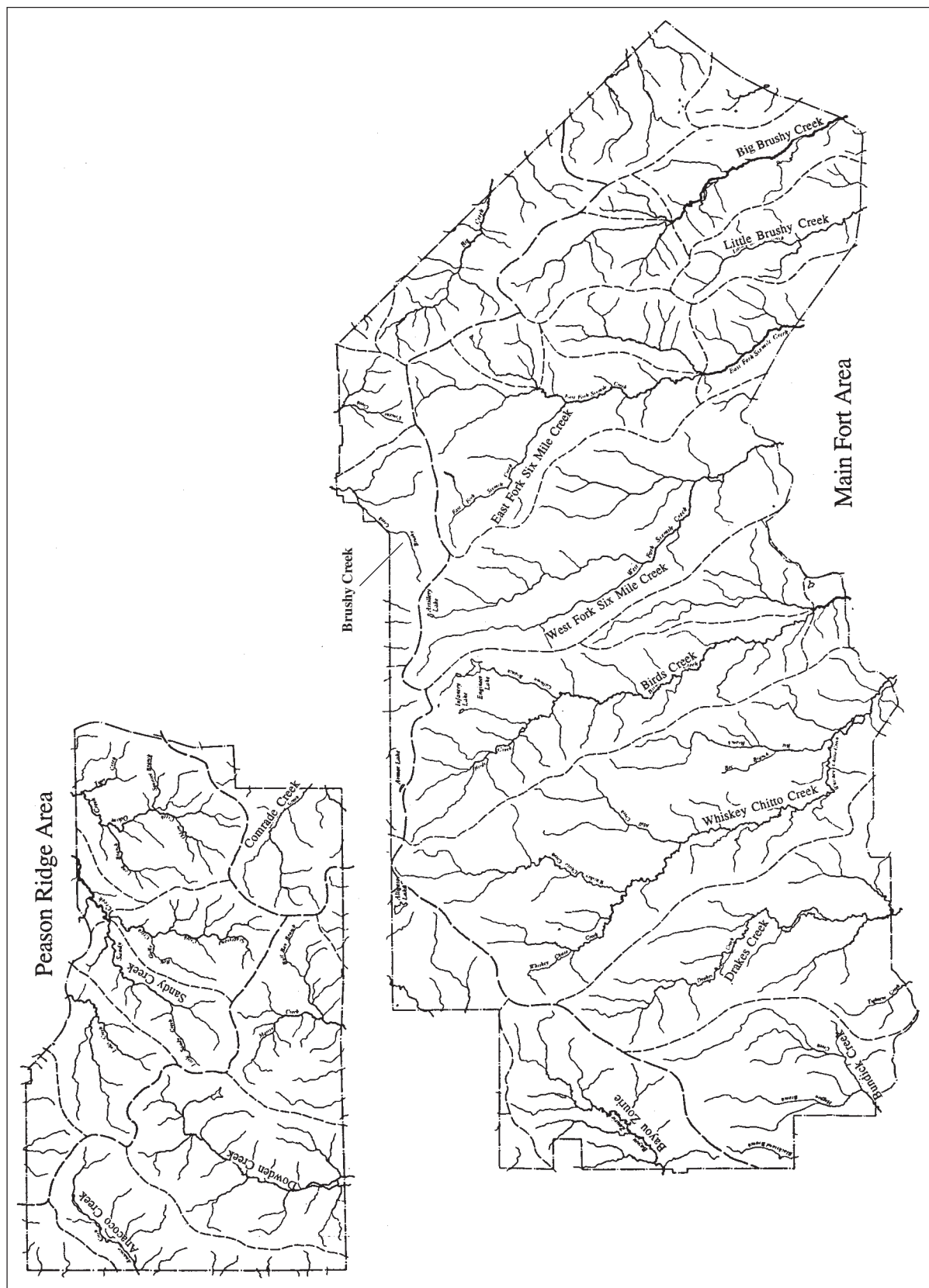


Figure 2 — Creeks and streams, Fort Polk/JRTC (from Cantiley and Kern 1984, figure 6).





Figure 3 — Thick, sturdy pines, like this one cut during the lumber days, were characteristic of Vernon Parish’s pine landscape (courtesy Museum of West Louisiana).

*When I was a boy I could ride a horse a hundred miles cross-country through Louisiana and Texas in virgin timber, pine timber. And it was longstraw—we called it longhaired pine, longleafpine—wasn’t a limb on it maybe for fifty feet. You could see a deer a half a mile across the Piney Woods. (Cole in Sitton 1995:47)*

Back in the late 1700s, D’Artigau chose the Anacoco prairie and bottomlands for his tract. This area would eventually draw quite a few of Vernon Parish’s earliest settlers. In fact, in the 1870s, when Lockett conducted his survey of the parish, this creek valley and prairie land made a “very good home for a poor man.” In general, however, the early surveyors and travelers through this region agreed with Parker’s assessment of “poor land, hardly fit for cultivation.” D’Artigau’s contemporaries even testified to this effect. When, in the 1820s, the region finally became part of Louisiana, the United States government made an effort to acknowledge the claims of those who had settled

there earlier under the Spanish flag. Two gentlemen living in Natchitoches Parish voiced the same opinion of the land’s potential.

*Board of the Register and receiver of the southwestern land district: “What is the nature of the soil within the late neutral territory: rich and productive, or poor and barren?”*

*Answer of S. Davenport: “The whole tract of country or land within the neutral territory is pine woods; of course a poor arid soil, with a few exceptions of small quantities to be found adjoining to and on creeks and bayous, and fit for nothing but raising of stock.”*

*Answer of Jose Maria Mora: “The soil of the neutral ground is mostly pine hills, and consequently very poor, and fit for nothing but the raising of stock, except some spots on the margin of water-courses, which can be cultivated.” (Crawford 1825:89)*

William Darby agreed. Writing to potential emigrants about western Louisiana, he reported that in the region above the thirty-second parallel (roughly above Natchitoches) “enough of the bottom land is fertile to admit of [sic] extensive settlement” (Darby 1813:86). He did not specifically mention the quality of land in the Vernon Parish region, but stated that just south of the thirty-first parallel (located just south of the Fort Polk Main Fort area) along the Sabine, “the adjacent country is generally pine wood; soil barren, as is usual, where that timber exists” (Darby 1813:56). Likewise, Timothy Flint wrote in 1826 that “the soil [of the pine hills] is comparatively poor. The bottoms are only second rate land” (Flint 1968:236 [1826]). And yet again, in 1839, a traveler through the Vernon Parish region en route to Texas wrote that “after leaving Alexandria, we had seen very few settlers and hardly any fertile soil. Nay, for whole days we traversed pine tree forests and infertile prairies with short grass growing on sandy, gravely soil” (Dresel in Freund 1954:58).

Gustav Dresel was traveling along one of the less-used paths to Texas—a route that would take him to Burr’s, or perhaps Bevil’s Ferry and directly through the southeastern portion of Vernon Parish and Fort Polk’s Main Fort. The soils there posed special challenges for eventual settlers. By the 1870s, the land was known as the “Hog Wallow lands,” which Lockett described as:

*characterized by a stiff, sticky, calcareous soil which becomes terrifically muddy in wet weather. The forests growth upon them is principally the post oak and blackjack, intermingled with the pines. The soil is not at all fertile and has nothing to recommend it. (Lockett 1969:47 [1874])*

These “Hog Wallow lands” extended beyond eastern Vernon Parish across the pine hills of Louisiana from the mouth of Anacoco Bayou to Grand View on the Ouachita River (Lockett 1969:47 [1874]). In this region, the pinewoods were broken by small, open or “bald” prairies described by Lockett as “wooded prairies,” which seems to be a contradiction in terms (Lockett 1969:72 [1874]).

Though longleaf pine dominated the landscape and presented a rather consistent vantage, other vegetation grew within the western Louisiana piney woods. William Darby noted that in the Sabine-Natchitoches area “the surface of the earth is clothed in spring and summer with an abundant herbage, that render the country excellent for pasturage” (Darby 1816:24). Other tree species found along the Sabine included “black oak, red oak, white oak, black hickory, sweet gum, black gum, ash, beech and dogwood” (Darby 1813:86). Along the bottomlands in the Natchitoches Parish area, Parker found “cotton-wood, magnolia, pecan, hackberry, holly, chinquopin, with grape vines running up the trunks and Spanish moss in the branches” (Parker 1973:113–114 [1835]).

Interestingly, antebellum descriptions of the Vernon Parish landscape mention little about edible vegetation. However, we can be assured that the parish’s pinewoods were bountiful. Across the Sabine in east Texas, for instance, the backwoods pioneers living in pinelands identical to those in Vernon Parish were as much gatherers as they were hunters. They gathered hickory nuts, chinquapins, beechnuts, pecans, walnuts, along with blackberries, dewberries, persimmons, highbush blueberries, wild plums, sloe plums, muscadines, and fox grapes. They also enjoyed native peppergrass, sour dock, and dandelion (Sitton 1995:60–61).

Meat was plentiful and widely touted. Samuel Lockett (1969:48 [1874]) recorded that venison was available for piney woods inhabitants whenever they wished, and Flint noted that “nothing can be easier than subsistence in the pine woods” (Flint 1968:237 [1826]). Various historians of the region in the early nineteenth century mention buffalo and deer. Within Vernon Parish, deer certainly were abundant, but buffalo probably were confined mostly to the prairies and the “source of the Sabine” north of Vernon Parish (Haggard 1945a:1049; Nardini 1961:1). If there were buffalo on the Anacoco Prairie, they were gone before intensive Anglo-American settlement began. Also mentioned are quail, wild turkey, wolf, fox, rabbit, opossum, squirrel, raccoon, mink, bear, panther, wild cat, and “crocodiles along the swamps” (Haggard 1945a:1049).

Furthermore, the streams were a rich source of protein for the intrepid pioneers of Vernon Parish. Flint wrote that “the streams that water them have clear, transparent water, that runs over white sand, and are alive with trout and other fish” (Flint 1968:236 [1826]). Lockett concurred, noting that “throughout the whole region [Piney Woods] there are numerous clear, bold streams of pure water, all of them abounding in fish” (Lockett 1969:47 [1874]).

Many of the natural resources that adorned the primeval landscape of Vernon Parish upon the arrival of Europeans and early Americans could be found almost anywhere in southeastern America at the turn of the nineteenth century. However, the unending pines provided a unique atmosphere. Many contemporary sources mentioned the almost constant low murmur of the wind (Pritchard 1938:1158). “A slight breeze always sighs in the elevated tops of the pines, and the fleckered mixture of light and shade creates a pleasant appearance and a delightful freshness of air” (Flint 1968:237 [1826]). With any gust, a roar of pine branches would interrupt the forest’s stillness. With the breeze came a rich pine scent variously described as the “terebinthine odour of the evergreens,” or the “turpentine influences of the forests through which they sweep” (Flint 1968:237 [1826]); Pritchard 1938:1158–1159). Where the pines grew thick, the land was covered with pine straw making “a natural carpet as soft and clean as one of Brussels manufacture” (Lockett 1969:150 [1874]). Universally, the pine hills were known for their healthfulness. Many plantation owners along the Red River owned summer homes in the cool pinewoods and, during the summer months, left the slaves and overseers to contend with the hot, mosquito-ridden, but more fertile bottomlands along the Red River and its tributaries (Flint 1968:237 [1826]); Hardin 1939:439; Parker 1973:109 [1835]).

The cooling shade of the pine trees must have been welcomed by the early settlers. Vernon Parish is mild through most of the year, the coldest month averaging 50°F. But it does get hot, and, in July and August, the average daytime temperature is 81°F (Rogers and Calandro 1965:4). The an-

nual precipitation is about fifty-seven inches. Few early accounts of the weather exist for this region. Flint, however, gives a general description of the state’s weather in 1826:

*The summer is temperate, the thermometer seldom indicating so much heat as there often is at the same time at the North. But the heat is uniform and unremitting, and this is what renders the summers oppressive. The days are seldom fanned by the northwestern breeze. The autumn becomes cool, almost as early as at the North. It is dry....Frost sometimes occurs in November, but not often before December. January is chilly, with frosty nights, but never sufficiently severe to freeze tender vegetables in the house. A few flakes of snow sometimes fall, though I have seen none during my residence in the country. In February the rainy season commences. (Flint 1969:240 [1826])*

In summary, the primeval landscape of Vernon Parish at the arrival of explorers and initial settlers was one of rolling land cut by narrow streams. Across this land were deep pine forests and smaller, dry, grassy prairies. It was fairly open land; the forest had little underbrush except where streams cut through them. In those spots, early travelers would have a difficult time negotiating a crossing. Universal condemnation of the region’s soils has to be balanced by the expectations of the state’s early chroniclers, who desired the rich, fertile soils needed for large productive plantations. The type of soil they sought and championed was found along the Red River. Speculators and planters would bypass the Vernon Parish area where the soils were poor and the road to market was long and difficult.

On the other hand, for the hunter-gatherer, or stockman subsistence farmer, the Vernon Parish landscape was acceptable and familiar. These country people of the lower South rarely extolled the virtues of the backwoods in writing. Rather, they arrived unobtrusively as squatters, lived off the land, and, when neighbors got too close, moved on. They thrived on lonely independent living, and the sparsely settled pine lands were ideal. But



though the woods were largely vacant of human occupants, they were not totally empty. In fact, before their own arrival, the land was already home to the Native Americans.

## THE NATIVE AMERICANS

Before the Spanish, the French, the English, and the Americans arrived, Native Americans inhabited Vernon Parish for at least 11,000 years.<sup>2</sup> Beginning with the arrival of Columbus in 1492, Native American culture would be transformed throughout North America, with the local result being their eventual displacement from the Vernon Parish region. But this does not imply that the pinewoods were thickly populated in pre-Columbian times. Even as early as the arrival of Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca at the Sabine Pass in 1528 and the de Soto *entrada* in 1542, the west-central Louisiana pineland may have become an uninhabited buffer zone between two major Native American cultures, the Caddoan groups, whose center of influence was in northwest Louisiana and Arkansas, and the Atakapa in southwest Louisiana (Abrams et al. 1995:18–19; Anderson et al. 1988:80; Kniffen et al. 1987:44–46).

The cultural roots of the eighteenth-century Caddo can be traced back at least as far as 800 years ago (Anderson et al. 1988:76–79). By the 1700s, the Caddoan tribes in northwest Louisiana included the Doustioni, Natchitoches, Ouachita, Adai, and Yatasi. Concentrated around Natchitoches, Mansfield, Monroe, and Robeline, Louisiana, they soon would be entangled in the struggle between the Spanish and the French and eventually the Americans (Webb and Gregory 1986:18). Farther north of Natchitoches, were other Caddoan tribes, including the Upper Natchitoches, Kadohadacho, Nassonites, Nanatsoho, Narsoos, and Petit Caddo (Haggard 1945a:1082; Kniffen et al. 1987:47; Webb and Gregory 1986:18). Louisiana

Caddo may have also been part of a larger confederacy, which included the east Texas tribes of the Anadarko, Hainai, Hasinai, Nacogdoches, Nabiti, Ais, and Nabadache (Webb and Gregory 1986:18). In 1805, Indian agent John Sibley at Natchitoches reported the locations of various small tribes in northwest and west-central Louisiana.

*According to John Sibley, American Indian Agent, the Caddoes, about 100 warriors, lived on Sodo Bayou, about 120 miles northwest of Natchitoches. The Yatasi lived on Stony Creek, about 50 miles above Natchitoches in Spanish territory. The Nandakoes lived 60 miles west of the Yatasi on the Sabine River. The Adaes lived about 40 miles west of Natchitoches and 20 miles north of the site of Los Adaes. The Ais lived on Ais Creek, 12 miles west of the Sabine. The Texas lived 25 miles west of Natchitoches. The Nabadachos lived 12 miles west of the Texas. The Conchatte lived on the east bank of the Sabine, about 80 miles from Natchitoches. The Pacanas lived on Calcasieu River, 40 miles south of Natchitoches. (Haggard 1945a:1082)*

The Caddo were a highly developed culture, the population living in small, widely dispersed, kin-based hamlets consisting of a few small farmsteads, each with their own storage shelters and cornfields (Jeter et al. 1989:236). Perhaps a temple and cemetery would be present also. They practiced sacrificial killing (Hudson 1976:255) and de Soto's party found them to be fierce and greatly feared among their neighbors. With the arrival of Europeans, the Caddo became important middlemen in trade between the Spanish and French, and later the Americans and Spanish. As a result, all sides vied for Caddoan trade while attempting to control them.

South of the Vernon Parish area, the Atakapa were also considered a fierce group. Their name

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<sup>2</sup> As part of the ongoing inventory of the cultural resources at Fort Polk, more than 3,600 archaeological sites have been recorded. Most of these sites are the remains left by prehistoric peoples, and much has been learned about their lives (Abrams et al. 1995; Anderson et al. 1999). It is not within the scope of this study to review this prehistory, but interested readers are referred to the Conservation Branch of the Environmental and Natural Resources Management Division at Fort Polk for information.

translates as “eater of human flesh,” and not without foundation as they were known to eat portions of their fallen enemies (Kniffen et al. 1987:44; Swanton 1974:197). At the time of the European arrival, the Atakapa ranged over a wide area of southwestern Louisiana, from Bayou Teche to the Sabine and as far north as Alexandria. Their settlements were widely scattered, however, and much of the land between was vacant (Kniffen et al. 1987:44). Many lived along the coast on cheniers. Although the Atakapa were fierce combatants, early explorer Cabeza de Vaca described their warfare as somewhat ritualistic in that they would fight in a crouch, “darting here and there to evade arrows” (Kniffen et al. 1987:295). When they ran out of arrows, both sides would retire without pursuit. Archaeologists have had difficulty learning much about this group as their “chief distinction lay in the meagerness of their material culture” (Kniffen et al. 1987:44).

As the Spanish pushed east from Texas and the British, French, and Americans contested the land east of Louisiana during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Native Americans were caught in between and eventually pushed farther and farther west. Politics and warfare between European groups and the struggle for survival among the Native Americans caught in the middle caused decimation of the Native American populations and intermixing of cultures. Competition among the survivors was fierce and violent. John Sibley’s *A Report from Natchitoches in 1807* (reprinted 1922), gives the modern reader a feeling for the struggle going on in north and west-central Louisiana during this period:

*May 22, 1807—Three Caddos Arriv’d...to inform me that a party of Chactas...had Murdered two of the [Indian] Women....June 8—I Receiv’d information from White Meat a Chacta Indian...that a Short time Ago a White Man had been Murdured by a young Conchetta Indian on a Branch of the Bayau Cossachie....June 27—This day I had a talk with Tombolin & the relations of the Indian who was killed by Thomas at Bayau Chico....July 12—Charles a Chacta half breed with three or four*

*others...complain’d that one of them had near the River Sabine been Rob’d of a Valuable Mare by a Man by the Name of James Elliot, and demanded that Elliot Should be compel’d to restore the Mare or they would go out and Kill him....July 21—I employ’d William Rollings to go with a Special Message to the Conchetta Village...relative to the Murder of Obryan by a Conchetta Indian....August 8—Receiv’d duplicate Packets from Governor Clairborne enclosing a Talk to the Caddo Chief, and Another to the Conchettas, and his Excellencys Proclamation for apprehending Watson who killed Indian Tom at the Salt Works. (Sibley 1922:22, 30, 43, 45–47 [1807])*

Sibley’s report documents the tension and violence between Whites and Native Americans and between various tribes. He mentions the Caddo, Choctaw, and Conchetta tribes. The Choctaw’s situation exemplifies how the European powers used the Indians in their conflicts with each other. The pressure from English encroachment on Choctaw land gave the Spanish the opportunity to lure the Choctaw into north and central Louisiana. The Spanish hoped the Choctaw presence would serve as a buffer to continuing English migration and settlement westward. Arriving in Louisiana, the Choctaw were soon in conflict with the Caddo already there (Kniffen et al. 1987:84–85), the evidence of which is clearly seen in Sibley’s report. Eventually the Choctaw would move to south Louisiana. Later, the tribe’s remnants would migrate west out of the state. But the Choctaw were not alone. From around 1764 to around 1830, various Native American tribes would migrate in and out of Louisiana. During this period, groups of the Alabama (1765), Pacana (1803), Koasati (1820s), Biloxi (1830), and Choctaw passed through Vernon Parish (Goins and Caldwell 1995, map 21; Kniffen et al. 1987:86). The Taensa and Apalachee passed through neighboring Sabine Parish in 1801. Currently, archaeologists and historians do not know of any large, late-historic Native American settlements in Vernon Parish or within Fort Polk’s boundaries. However, Henry S. Tanner, on his 1820 map (Figure 4), shows a “village of Ouchatta



savages,” or “Coshatta” on the eastern bank of the Sabine south of Vernon Parish. (Darby’s 1816 map, Figure 10 in Chapter 3, also shows this village. At the scale used for this figure, however, the village is difficult to discern.) It is not clear if the village’s location is at the mouth of Bayou Anacoco or another branch farther south.

By the time of the Civil War, the vast majority of Native Americans had moved out of Louisiana. Still, some remained, and Louisiana Choctaw, Tunica, Koasati, Chitimacha, and Houma number between 3,000 and 20,000 today (Kniffen et al. 1987:299–311). The Caddo officially left Louisiana in 1835 when they sold their lands to the United States, although some continued to hang on until 1842 (Webb and Gregory 1986:24–25). In the Vernon Parish region, the Native Americans were gone by the Civil War although a group of mixed blood Indian, White, and Black peoples from the Carolinas and Georgia would settle in Beauregard and Allen Parishes south of Vernon. Called “Red-bones,” their history is still to be written.

### EXPLORATION, TRADE, AND INITIAL OCCUPATION TO 1806

The names of the first White explorers of Vernon Parish and the Fort Polk region will always remain lost to history. It is likely that the first European to set foot in what is now Vernon Parish was a French hunter-trader from Los Adaes, Natchitoches, or Post du Rapides. He probably ranged through the area between 1715 and 1725 on a hunting trip. Perhaps he was guided by an Indian or traveled alone along one of the numerous animal-Indian trails that traversed the region. More than likely, the area was only a forage and hunting region for settlers along the Red River or the Camino Real (a road running from Natchitoches to Nacogdoches, Texas) throughout most of the eighteenth century. Also, those fleeing from justice probably camped in the region at this time.

Then sometime around the 1790s, D’Artigean and the Lecomtes, or some as yet unidentified settler, built a cabin along the oft-traveled trail that ran from Post du Rapides (Alexandria) to Nacog-

doches, Texas, and thus initiated European settlement. Throughout some 120 years, regional settlement was delayed by the land’s isolation, far from the major river transportation routes and fertile soils. But another major settlement obstacle was the political maneuverings of European nations far from Vernon Parish.

### EARLY EXPLORATION

With the discovery of the New World, Spain, France, and England began a long struggle for its control that would not end until the nineteenth century. During the sixteenth century, Spain explored and conquered the middle Americas. By the 1520s, they effectively controlled Mexico (Davis 1971:27). This gave Spain a foothold for expansion northward. One of the first visits to the Louisiana region may have been by shipwrecked explorer Álvaro Núñez Cabeza de Vaca and four others who, when washed ashore, wandered the Louisiana-Texas coast trying to find their way to the Spanish settlements in Mexico (Anderson et al. 1988:82). The exact location of de Vaca’s landing is still debated. Traditionally, scholars (Davis 1971:27; Jeter et al. 1989:250; Nardini 1961:4) place his landing site at Sabine Pass and contend that he made contact with the Native Americans living along the “buffalo trail” that crossed the Sabine (Anderson et al. 1988:82). These Indians were the Adai, who were living far north of Sabine Pass. Thus, de Vaca would have had to travel up the Sabine and perhaps wander through west Vernon Parish to contact the Adai. However, other historians have argued recently that de Vaca’s party landed farther west in Texas on “an island near the western extremity of Galveston Island” (Chipman 1992:29). If so, it is doubtful that de Vaca would have explored west-central Louisiana.

Spanish exploration of Louisiana may have begun with Hernando de Soto’s *entrada* during the early 1540s. The de Soto expedition landed in Tampa Bay, Florida, and embarked on a long exploration into the Southeast wilderness, eventually crossing the Mississippi River. Whether or not they entered the future state of Louisiana is a fact fiercely debated today (Jeter et al. 1989:250). Some scholars believe that the expedition led by



Moscoso, de Soto's successor after his death, traversed northern Louisiana and passed into east Texas reaching an area near modern Nacogdoches and Jefferson, Texas (Chipman 1992:40–41; Jeter et al. 1989:251). But others (Hudson 1985) place the westward push by the de Soto expedition to the north of this route, bypassing Louisiana.

After considerable interest in exploring the North American continent in the early sixteenth century, there was a long pause before any European powers returned to the Louisiana region. Spain concentrated on the development of New Spain in Mexico. Its slow expansion north into Texas was led by “adventurers, prospectors, ranchers, friars, and soldiers” (Chipman 1992:43).

Meanwhile the French settled in Canada. Their expansion into the interior was also led by the church, but driven just as passionately by the fur trade. In 1682, Robert de La Salle traveled down the Mississippi and found its mouth at the gulf. He claimed the land for the French government, naming it Louisiana after his king Louis XIV. La Salle returned two years later by ship and attempted to find the Mississippi's mouth from the Gulf of Mexico. But he missed it, and his expedition landed along the Texas coast. The Spanish naturally saw this French incursion into the gulf as a threat to their territory, and they feared further intrusions. Their fears were well grounded since La Salle's goal was to establish a post at the Mississippi and split the Spanish settlements in Florida from those in Mexico (Jeter et al. 1989:251). This was accomplished in 1699 when Pierre Le Moynes, Sieur d'Iberville, found the mouth of the Mississippi and established Fort Maurepas (Davis 1959:30).

From this time until 1762, the French and Spanish maneuvered to determine the borderline between their possessions in the south-central part of America. Beginning in 1689 and continuing until around 1768, the Spanish launched a series

of expeditions into Texas. The earliest of these sought evidence of La Salle's lost expedition to find the mouth of the Mississippi. The goals of later forays were to establish missions with the Tejas (Texas) Indians and convert them, and also to maintain Spain's claim to Texas. These expeditions followed long established Native American trade routes (Foster 1995). The main trail led all the way across Texas to a Natchitoches Indian settlement along the Red River (Figure 5). After serving the Spanish and Indians for hundreds of years as the Camino Real, or King's Highway, this trail would eventually serve as a gateway for the westward expansion of the Americans into Texas. During the latter part of the eighteenth century, it would also be a focus of the earliest settlements in northwest Louisiana.

#### **SETTLERS AND TRADERS, 1717–1800**

In 1717, along the Camino Real—which today crosses Sabine and Natchitoches Parishes and generally follows Highway 6—the Spanish established the mission San Miguel de los Adaes at an Adaes Indian village near modern-day Robeline, Louisiana (Chipman 1992:112). But the French had beaten them to the Red River.<sup>3</sup> As early as 1690, French adventurer Henry de Tonti, searching for La Salle, had explored the Red River and found a Natchitoches Indian village near modern-day Natchitoches (Webb and Gregory 1986:19–20). This settlement was located at the river's head of navigation, just south of a great raft of debris and logs that clogged the river to the north. Probably long before the White man arrived, this site was a stop for Native Americans traveling upriver and a logical point at which to join with the long trail into Texas. As the Spanish and French fought for control of the land, this site would become a strategic point in the struggle. Here, in 1714, Louis Juchereau de St. Denis founded Fort St. Jean

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<sup>3</sup> Several standard references state or imply that there was a small Spanish presence in the region before the French. These claim that Canary Islanders were settled at the Adaes Indian camp by 1694 (Belisle 1912:39; Southern Publishing Company 1890:295). Another source states that Spanish missionaries settled as far south as the rapids on the Red River (Alexandria) in 1690 (Whittington 1935:28). Davis (1971:49) notes that “a few Spanish were already settled near present day Robeline,” but he probably gathered this information from previous historians. The information regarding the Canary Islanders' occupation is questionable because it is not fully referenced in the older sources, nor is it mentioned in the latest sources on Spanish Texas history, which are fully referenced by primary documents (Chipman 1992; Foster 1995).



Baptiste aux Natchitos, the first permanent settlement in northern Louisiana (Belisle 1912:39; Jeter et al. 1989:253; Webb and Gregory 1986:22).

The Spanish countered the French threat by founding Los Adaes and then, in 1721, Nuestra Señora del Pilar de Los Adaes. The latter, a military and government establishment, would serve the Spanish for most of the eighteenth century (Chipman 1992:123). Los Adaes was only eight kilometers from the French settlement. With its establishment, the line between the Spanish and French possessions in the New World was drawn. Halfway between the two European settlements was a small, rather unobtrusive stream called the Arroyo Hondo. It soon became an unofficial boundary and would figure prominently in the creation of a neutral zone between the two powers.

St. Denis's response to the Spanish presence was to form an alliance with the local Caddo, offering to buy all their surplus food. Each year, the chiefs of the Caddo were invited to Natchitoches to trade and receive gifts, thus helping to ensure the safety of the rapidly growing French population at the expense of the Spanish (Nardini 1961:32). Meanwhile, some fifty miles downstream of Natchitoches, there was a great rapids that for ages had caused Native Americans to stop and portage their canoes. It was a favorite ambush spot and would obviously become another strategic point on the Red River as Europeans moved into northwest Louisiana. In 1723, the French established Post du Rapides at this location (Whittington 1935:30).

No sooner had the French built Post du Rapides than English and French traders arrived. Close behind came the earliest settlers to the land that would eventually be divided into Natchitoches, Sabine, and Rapides Parishes. Today it is difficult to imagine these intrepid pioneers settling a wilderness so far from any major civilization. Yet a 1722 census of Natchitoches indicated that fourteen men, ten women, ten children, twenty Negro slaves, and eight Indian slaves were already living there (Ditchy 1930:210). The French names included St. Denis, de Redot, Cotleau, Fausse, Lemoire, and Marioneau. The settlers at Post du Rapides had names such as Laissard, Chevalier,

Poiret, LaCour, LaSage, and Vallery (Whittington 1935:30). These people and the many that soon followed during the early eighteenth century probably ventured west to hunt and fish and eventually visited the Vernon Parish region.

Officially, through the first half of the eighteenth century, the Spanish at Los Adaes and the French in Natchitoches were enemies facing off along the Arroyo Hondo. Unofficially, both sides saw the need for mutual support and trade. Los Adaes was at the very end of a long string of missions trailing all the way back to Mexico. Because of this, the Spanish realized early on that they were dependent on the nearby French Louisiana colony for many necessities. For mutual survival, a sometimes tense truce was established between the two settlements. French and illicit traders supplied the Spanish with food (maize and beans), medicine, firearms, tobacco, liquor, and Indian trade items. The Spanish provided horses, cattle, and Indian slaves (Bolton 1962:39; Jeter et al. 1989:253; Webb and Gregory 1986:23). In 1731, the Spanish commander at Los Adaes went so far as to send soldiers to Natchitoches to assist the French, who were about to be attacked by Natchez Indians (Bolton 1962:40; Nardini 1961:43). The Spanish, French, and Anglo traders all profited from a mutually beneficial trade relationship. However, political events across the seas and far to the east would eventually change the semipeaceful atmosphere on the Louisiana frontier.

Unlike the Spanish at Los Adaes, the French settling at Natchitoches profited from a shorter supply line that included a series of settlements established shortly after Louisiana was claimed. By 1714, when Natchitoches was founded, three small French settlements already existed at Fort St. Louis de la Mobile, Fort Maurepas, and Fort de la Boulaye. These were inhabited by some two hundred people, and more were on their way. Between 1717 and 1731, new settlements were founded under the Company of the Indies. One of these was New Orleans in 1721. French prisoners and the poor arrived, and German and Swiss farmers were recruited. In 1719, five hundred Black slaves were brought to Louisiana. By 1731 the French colony boasted some 7,500 people (Davis 1959:52–54).



Relatively speaking, French settlement was on firm, if not solid footing. But French fortunes changed during the eighteenth century. It became evident that Louisiana was costing France far more than the nation was seeing in returns (Chipman 1992:172). Indian wars and disease took their toll on the colony. A 1744 census counted around 3,000 Whites, 800 soldiers, and 2,000 slaves—fewer people than in 1731 (Davis 1959:60). The 1750s brought more conflict with the English. By 1760, it was clear the French would soon lose both their Canadian base and the Louisiana colony. Since they were about to lose Louisiana anyway, the French signed the secret Treaty of Fontainebleau in 1762, transferring the vast territory west of the Mississippi to Spain (Davis 1971:70).

The Louisiana acquisition was not necessarily a welcome development in Spain or in northwest Louisiana. Though the French were gone, Spain was left to contend with the English who had gained all the French land east of the Mississippi. With the French out of the way, English colonists were constantly slipping west into the Louisiana region. Furthermore, there was a fair number of French settlers in Louisiana, especially around New Orleans, who were neither about to move nor welcome the Spanish. In fact, the Spanish did not gain full control of Louisiana until 1769. However, there was one bright spot for the Spanish. Since they were now in possession of the gulf region, they no longer needed the economically draining posts in east Texas and Louisiana, including the presidio at Los Adaes (Faulk 1964:15). Spanish settlers in the area around the Adaes post were ordered to leave for San Antonio so as to consolidate and strengthen the Spanish position there. Many chose to flee to Natchitoches instead (Bolton 1962:114; Nardini 1961:76).

Despite these problems, Louisiana actually grew during the last thirty years of the eighteenth century under the Spanish administration. Governor Alejandro O'Reilly was especially effective, fixing food prices, abolishing import and export duties to increase trade, ignoring illicit trade with the British, convening a council with the Native Americans, improving fortifications, and reorganizing the government (Davis 1971:103–105).

Population increased with a flux of Anglo settlers arriving after the French and Indian War and the American Revolution. O'Reilly's census counted 13,500 people, with 3,190 in New Orleans alone (Davis 1971:104). Small communities sprouted all along the Mississippi and the Red Rivers, connecting the larger villages of New Orleans, Baton Rouge, Opelousas, and Natchitoches (Davis 1959:120).

In northwest Louisiana throughout the latter part of the eighteenth century, English and colonial traders and settlers continued to arrive in the Natchitoches-Post du Rapides area thanks to the liberal policies of Spanish Governor Carondelet (Whittington 1935:34). In fact, as friction increased between the Spanish and the English, and between the English and the colonists, the Spanish government in Louisiana looked more favorably toward the American immigrants. During the American Revolution, Louisiana's Spanish governor, Bernardo Galvez, called for support in attacking the English at Fort Butte, Baton Rouge, and Natchez. The population around Rapides was large enough to form a local militia that served under the Spanish in this campaign (Whittington 1935:31).

Overall, settlement within the modern boundaries of Natchitoches, Sabine, Rapides, and Vernon Parishes prior to the turn of the century was strung along the Red River and the Camino Real. Clusters of settlements could be found around the rapids on the Red River, at Natchitoches and nearby along Bayou Rio Hondo, and at Los Adaes. A 1770 Spanish census of Rapido (formerly Post du Rapides) found 33 Whites and 18 slaves in eight houses (Hardin 1939:422; Whittington 1935:33). Athanase de Mézières, commandant of the post at Natchitoches, reported that in 1776 there were 113 homes, 105 heads of households with 86 women, 77 youths old enough to bear arms, 106 infants, 34 unmarried women, 84 bachelors, "non residents engaged in hunting and fishing and trade with the Indians," 2 male and 2 female free Blacks, 2 male and 1 female mulatto, and 410 Indian and Negro slaves (Nardini 1961:79). Another census in 1785 of the Rapides district, which included Avoyelles, Catahoula, LaSalle, and part of Grant, reported 212 Whites and 138 free Blacks (Whittington 1935:37).



This grew to 920 Whites and 250 free Blacks in 1792. By 1799, the population of the district had increased to 3,000 Whites and 2,000 slaves (Whittington 1935:37).

The great increase reported in 1799 was due not only to Spain's liberal settlement policies but also to the monumental political changes that had occurred east of Louisiana. First, Americans had defeated the British in the Revolution, and the English influence in the west was gone. A massive migration began into America's heartland. Second, in 1795, Spain and the United States signed the Treaty of San Lorenzo. Spain's boundary with the new nation was pushed west of the Mississippi, except for West Florida (Haggard 1945a:1015). Third, Spain gave up her claim to the Mississippi River, opening the floodgate for Americans pushing west and opening the door for trade in New Orleans. The momentum of this migration carried on into Louisiana, spilling additional settlers into the Red River area.

It was in this political and social setting that, in 1797, Juan Baptiste D'Artigeanu was deeded one square league on the Anacoco Prairie by Don Antonio Gilly Barbo, the Spanish commandant at Nacogdoches. This perhaps opened the way for others to move into the Vernon Parish region before 1800.

The total population of the Vernon Parish region prior to 1800 is unknown. It would seem likely that D'Artigeanu and the Lecomtes (John Baptiste and Ambrose) had a few neighbors within twenty miles at this time, especially to the northeast. Still, documentary support for this supposition is scant. An 1805 census of Spanish claims indicated only twenty-eight families living between the Sabine and the Arroyo Hondo (Haggard 1945a:1050–1051), an area north of Vernon. Señor Gregorio Mora testified before the American government in 1824 that in the years 1794 and 1795 he “collected the tithes of all the inhabitants who lived or

who had stocks west of the river Culeashue [Calcasieu] [and] of Bayou Kisachey” (Crawford 1825:90). This strongly implies that there were some residents or at least hunter-stockmen camping in the Vernon Parish region by that time. However, on closer examination, Mora's collection list may not include the entire population of the area (Nardini 1961:129–130). Some familiar names are missing from the list. Other sources include additional Anglo residents. For instance, two regional histories state that Joseph Willis, a circuit rider, was making rounds in the southeastern section of the parish around 1795 (Eakin 1987:20; Wise 1971:50). However, Willis probably did not reach the Vernon Parish area until at least 1810 because, according to Paxton (1888:139–140), the famous minister entered Louisiana for the first time in 1804, preaching the first Protestant sermon west of the Mississippi at Vermilion.<sup>4</sup> Despite the lack of solid evidence, it is felt that around the 1790s a few intrepid pioneers besides D'Artigeanu must have settled in the region, especially along the upper Calcasieu River. If this is true, they were squatters and would not have sought legal sanction for their homesteading.

Many of the earliest arrivals to the Red River-northwest Louisiana region did not turn to the soil to make a living in the pine forests. Instead they were full-time traders, either with the Native Americans or as middlemen between the French and Spanish. As early as 1722, Jean Lagros and two Barberousse brothers established a trading post among the Yatasee Indians near modern-day Campti (Nardini 1961:27). Another local trader was Pierre Largen. In 1773, Commandant de Mézières assigned nine traders to the various Native American tribes in the region, some were assisted by the government, others were independent (Nardini 1961:77–79). Of course, there had been English traders illegally exchanging goods in the region as far back as the 1720s (Whittington

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<sup>4</sup> Eakin and Wise do not reference their assertions but note that Willis is buried at Occupy No. 1 Baptist Church Cemetery (Wise 1971:50). Wise states that Willis preached on the Sabine “as early as 1804” (Wise 1971:60), however, Paxton states that Willis did not become associated with the Cheneyville Baptists until 1813, founding a church there (east of Vernon) in 1816 (Paxton 1888:143–144). Whenever Willis got to the Vernon Parish region, he was an influential early minister who eventually settled along Ten Mile Creek, dying in 1854 (Paxton 1888:516).

1935:25). These traders were vexing to Spanish traders, who complained to the authorities in New Orleans that their prices were being undercut by cheaper English goods.

The first documented merchant in the Alexandria region was Edward Murphy. He established his store at the confluence of the Red River and Bayou Rapides sometime before 1790 (Hardin 1939:421; La Vere 1991:373; Whittington 1935:24). Murphy would later join with Luther Smith, William Barr, and Peter Davenport to form the “House of Barr and Davenport,” a large trading firm that, by the turn of the century, had vast land holdings and a huge share of the regional trade (Haggard 1945b; La Vere 1991). Other regional merchants included William Miller and Alexander Fulton, who came to the area in 1790 or 1793, and a firm called Martineau and Landreau, which operated from 1800 to 1818 (Hardin 1939:421; Whittington 1935:25–26). No doubt these traders used the trails winding through modern Vernon Parish to get their goods into and out of Spanish Texas.

Though the Spanish either averted their eyes or only halfheartedly attempted to control American settlement and trade in Louisiana, they were more adamant that Protestant American settlers not infiltrate Catholic Texas. In the 1790s, Spanish authorities placed a permanent detachment of troops in Nacogdoches to keep out American immigrants and required all visitors to have valid passports (Chipman 1992:209–210). They also enlisted the aid of local landowners, including Ambroise Lecomte. Because the road from Alexandria to Nacogdoches cut through Lecomte’s land, one stipulation of his land grant was that he arrest anyone passing through without a passport (Wise 1971:4).

Into this setting rode an American adventurer, Philip Nolan. Nolan is among those historical legends whose real lives are so closely intertwined in local lore that it is impossible to clearly separate the two. Sometime before the 1780s, Nolan became associated with General James Wilkinson, another man whose life had a profound influence on the development of the American West but was shrouded in mystery. This ex-Revolutionary War general, who lived in Kentucky at the time, built

clandestine ties to the Spanish in New Orleans. Unknown to the United States government, he once plotted to bring Kentucky under the control of Spain. By the 1790s, he was involved in Ohio and Mississippi River trade. Nolan served as Wilkinson’s agent in New Orleans. These two restless plotters became interested in the possibilities of slipping into Spanish Texas to trade for horses to sell in Louisiana. Nolan’s first adventure was in 1791. Over the next ten years he conducted three other expeditions to bring back contraband horses (Chipman 1992:213; Mims 1972:68–78; Puelles 1918:37 [1827]; Wilson and Jackson 1987).

During the first of these expeditions, Nolan received permission to enter the country from the Spanish governor of Louisiana, Don Estevan Miro. But his passports were not recognized in Spanish Texas. Eventually the deteriorating relations between Spain and the United States, and between Spanish officials in Texas and New Orleans, combined with well-grounded suspicions by the Texas Spanish that Nolan was an agent of Wilkinson, made Nolan a marked man. Nolan entered Texas for the last time in late 1800. The Spanish caught up with him near modern-day Blum, Texas. In a fierce battle, Nolan’s party was surrounded by 150 Spanish troops. Nolan was killed and his men captured (Faulk 1964:119; Wilson and Jackson 1987:38–52).

Nolan’s connection to the history of Vernon Parish stems from the route he took into Texas on his trips there. This route, today known as Nolan’s Trace, is believed to have passed through Vernon Parish and possibly through the Fort Polk area. The arguments for and against this possibility are discussed in detail in Chapter 3. Suffice it to note here that Nolan would have camped along this route and been one of the earliest of many furtive travelers who would pass through the parish to and from Texas until it became part of the United States in 1845.

## THE NEUTRAL GROUND

At the turn of nineteenth century, political events far from Vernon Parish continued to affect the lo-

cal cultural landscape. In Europe, revolution had changed the fortunes of France and Spain, and they had gone to war between 1793 and 1795. In the latter part of that decade, as Napoleon rose in power, Spain was in no position to hold its North American possessions against the threats from both France and the United States. Furthermore, Spain, like France before it, was losing some quarter of a million dollars yearly maintaining Louisiana. By 1800, Napoleon was positioned to expand his empire, and Spain was pressured into signing the second Treaty of San Ildefonso, giving Louisiana back to France for other compensation. Under the circumstances, it was probably the best deal Spain could get (Chipman 1992:223; Davis 1971:128; Hofstadter et al. 1967:206).

Napoleon originally saw Louisiana as a bread basket for his possessions in the West Indies and as a part of his envisioned New World empire. Before accomplishing his goals in the Americas, however, he had to better secure his position in Europe. In the meantime, events beyond his control thwarted his plans for an overseas realm. First, there was an expanding, aggressive United States, led by President Thomas Jefferson who wanted the New Orleans port and the Louisiana territory. The United States let it be known through diplomatic channels that the French acquisition of Louisiana might cause the United States to be driven into an alliance with England (Hofstadter et al. 1967:206). Then, as the likelihood of war with England grew, Napoleon learned of a slave insurrection in Santo Domingo. An expedition sent to suppress the insurrection failed. Faced with problems on the continent and with his expensive foothold in the New World slipping, Napoleon decided to forgo his overseas ambitions and concentrate on the conquest of Europe. Consequently, in 1803, France sold Louisiana to the United States for fifteen million dollars (Hofstadter et al. 1967:207; Morris 1965:132).

#### **BOUNDARY DISPUTE**

The money for Louisiana was well spent. But exactly what the United States had purchased was unclear at the time of sale. When Spain gave the land back to France, the wording of the treaty did

not precisely delineate Louisiana's western borders. The Louisiana Purchase was vaguely defined as the same lands that Spain gave France and that France had sold earlier to Spain. It is likely that the boundary description was intentionally vague. Napoleon is reputed to have said, "if an obscurity did not already exist, it would be good policy to put one there" (Chipman 1992:223). Creating a situation where Spain and the United States were at odds over boundaries was the sort of infamous tactic Napoleon would have exploited given the opportunity (Sternberg 1931). Of course, the vaguely worded treaty was advantageous, as well, to the land-hungry United States.

Regardless of the geopolitical maneuvering, no country, not even the United States, truly understood the extent or resources of the new purchase. For this reason, President Jefferson planned and sponsored expeditions into the area, including those of Lewis and Clark (1804–1806), Dunbar and Hunter (1804), and Freeman and Custis (1806). The latter two expeditions planned to use the Red River as their route into the interior. However, Dunbar and Hunter never ventured out of Louisiana because of Spanish threats; and Freeman and Custis were forced to turn back when confronted by Spanish soldiers (Chipman 1992:224). By 1806, at both the international and local levels, tensions were running quite high between the Americans and the Spanish.

As the two nations bickered, intrepid Anglo settlers continued up the Red River, along the Camino Real, and into Texas. Spanish officials, both on the scene and in Mexico, could not agree on exactly what to do about these people. Some wanted to let the settlers enter Texas, others were adamant that they stay out. As the border problem was exacerbated by increasing encroachment of land-hungry Americans, Don Nemesio Salcedo, the Commandant General of the Interior Provinces, built up his forces along the Texas-Louisiana frontier to more than 1,200 (either 1,273 or 1,368) soldiers (Faulk 1964:124; Haggard 1945a:1029). Salcedo ordered his men to patrol along the Camino Real and as far south as the Calcasieu River. These patrols probably reached south into Vernon Parish. Alarmed, Major Moses Porter, the

American commander at Natchitoches, sent a letter to the commandant of Nacogdoches, Captain Sebastian Rodriguez, requesting the withdrawal of all Spanish troops east of the Sabine. While the request was being forwarded to the Spanish governor, Rodriguez replied to Porter that his troops would stay put and continue to patrol as far east as the Arroyo Hondo. This response provoked the Americans, and, on February 5, 1806, American and Spanish troops faced off across the Camino Real at Juan Mora's Lagoon, about three miles east of Los Adaes. After exchanging unpleasantries, the Spanish officer in charge eventually began a slow retreat west to the Sabine, followed closely by the Americans (Haggard 1945a:1032).

Though excitement was high on the northwest Louisiana frontier, cooler heads prevailed. General Wilkinson, commander of the United States troops in Louisiana, offered to withdraw all soldiers east of the Arroyo Hondo if the Spanish would pull back west of the Sabine. The Spanish, realizing they would lose in any exchange with the United States, quickly agreed, and a buffer zone or "Neutral Ground" between the two was established. This agreement, never actually formalized between the two countries, would hold for some fifteen years and affect the course of settlement in the Vernon Parish region throughout most of the antebellum period (Chipman 1992:224).

The use of a neutral zone between two countries was not a totally new concept, but rather a common temporary solution used repeatedly during the long European conquest of the New World. As early as 1739, Newcastle, the English prime minister, had proposed that the lands between the Altamaha River (Georgia) and San Juan River (Florida) remain uninhabited and serve as a neutral ground between the Spanish and the English holdings (Haggard 1945a:1008). As the English and later the Americans pushed west, the Spanish and French often used the Native Americans' lands as a buffer between them, forming dangerous but somewhat neutral zones.

When the United States obtained Louisiana, Americans, including President Jefferson, argued that Louisiana's true western boundary was as far west as the Rio Grande (Haggard 1945a:1020).

Naturally, the Spanish, with extensive settlements in Texas, believed that this argument was absurd. In fact, the Spanish had consistently maintained that the eastern border of their territory was the Arroyo Hondo. They defended their claim based on the establishment of Los Adaes. Salcedo even officially offered it as a formal border with America in 1803. Later, James Madison proposed a similar solution. Thus, in 1806 when Wilkinson proposed that both sides retreat and leave the land between the Sabine and the Arroyo Hondo vacant, the idea was a logical and readily acceptable, if not welcome, compromise. Eventually, both governments recognized and honored these limits, though individual Americans did not.

Where exactly was the Neutral Ground? Since it was never officially recognized there is no exact answer. The Sabine was a clear and logical western border, and it was logical for the two sides to agree on the Arroyo Hondo as an eastern border because the land along it was well settled and well known. However, the Arroyo Hondo ran east into the Red River, not south to the gulf. South of the Arroyo Hondo the land was practically unexplored and had no clear landmarks like the Sabine. Eventually, both the Spanish and the Americans accepted the Neutral Ground as "all the tract of country lying east of the Sabine and west of the Culeashue, Bayou Kisachey, the branch of the Red River, called Old river, from the Kisachey up to the mouth of Bayou Don Manuel, southwest of Bayou Don Manuel, Lake Terre Noir, and Arroyo Hondo, and south of the Red river, to the northwestern boundary of the State of Louisiana" (Crawford 1825:90) (Figure 6; also see Figure 4). After much research, historian J. Villasana Haggard defined the Neutral Ground borders as the west boundary being the mouth of the Sabine "to the thirty-second parallel of north latitude and the intersection of the 94° line of longitude and the Sabine River," the north boundary as "a straight line running in a southwesterly direction from the Bayou Pierre settlement to a point crossed by the thirty-second parallel of north latitude and the intersection of the 94° line of longitude and the Sabine River," the eastern boundary beginning at Calcasieu Pass north to Calcasieu Lake to the

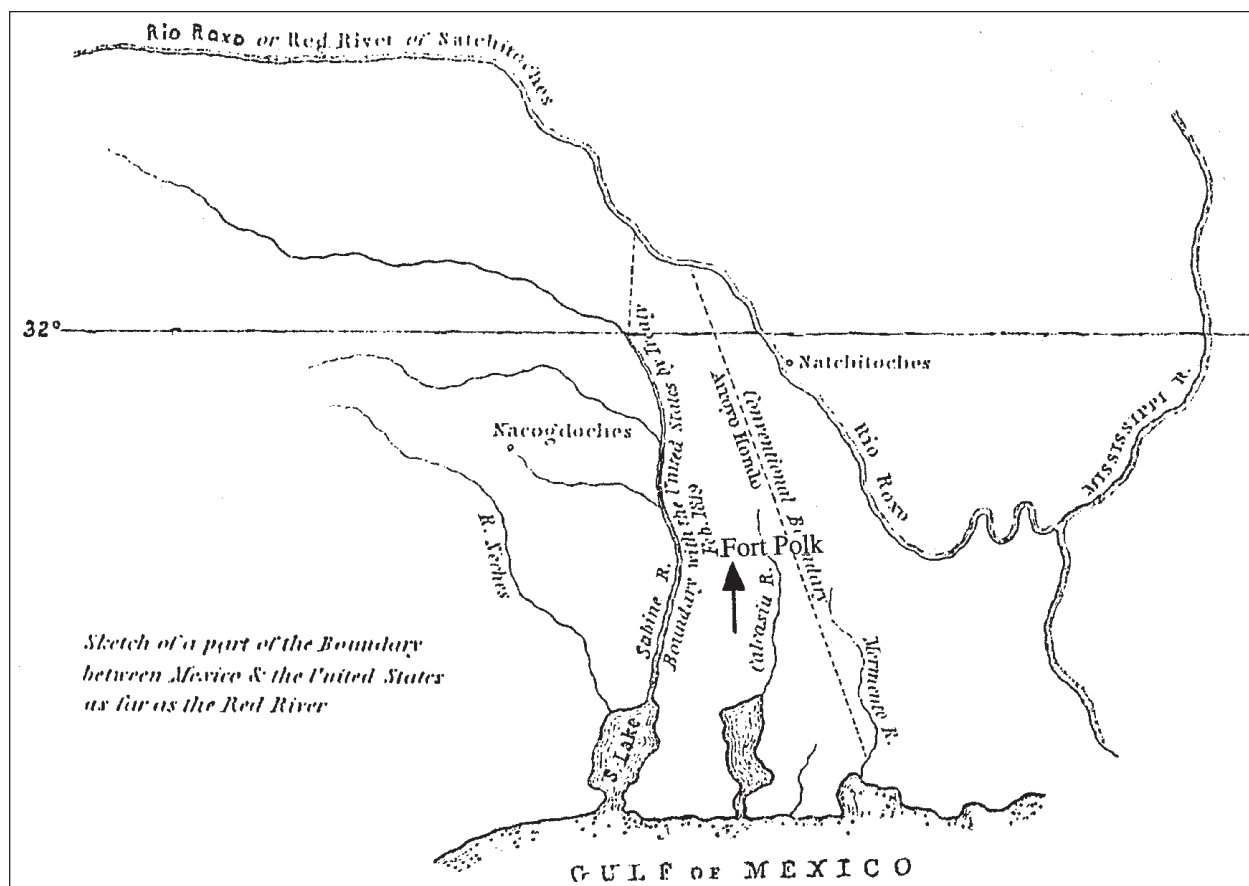


Figure 6 — Neutral Ground from M. E. De Gorostiza’s pamphlet, House Executive Document 190 (U.S. House of Representatives 1838).

source of the Calcasieu then north to the Kisatchie Creek, “along this creek to the 93° 7' line of longitude, where the Arroyo Hondo fades into Sibley’s marsh, then along the Arroyo Hondo to its source—about 93° 8' and 31° 47' 30”—thence a straight line to Bayou Pierre, along this bayou to the west bank of Bayou Pierre Lake at the Bayou Pierre settlement,” and the south boundary being the Gulf of Mexico (Haggard 1945a:1045–1047).

#### NO MAN’S LAND

The forty-mile-wide neutral strip was a land apart (Figure 7). With no government, neither Spanish nor American citizens could settle with the hope of a peace-keeping authority to guard them. Soon, into the Free State of the Sabine, as it was sometimes called, “came the refuse of both Texas and Louisiana—criminals, robbers, and smugglers—

who raided and robbed in both provinces” (Faulk 1964:125). Despite this “refuse,” traders continued to cross the land and squatters quietly settled along streams and trails. Both continually demanded that their governments do something to control the thieves. The traders were especially vocal as they were usually the targets of robbers. In addition to this human mix, fugitive slaves hid in the region, and filibusters used the strip as a base to launch expeditions into Texas. No doubt by this time, Vernon Parish was more than just a hunting ground.

During the period from 1806 until 1821, there were two kinds of settlers: those with legal claims to their lands, granted by the Spanish prior to the establishment of the Neutral Ground, and squatters. The squatters were a curious breed. Some had been thrown out of Texas after the failure of the





filibuster expeditions or were wanted as lawbreakers. Others were simply pioneers seeking free land. They were universally poor and, it would appear, universally disliked by “respectable” personages. In 1806, for instance, the Bishop of New Leon crossed the land and described the settlers:

*Many Englishmen and Americans are living near the boundary line. They live without a ruler and without laws; they become frightened like wild beasts when they see other human beings. They live in concubinage and incestuous unions; they carry on illicit trade with the wild tribes. I saw them with my own eyes. Many other horrible conditions exist, which I prefer to leave unwritten. (quoted in Haggard 1945a:1051)*

The bishop’s description is interesting but probably a bit overdrawn. No doubt the Neutral Ground’s and Vernon Parish’s first inhabitants included many bandits and scalawags. But such people tended to drift away in restless pursuit of illegal activities. Those who attempted to settle were indeed anarchists. But their anarchy was in keeping with their Upland South cultural roots. They were just too poor to purchase the land, abhorred any government intrusion into their lives, and sought dispersed isolated areas for settlement. The Neutral Ground actually may have been to their liking, or at least it was familiar ground, for they had developed a thriving culture in similar environments across the Eastern woodlands. Naturally they would be quite timid of strangers who might be, or report to, government authorities. Also, as noted, the Neutral Ground boundaries had never been formally delineated, rather they “evolved.” Settlers were apt to push west to the limits of this vaguely defined line. Thus Anglo settlement began in the Vernon Parish region at the turn of the century when the area was still considered a neutral zone and settlement was officially illegal.

The first census of the Territory of Orleans (Louisiana) in 1810, which included nearby Rapides County, counted 2,200 Whites of which “a few found their way into the western part of the parish in the hammocks and along the banks of

the Calcasieu River” (Davis 1971:66; Whittington 1935:61). An influx of Mississippians settled around modern-day Cheneyville at this time. By 1820, 2,491 Whites, 85 free Blacks, and 3,487 slaves were counted in Rapides Parish. (The borders of the parish changed between 1810 and 1820, thus the slight difference between the two census counts actually reflects real growth.) It was also at this time that the settlement of Hinston, just east of modern-day Vernon Parish, is said to have begun with the arrival of the Golemon family (Hardin 1939:429; Marler 1994:16). In the Vernon Parish area, it is likely that squatters with hopes of farming chose to settle along Bayou Anacoco and the Calcasieu River where some fertile soils could be found.

Settlers who had made valid land claims through Spanish authorities tried to reclaim their land through American authorities after the Neutral Ground dispute was settled. A tantalizing but frustrating document listing these settlers is found in the *American State Papers* called “The Register and Receiver of the Land District Claim between the Arroyo (Rio) Hondo and the Sabine Rivers under the Spanish.” It lists 280 claimants, 29 of whom were denied (Crawford 1825). Haggard (1945a:1053) states that these people were not on the land prior to 1812, but settled there between 1812 and 1819 (see Footnote 1). He does not state how “it is known” that they were not there in 1812. On the list are the previously mentioned Juan Baptiste D’Artigeau and John Baptiste and Ambroise Lecomte, all of whom settled along Bayou “Lianacucu,” which is obviously Bayou Anacoco and within Vernon Parish. But the documented locations of other claims are vague, making it difficult to determine who on the list was actually in the Vernon Parish area. Discrepancies between the other sources further add to the confusion in identifying Vernon’s first settlers. For instance, Wise (1971:46–47, 50) states that Alexander Calhoun, James Going, John Graham, Gibson Johnson, Joshua Johnson, Azor Mathis, Frederick McMullen, Jourdan Perkins, and William Pinchback settled in modern-day Ward 5 (southeast Vernon Parish including the eastern part of Fort Polk) prior to 1819. He mentions the

Groves, Hawkins, and Nash families among those settling in the Walnut Hill area around 1810 (Wise 1971:53). James Groves, an Indian trader, is named as the first settler in this area, along with Tap Dial. According to Wise, they settled along Nolan's Trace (see Chapter 3). Wise, however, did not reference this information. He also stated that the Winfrees arrived at (what would soon be called) Burr's Ferry in 1805 (Wise 1971:46–47).

The land claims of Calhoun, Going, Joshua Johnson, and Mathis indeed can be found in the *American State Papers* (Crawford 1825). There is also a G. Johnson, a T. Nash, and a Rees Perkins, but no Jourdan Perkins. Of the 280 claims, several were made by Winfrees, but most likely the Vernon Parish Winfrees are Philip and Abraham, whose claims are “near the Sabine River” (Crawford 1825:144). The rest of the people on Wise's list are not mentioned in the registry. Gibson Johnson's claim was denied; it is possible that the others' claims were also refused (Crawford 1825:139). Finally, Jack Hadnot, an early Vernon Parish historian, indicates that a William West was also living on Anacoco Creek in 1810. West is not among the registrants either (Hadnot n.d.).

While finding these peoples' names in the registry confirms their settlement in the Neutral Ground, it does not necessarily confirm their residence within the modern boundaries of Vernon Parish. In fact, they most probably did not settle within Vernon Parish. Calhoun's claim was located at “Dividing Ridge,” and Mathis's at Mill Creek, both of which could be anywhere within the Neutral Ground (Crawford 1825:144). G. Johnson's and T. Nash's claims were along Bayou Kisatchie, not in Vernon Parish. James Going's claim was along Bayou Chou Pique, also not in Vernon Parish (Crawford 1825:146).

Then there is a long list of people who claim to have settled along the Calcasieu, including Joshua Johnson. All of them, including Going along the Chou Pique, are listed as residing in St. Landry Parish in 1824. Throughout the nineteenth century, the St. Landry-Rapides (later Vernon Parish-Calcasieu Parish) line generally remained stable (moving a little south). This strongly implies that these settlers, including Going and Johnson, were actually living south of modern Vernon Parish boundaries.<sup>5</sup> This is typical of the discrepancies encountered when researching early land claims and determining the earliest settlers in Louisiana.<sup>6</sup>

Included among those settling just outside of modern Vernon Parish were: Hugh McNeley and James Walker (assignee of James Dollohide) along Bayou Toro; Nicolas Jacks and Samuel S. Carnes along a “branch” of Bayou Toro (Crawford 1825:143–146); Eli Smith, David Wrinkles, John Montgomery, Portevent Bludworth, John Warrick, Humphrey Yarborough, and James Madden along Bayou Kisatchie; and, near the end of this period, the Billy Langton family along Sandy Creek (Wise 1971:44). The first settler near the village of Kisatchie may have been James Dowden, who arrived in 1818 (Fortier 1909:128). However, Dowden is not listed among those who claimed land in 1824. Perhaps those listed by Wise who did not appear in the *American State Papers* were squatters.

Obviously, with at least 280 families and probably more living within the Neutral Ground, this border zone was hardly an effective barrier between the two nations. Furthermore, traders, both legal and illegal, traveled through the Neutral Ground along the Camino Real, Nolan's Trace, and other trails leading off the main thoroughfares.

One of the largest government-sanctioned trading enterprises was the House of Barr and Daven-

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<sup>5</sup> This is based on a comparison of maps showing the general borders of the development of parishes (Louisiana Historical Records Survey 1939; Newton 1972). These lines could be inaccurate, however, Whittington (1935:15) describes the southern border of Rapides Parish (which became Vernon Parish) at formation to be the same as the modern (1939) southern line of Avoyelles Parish. Thus, the north boundary of St. Landry was an additional two or three miles south of the present-day southern Vernon Parish border, making it even less likely that these people settled in Vernon Parish.

<sup>6</sup> Because of this problem, the author did not list six other claims of people who settled along the Sabine and several who were listed as settled along the “Quelqueshue.” Those on the Sabine are not listed because the author cannot determine where along the river they settled. Those on the Calcasieu probably settled south of Vernon Parish.



port. Organized in 1798 by Luther Smith, Edward Murphy (who started trading at Rapides), William Barr, and Peter Samuel Davenport, it was the main agency for Spanish trade across the Neutral Ground until 1812 (Haggard 1945b:66). Smith and Murphy operated from the Louisiana side, while Barr and Davenport operated from company headquarters at Nacogdoches (Faulk 1964:97). They mainly transported furs, pelts, livestock, and occasionally horses to Louisiana to exchange for various merchandise to ship back to Texas. While discouraging others from trading, Spanish authorities needed this enterprise to supply local troops as well as to obtain presents for the Native Americans to maintain friendly relations. Thus, the enterprise was exempt from the Spanish prohibition of exporting horses. Besides the House of Barr and Davenport, only a few other traders in and around the Neutral Ground were approved by the Spanish.<sup>7</sup>

Meanwhile, across the border, American traders were fierce competitors. One of the House of Barr's biggest competitors for Native American support was John Sibley, United States Indian agent at Natchitoches. It was Sibley who, through Indian informants, discovered in 1806 that a detachment of Spanish troops had crossed the Sabine. He contacted the military at Natchitoches, initiating a crisis that led to the formation of the Neutral Ground (Nardini 1961:80). Sibley so successfully influenced the Indians toward the United States that the Spanish formally protested to the Spanish consul in New Orleans (Faulk 1964:68).

Besides Sibley, there were many other American traders on the Louisiana frontier. In direct defiance of the Spanish authorities, one trader named Anthony Glass, formed an expedition in 1807. Glass and his party traveled from Natchitoches up the Red River and deep into Texas, trading with the Native Americans and making friends for the Americans—reminiscent of Philip Nolan (Chipman 1992:228).

Settlers, traders, and Native Americans in the Neutral Ground were not alone. Fugitive slaves saw the Neutral Ground as a place of refuge, an opportunity to cross into Texas to gain freedom as Spanish citizens. Although slavery was practiced in Texas (Faulk 1964:96), a 1789 law guaranteed freedom to foreign slaves who entered the territory. When Louisiana was sold to the United States, the Spanish considered issuing a similar proclamation of freedom if the Americans made any hostile moves toward Texas (Haggard 1945a:1071). Slaves knew about this opportunity anyway, and many attempted to escape west. They would usually flee in groups and make their way across the Neutral Ground to Nacogdoches. Here they would present themselves to Spanish authorities.

In 1808, more than thirty slaves escaped from a plantation on the Cane River, only to be captured on the Texas side of the Sabine (Haggard 1945a:1072). Usually, groups were much smaller. For instance, a March 20, 1918, advertisement in the *Louisiana Herald* offered a \$250 reward for two male slaves, Hope and George, along with their wives, Nancy and Rebecca, and another slave named Jack, who escaped from a Red River plantation. The owner noted that they “will most probably attempt to cross the Sabine” and offered \$100 for each if they were caught beyond the Sabine. The problem of escaped slaves would plague the American plantation owners along the Red River throughout the existence of the Neutral Ground. The Spanish recognized this and used the fear of escaped slaves as a way to deter Americans from settling within the buffer zone.

Traders, settlers, and both governments were harassed by the bandits and outlaws who moved into the Neutral Ground almost immediately after the two nations created the zone. Some of the bandits were organized into sizable gangs. For instance, one Jose Zepeda and his three hands were overcome by a larger party of bandits in 1811 (Hag-

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<sup>7</sup> One of these was a Marcelo Soto or Marcel de Soto who opened his trading post on Bayou Pierre. De Soto's trade cut into Barr and Davenport's monopoly. Interestingly these traders were among the 280 claimants to the land in 1824 (Crawford 1825:146; Haggard 1945b:72,76). De Soto's claim was along Bayou Pierre, probably at his trading post. The owners of the House of Barr and Davenport had the three largest claims along the Camino Real—two were four leagues and the other, six leagues square—besides another claim of 2,222.84 acres elsewhere (Crawford 1825:143).

gard 1945a:1064). Don Apolinar Masmela and a detachment of eleven soldiers and fifteen settlers were attacked in 1812. A year earlier, a party of seventeen Spanish had been attacked on the Sabine by some thirty renegade Americans. In a separate incident, thirty or more brigands attacked traders along Bayou Pierre (Haggard 1945a:1064–1065).

Outlaws became so numerous that, in 1810, American and Spanish forces cooperated in a joint operation, sweeping the Neutral Ground, burning homes, and moving out squatters (Haggard 1945a:1062–1063). Whether these forces went as far south as the Vernon Parish region is not known, but evidence indicates that they did pass down the Sabine to Bayou Toro (Haggard 1945a:1063, footnote 63).

The Spanish and Americans patrolled the zone again in 1812, when American General Wade Hampton ordered Lt. Colonel Zebulon M. Pike to enter the Neutral Ground and clean out its bandits. Pike was to notify the Spanish and propose a joint expedition, which he did. However, in March 1812, while the Spanish officer at Nacogdoches waited for authorization from higher up, Pike and the Americans entered the Neutral Ground without the Spanish. The Americans captured sixteen men and thirty-five horses and mules. The Spanish, who finally arrived in April, found mostly the devastation caused by the Americans. Even after these efforts, Samuel Davenport of Barr and Davenport wrote: “The Neutral Ground is still infested by gangs of bandits” (in Haggard 1945b:78). It would continue to be so even after the land was granted to the United States.

The Neutral Ground also offered an excellent staging and recruiting area for private armies, collectively called filibusters, attempting to take Texas. Besides facing the threat of the Americans, Spanish royalists had trouble controlling Texas from internal revolutionary influences. Don José Bernardo Gutiérrez de Lara, a revolutionary from northern Mexico, and others had staged unsuccessful revolts prior to the formation of the buffer zone. Then in 1811, Gutierrez and a small party of men

passed through Texas, crossed the Sabine, and arrived in Natchitoches. From Natchitoches, Gutierrez traveled to Washington, D.C., to gather support from the United States government. Although the United States would not officially sanction his actions, Gutierrez received a letter of introduction from Secretary of State James Monroe addressed to William C. Clairborne, U.S. military commander in New Orleans (Chipman 1992:234; Haggard 1945a:1055; Nardini 1961:95–97). Returning to Natchitoches, Gutierrez met Irishman Augustus William Magee. Together they began recruiting an army made up largely of Neutral Ground desperadoes, who were offered forty dollars a month to join the expedition (Henderson 1951:44).

The recruits, calling themselves the Republican Army of the North, gathered in camps in Natchitoches, Rapides, and at a camp along the Sabine. They eventually formed a little army of about 130 men. In August 1812, they crossed the Sabine, attacked and captured Nacogdoches, Texas, where they recruited an additional 190 Mexicans, Indians, and other “disreputable characters from the Neutral Ground” (Faulk 1964:135). Among these new Nacogdoches recruits was Samuel Davenport of the House of Barr and Davenport, who only a few weeks before had warned the Spanish that an army of men were organizing in the Neutral Ground for an attack on Texas (Haggard 1945b:85; Nardini 1961:97).<sup>8</sup>

While the United States government publicly sent an envoy to Chihuahua expressing official disapproval of Gutierrez’s actions, secretly Monroe was in communication with William Shaler, who had been sent by Clairborne to accompany Gutierrez and monitor the invasion (Chipman 1992:235). Gutierrez’s army marched deeper into Texas, winning battles at La Bahia and Salado Creek and capturing San Antonio. Meanwhile, the seeds of its own destruction were being sown within the band. Magee died mysteriously, and then Gutierrez was replaced by José Alvarez de Toledo, partially through Shaler’s influence (Chipman 1992:236;

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<sup>8</sup> Davenport wasn’t the only trader to warn the Spanish. Marcelo de Soto, then a justice of the peace, also contacted Spanish authorities about the growing army in and around Natchitoches (M’Caleb 1900:220–221).

Haggard 1945a:1055). Then at Medina River in August 1813, the rebellion was crushed by the Spanish. Approximately 1,000 men in Toledo's mob were killed in the battle (Chipman 1992:237; Henderson 1951:59–61). Toledo retreated to Nacogdoches and, with some three hundred men, women, and children, fled back into the Neutral Ground. Many of these survivors settled temporarily around Bayou Pierre (Haggard 1945a:1055).

But the Gutierrez-Magee Republican Army of the North was not the only filibuster group to use the Neutral Ground. Ex-French officer and adventurer Jean Joseph Amable Humbert soon recruited the vengeful survivors of the Gutierrez-Magee expedition and crossed the Sabine for another attempt at Texas. But once there, the cause died for lack of funds, and the mob of discontents returned to the Neutral Ground.

In 1814, John Hamilton Robinson organized the Friends of Mexican Emancipation and used the trails of the Neutral Ground as a route into Texas (Haggard 1945a:1056). But, while camping on the west side of the Sabine, Robinson was detained by one of Toledo's secret agents. Toledo, who still held influence among the filibusters, arrived at the camp on the Texas side of the Sabine in May 1814. He released Robinson, sending him back into the Neutral Ground, and then warned the U.S. military at Fort Clairborne that there was a party of armed men within the buffer zone. Eventually, like all the others, Toledo's force slowly disintegrated through lack of support and funds. The mob again filtered back into the Neutral Ground, where some took up farming, while others continued to seek their fortunes in war (Haggard 1945a:1057).

Five years later, yet another adventurer, John Long, arrived in Natchitoches, crossed the Neutral Ground again, and at Nacogdoches on June 23, 1819, declared Texas an independent republic. As his government was being formed, recruits poured across the Neutral Ground into Texas. But this mini-revolution also fell apart. First, Long attempted to recruit the pirate Jean Lafitte and his brother. But they rejected Long's offer. Then, American officials on the Louisiana side of the border captured his supplies. His men in Texas

were forced to disperse to hunt for food. Spanish patrols eventually rounded up these small parties and drove them across the Sabine, again into the Neutral Ground (Chipman 1992:240). Long drifted west to Mexico and was later killed by a soldier in Mexico City (Faulk 1964:139).

Although Long's motive for revolution was probably personal glory, he was spurred to action by the 1819 Transcontinental Treaty (Adams-Onis Treaty) between Spain and the United States. The treaty recognized Spain's claim to Texas (the United States acquired West Florida) and set the eastern Texas border at the Sabine and Red Rivers (Morris 1965:157). Two years later, when the treaty was finally ratified, Mexico declared its independence from Spain. Texas then became a Mexican problem. These events spelled the end of the Neutral Ground, but not the last of the restless Americans who would continue to use the land between the Sabine and the Calcasieu, including modern Vernon Parish, as a staging ground for revolution.

## SUMMARY

From the time of the first settlements in northwest Louisiana around Los Adaes and Natchitoches until 1820, the settlement of the Vernon Parish region was delayed by the political maneuvering and intrigue of European nations from across the Atlantic. West of Vernon Parish, development in Texas and Mexico was controlled by the Spanish. East of the parish, the English, French, and eventually the new nation of the United States directly and indirectly delayed its settlement. During the late eighteenth century and the first two decades of the nineteenth, Vernon Parish was the center of a struggle between restless, independent-minded Americans and the Spanish with their almost medieval, Old World system of government. Legal settlement, including the establishment of legitimate government, religion, and the development of towns, roads, and industries, was thwarted by this struggle. Naturally, the frontier became a playground for renegades. It also became a stage for inciting revolution among the squatters, although

many of them sought nothing more than peace and free land.

While it is impossible to know exactly how many settlers actually were in the Vernon Parish region, it is tempting to speculate. Based on the research, it is estimated that between ten and twenty families called the Vernon Parish region home from around 1790 to 1820. These people

would have settled along the banks of the Sabine, Anacoco, and Calcasieu. By 1820, settlement just outside of the Neutral Ground probably had doubled this number in the land between Cheneyville and Hinston in Rapides Parish. With the opening of the Neutral Ground in 1819, settlement and the establishment of legitimate government began.



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## Chapter 3

### ANTEBELLUM PERIOD, WAR, AND RECOVERY, 1821–1871

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*It took a man of real courage and moral fiber to settle in this section during these times. There were no settlements, no stores, no schools and no churches. But the desire of men for a home of their own was stronger than all dangers and inconveniences. Had not these hardy folks forefathers established a Nation under similar circumstances? If their forefathers could, so could they. Most of the early settlers were from the Carolinas, Virginia, Georgia and other southern states, where the country was fast settling up, and these restless souls were feeling crowded, and there was new country ahead to be settled so they moved on, some thinking of going into Texas, but when they reached this section they settled down, some with the intention of moving on. Maybe a loved one died and was buried here, so they stayed on. Some fell in love with a girl whose family lived in the section, so they married and settled down.*

— Hadnot in Sandel 1982:110

#### THE ANTEBELLUM LANDSCAPE

The ratification of the Adams-Onís Treaty in 1821 initiated legitimate Anglo-American settlement in the Fort Polk region and the future Vernon Parish. The treaty did not initiate a land rush, however. Western Louisiana was still isolated; transportation routes in and out were still primitive trails. The Sabine River was still an unreliable route for migration and commerce due to its logjams and shallowness during much of the year. Also, its western bank was still under the jurisdiction of the Mexican government. Admittedly, between 1826 and 1828, there was a small population gain due to a combination of economic and natural crises along the Red River. The region was hit with floods, the price of cotton fell, and a yellow fever epidemic took its toll (Whittington 1935:65–66). These misfortunes forced many foreclosures among the established residents of Rapides Parish. Bankrupt, they moved west into the pinelands or on to Texas where they began new lives. But sustained growth and settlement in the Vernon Parish area would not begin until the 1830s, especially after 1836 when Texas became an independent state and steamboat traffic on the Sabine was viable (Cantley and Kern 1984:42).

Thus the natural and cultural landscape in western Louisiana changed very slowly through the antebellum period. From the mid-1830s until the Civil War, early settlers might have experienced such changes as the establishment of a few small villages (in reality, clusters of buildings inhabited by one or two extended families), a few new neighbors settling within ten miles, and an increasing use of the trails leading east to the settlements along the Red River and west to the ferries across the Sabine River. Early inhabitants also might have noticed that, after 1836, most pilgrims traveling these trails continued on to Texas rather than settling nearby.

#### POPULATION AND SETTLEMENT

East of the Vernon Parish region the landscape had changed dramatically since the Louisiana Purchase. Settlement along the Red River and its tributaries, like Bayou Rapides, Bayou Boeuf, and Bayou Robert, had increased steadily. In fact, this region had experienced “a veritable boom in immigration of farmers” (Whittington 1935:65). By the 1820s, large plantations had been established along the fertile river bottomlands, and plantation owners had built summer homes in the cool upland pine forests adjacent to the bottomlands. Alexan-



dria was established between 1805 and 1810—the town plat being laid out by Alexander Fulton—and in 1818 the town was chartered (Whittington 1935:74). Growing quickly, by 1823, the town boasted two banks and a newspaper. The latter was actually the fourth attempt to bring the printed word to the people of Rapides Parish since its early French beginnings.

The political landscape also had changed dramatically in central Louisiana since 1803. Louisiana became a territory and then a state in 1812. Rapides County was one of the first of twelve counties in the territory. Soon the counties came to be called parishes. When established in 1805, Rapides Parish contained “the settlements of Rapides, Catahoula, Avoyelles, Bayou Boeuf, Bayou Robert, and all other settlements who now or may be made in the vicinity thereof” (Act of 1804 in Whittington 1935:51–52).

Natchitoches Parish adjoined Rapides Parish (Figure 8a) along a direct line running diagonally southwest from the confluence of the Rigolet de Bon Dieu on the Red River (Louisiana Historical Records Survey 1939:21) to the Sabine River. Even when Sabine Parish was carved out from part of Natchitoches Parish in 1843, this line continued to be the demarcation between Rapides Parish and Natchitoches and the new Sabine Parishes (Figure 8b) (Louisiana Historical Records Survey 1939:57). When parish boundaries again changed in 1871 with the formation of Vernon Parish from parts of Sabine, Natchitoches, and Rapides Parishes (Figure 8d), this line no longer served as a boundary but, rather, bisected the new parish from northeast to southwest. Thus, it is easy to understand how the political organization and the fortunes of those moving into antebellum Vernon Parish were closely tied to Rapides, Natchitoches, and Sabine Parishes. Today, Fort Polk’s Main Fort lies entirely within the southeast portion of Vernon Parish, while Peason Ridge and the Horsehead Training facilities straddle the area where Natchitoches, Sabine, and Vernon Parishes meet.

Three sets of very incomplete parish census records, a distinct lack of occupants, and the loss of most records to courthouse fires combine to make it extremely difficult to understand the population development of antebellum Vernon Parish. However, an examination of parishwide population figures allows some speculation as to the general community’s size and density. In 1820<sup>1</sup>, there were only 7,486 people in Natchitoches Parish (Table 1) and 6,065 in Rapides Parish (Table 2). Ten years later, Natchitoches’s population stood at 7,905. Spread across a vast area, the original Natchitoches Parish incorporated modern-day Natchitoches, Sabine, De Soto, Caddo, half of Vernon, and most of Red River Parishes. Meanwhile the Rapides Parish population had increased to 7,575, its borders incorporating modern-day Rapides, the other half of Vernon, and a little of Grant Parish (Figure 8). Through the antebellum period, Natchitoches and Rapides Parishes continued to shrink in size, and Sabine Parish was established. Still, the combined total population of Natchitoches, Sabine, and Rapides Parishes had reached only 47,885 by 1860 (Tables 1–3).

At first glance, this may seem like a moderately sized population. But from the perspective of households or farms sprinkled across this pine-filled landscape, only 1,032 families were living

Table 1 — Natchitoches Parish population, 1810–1870.\*

<i>Year</i>	<i>Whites</i>	<i>Freedmen</i>	<i>Slaves</i>	<i>Total</i>
1810	1,213	181	1,476	2,870
1820	4,745	415	2,326	7,486
1830	3,802	532	3,571	7,905
1840	7,042	657	6,651	14,350
1850	5,466	881	7,881	14,228
1860	6,304	959	9,434	16,699 †
1870	7,312	10,929	—	18,265 †

\* Peason Ridge was entirely within Natchitoches Parish until Sabine Parish was established.

† These totals are presented in the census, but are incorrect and should read 16,697 and 18,241.

<sup>1</sup> A complete list of the census reports referred to in researching this book is found in the *References* section under U.S. Bureau of the Census.

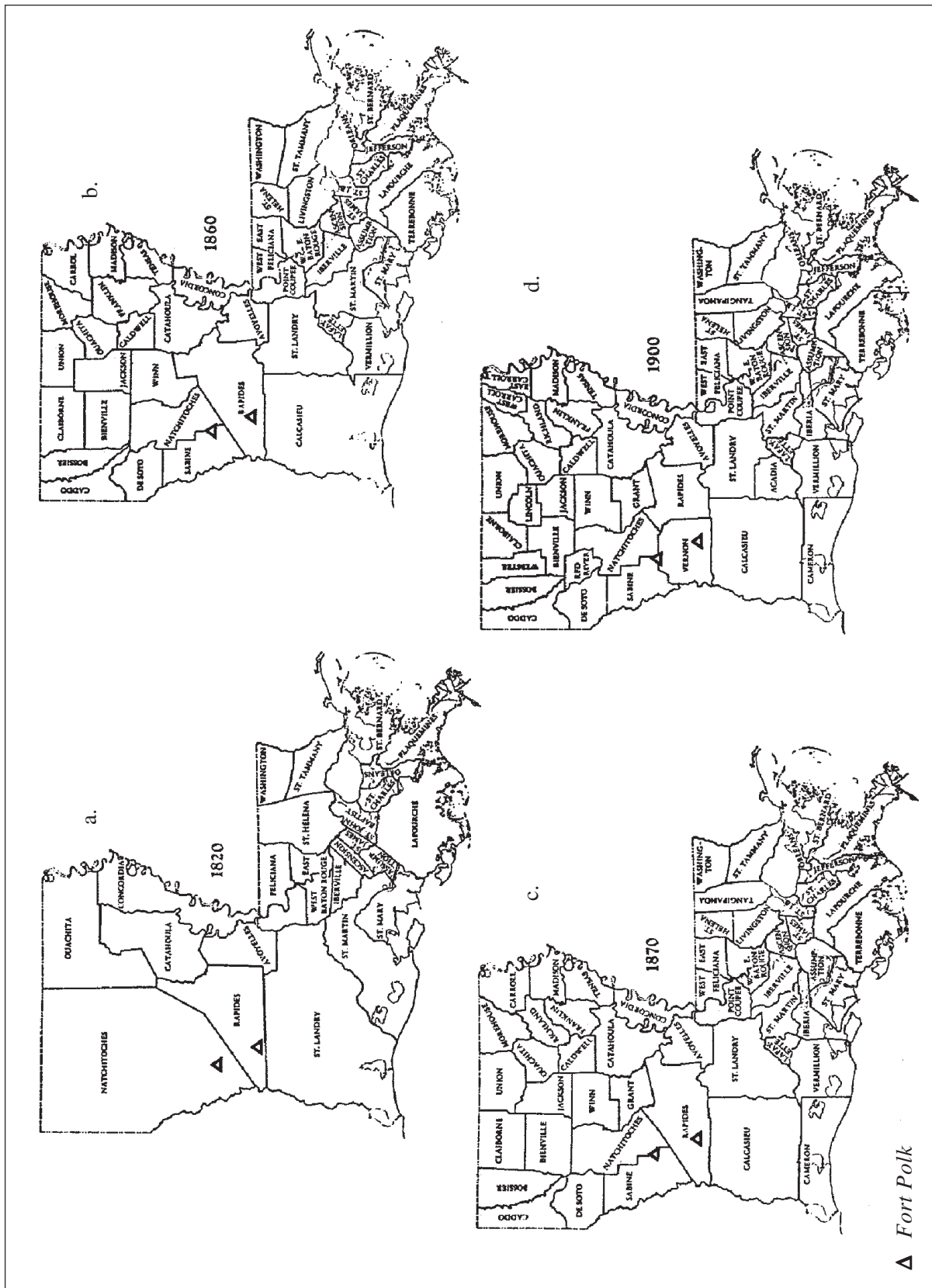


Figure 8 — Parish formation, 1820 to 1900 (adapted from Newton 1972).

Table 2 — Rapides Parish population, 1810–1870.\*

<i>Year</i>	<i>Whites</i>	<i>Freedmen</i>	<i>Slaves</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Total</i>
1810	996	123	1,081	0	2,200
1820	2,491	85	3,489	0	6,065
1830	2,133	113	5,329	0	7,575
1840	3,243	378	10,511	0	14,132
1850	5,037	184	11,340	0	16,561
1860	9,711	291	15,358	0	25,360
1870	7,742	10,267	0	6	18,015

\* The entire main fort was within Rapides Parish until around 1870, when Vernon Parish was formed.

Table 3 — Sabine Parish population, 1850–1870.

<i>Year</i>	<i>Whites</i>	<i>Freedmen</i>	<i>Slaves</i>	<i>Total</i>
1850	3,347	0	1,168	4,515
1860	4,115	0	1,713	5,828
1870	4,592	1,847	—	6,456*

\* The correct total is 6,439.

in as many dwellings in Rapides Parish in 1850. In Natchitoches, there were 1,432 families in as many dwellings, and in Sabine Parish only 636 families in 632 dwellings. Ten years later, there had been only moderate growth (again, parish borders were changing during this time), with 1,793 families in Rapides, 1,614 in Natchitoches, and 747 in Sabine. Considering that population and settlement were concentrated along the Red River, the western pinelands were indeed sparsely settled.

Just how scattered was settlement in the Vernon Parish region? As few as 2,500 or, more likely, as many as 3,000 people may have lived there by the time of the Civil War. One source puts the population at parish formation in 1871 at 2,500 (Loui-

siana Historical Records Survey n.d.a).<sup>2</sup> However this figure is probably too low for 1871 and even 1860. The first Vernon Parish census in 1880 indicates a population of 5,160, or 3.8 people per square mile. This was taken twenty years after the end of the antebellum period (see Chapter 4) and nine years after the parish's establishment. The White population of Sabine Parish in 1860 was only 4,115, and Sabine only encompassed about half of modern Vernon Parish. Although Sabine Parish, with its better plantation land, had a longer, denser settlement history beginning with the Spanish, a careful look at the 1870 census figures for Rapides and Sabine Parishes supports an estimate for the Vernon Parish region of between 3,000 to 4,000 at that time. In this census, Rapides Parish population was broken out into "minor divisions." Among these were the Anacoca [sic], Calcasieu, and West divisions<sup>3</sup> with 1,640, 1,022, and 776 people respectively. These figures added to the population of Sabine Parish's Ward 1 in south Sabine gives a total of 4,264 people, or 3.1 people per square mile,<sup>4</sup> in 1870 within an area roughly covering the borders of modern Vernon Parish.

<sup>2</sup> The anonymous author of this WPA source probably came up with this round figure from the minimum number of electors needed in a region in order to form a parish as prescribed by the state constitution. But this does not mean that there were only 2,500 people in the parish. For instance, electors only included white males over twenty-one.

<sup>3</sup> Although the exact location of these minor divisions is not known, the three divisions used in this analysis have names associated with the Vernon Parish region. Further, they all had minor Black populations, which strongly implies that they were located in western Rapides away from the plantation lands. The only other division with a small Black population was Pineville, which was obviously the region around the town of Pineville in another upland pineland barren of fertile plantation soils.

<sup>4</sup> Working back from this estimate gives a similar figure. There are 1,360 square miles in modern Vernon Parish (Vernon Parish Planning Board 1949:12), and multiplying this by 3.1 would equal 4,216 people.

If most of the population was concentrated along the Anacoco and Calcasieu Rivers' fertile landscape, then how many of those 4,000 plus people were living within Fort Polk's borders? Certainly less than 700 in 1860. Fort Polk, including the Main Fort and Peason Ridge, is approximately 218.5 square miles. This figure multiplied by 3.1 people per square mile comes to around 677 people.<sup>5</sup> This estimate is supported by the population figures for West, a minor division (or ward) of Rapides Parish that included what is now Fort Polk. By 1870, West still had a sparse population of only 776 people.

Incidentally, examining gravestones of cemeteries in and around Fort Polk provides evidence (admittedly circumstantial) to support the notion that settlement within the installation boundaries was sparse prior to the Civil War. The death dates on the gravestones in twenty-one cemeteries<sup>6</sup> indicate that only twenty-two people were buried prior to 1872 (McManus 1978, 1979). The first dated death was that of Philemon Bryan in 1849. Seven people died during the four years of the Civil War. Not everyone who died was buried in a cemetery or still has a gravestone today, but this information does imply a thin regional settlement.

Population was neither spread throughout nor evenly dispersed across the installation's landscape. Farms were probably concentrated along Whiskey Chitto, Six Mile, and Ten Mile Creeks (Whittington 1935:70). Most of the families who lived on these farms are unknown, but Wise (1971:50) records that by 1830 the Ashworth, James, and Mericle families had settled in the area of modern Ward 5, which encompasses most of the Main Fort's east half and the parish's southeast corner (also see sections on Huddleston and Liberty Creek, this chapter).

Interestingly, J. W. Dorr mentioned that in 1860 there was a free African American settlement

called "Ten Mile" (in Pritchard 1938:1159). Well southeast of the Main Fort, it was a rare isolated settlement in the region at the time. In the Kisatchie region, the earliest settlers were found along Kisatchie Creek. Among those who might have settled within or near the boundaries of the Horse's Head Limited Use Area of Fort Polk were James Dowden (around 1818), Hugh Dowden, William H. Taylor, Abner Booty, and Peter Airhart (Kadlecek and Bullard 1994:34). The Beasleys, Clarks, and Grants were also in the area (Scoggins 1961:5).

By 1850, the Crager, Dillon, Fairchild, Garland, Hardcastle, Weeks, Sweat, Wise, and Cooley families were living in the Walnut Hill area just north of the Main Fort (Wise 1971:53). The area south and east of the fort was settled by the Martin, McCullough, House, Welsh, Roberts, Watson, Tice, Maddox, Bedgood, Weldon, Beeson, Deason, Johnson, and Nolan families (Cupit 1963:24). Wise (1971:50) adds that Jep Beesen (or Beeson?) was the first settler in this area and includes the Mathis, Jeter, and Morrison families on the list of earliest settlers. Meanwhile, in the 1830s, the Eddleman, Lovett, Knight, Word, McCranie, Cain, Sanders, and Roberts families settled just west of the Main Fort near what would soon be called Petersburg and later Huddleston (O'Halloran, March 27, 1952).

Other concentrations of antebellum settlers outside of Fort Polk included a group along Sandy Creek and another in the Hornbeck area of northwestern Vernon Parish. The Billy Langton family arrived at Sandy Creek as early as 1820 (Wise 1971:44). The Langtons were soon joined by the Carrs, Dixons, Koonces, Leaches, Newmans, Palmers, Prewitts, and Youngbloods (Wise 1971:44). The Burrs of Burr's Ferry settled along the Sabine in 1827. Between 1840 and 1859, the lower Anacoco became home to the Welbron, Eaves,

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<sup>5</sup> The installation's total acreage is around 139,838 (Cantley and Kern 1984:7), or 218.5 square miles. (One square mile equals 640 acres.)

<sup>6</sup> The cemeteries are the Burns, Castor, Davis, Franklin, Fort Polk No. 2, Fort Polk No. 7, Glass Window, Holly Springs, Holton, Hunt, Johnson, Smart, Watson (Fort Polk No. 3), Zion Hill (Fort Polk No. 5), Gravel Hill, Liberty, Mayo, McAllen, Mill Creek, Sermon, and Smith, all located near or within the installation.



McGree, Crett, Hennigan, Wingate, Pharrise, Mitchell, Cole, and Cain families (Wise 1971:46). Probably the earliest settlements in the parish were along the mid and upper Anacoco (see Chapter 2). One of the more prominent families there, the Franklins, arrived in 1834 (Wise 1971:44) or perhaps as early as 1828 (O’Halloran, January 10, 1952). The Meryers family came the next year, soon followed by the Conerly, Martin, West, Ball, and Toomb families (Wise 1971:44). In the parish’s northeast corner near Simpson, the Blackwell, Jackson, Monk, Jowers, McDrew, Murdock, McMillian, Parker, and White families were established by 1860 (Wise 1971:51), along with the Mims, Haymons, and Nesmiths (Lewis 1956:4).

#### AGRICULTURE AND INDUSTRY

Subsistence farming was the principal occupation of the Vernon Parish settlers. These self-sufficient antebellum pioneers (Figure 9) descended from a long-established line of stockman-farmers and hunter-squatters. Thad Sitton described the resolute pioneers of east Texas, who were culturally identical to the settlers across the river in Vernon Parish:

*Stockman-farmers from the southern Piney Woods found the pine uplands and hardwood bottoms of southeastern Texas more to their liking than did the cotton planters. Here was a familiar environment, where their subsistence tricks of the trade would work. They settled on hammocks and bluffs along the river valley, ranging their stock in the bottoms and raising corn and garden crops on higher soils of the uplands. For the stockman-farmer, the general pattern was a long-range migration to southeastern Texas, the establishment of a homeplace, then more*



Figure 9 — Self-sufficient, hardy antebellum homesteaders (possibly the Floyds) (courtesy Museum of West Louisiana).

*often than not one or more short-range moves as the settler tried to find the best of all possible locations in the new land. A family’s log cabin and partially cleared fields could always be sold to a newcomer.<sup>7</sup> (Sitton 1995:47–48)*

The majority of those settling in the Vernon Parish region during the antebellum period were from the lower southern tier of states—eastern

<sup>7</sup> Compare this scholarly observation to the straightforward wisdom of Jack Hadnot in the opening quote of this chapter.



Louisiana, Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, and South Carolina. In fact, most were from Louisiana. As early as 1850, 65.5 percent of the White population of Rapides Parish and 63.8 percent of the White population of Natchitoches Parish were native-born Louisianians (Hackett 1973:333). In Sabine Parish, 42 percent of the White population were born in Louisiana. While census information does not disclose the nativity of inhabitants in the present-day Main Fort area during the antebellum period, they are assumed to have been overwhelmingly Louisiana-born. The 1870 census also indicates that all 776 people living in the Rapides Parish division named West were born in the United States, and that 76 percent of them were born in Louisiana. For all intents and purposes, white Anglo-Americans were the only ethnic group visible on this landscape. The 1870 population census indicates that only thirteen African Americans were living in West, 153 in the Calcasieu division, and 134 in the Anacoco division. In all three divisions there were only eighteen foreign-born residents.

These hunter-stockman-farmers came early and came first to the pinelands, perhaps because the environment seemed familiar to them. They and their ancestors had migrated across the South, settling for one or two generations, then moving on through an endless upland of pine and hardwood forests. By the time they reached western Louisiana, they were well versed in Native American and backwoods life.<sup>8</sup> Many had moved into Louisiana only a few years previous and would later move on to east Texas (Lathrop 1949).

Settlement began by moving onto land near a water source already cleared of pines by the Native Americans (called “openings”) and planting crops while building a cabin at the clearing’s edge (Sitton 1995:49). Occasionally, settlers came upon areas where tornadoes had ripped up trees, providing them with ready-made agricultural fields (O’Halloran, April 27, 1952). As in the rest of the rural South, corn was the primary crop, with beans,

squash, and gourds grown in and around the cornfields (Sitton 1995:62). Field crops were supplemented with sweet potatoes, okra, and turnips grown in home gardens. Cane sugar, used to make syrup, was an important caloric source for the pinelands subsistence farmer. Cotton, on the other hand, was rarely grown in great quantities; the early settlers had no market for it. But even later, cotton was too labor intensive and risky. A ruined corn crop could be replanted, or the hogs and pigs turned loose on it and fattened for market. A ruined cotton crop was “a total loss” and a disaster for the subsistence farmer (Sitton 1995:69). Enough cotton was grown to make clothing and to sell a few bales, if there was a place to take it for ginning. But the big cotton fields were found only along the Red River.

Gardens and fields were fenced against deer and domestic animals. Cattle and hogs ranged free in the woods to be herded when necessary by the faithful cur dog (Sandel 1982:25). Hogs found abundant mast in the forests, and cattle and sheep grazed on the prairies or woodland grasses. The first Anglo-American settlers often found wild horses and cattle in the woods, lost by the Spanish or other settlers pushing west. These were fair game for the pioneer and part of the forest’s bounty. Deer, rabbit, squirrel, and fish were plentiful, providing additional protein for the homesteader’s table.

Again, because Vernon Parish was not formed until 1871 and because Rapides Parish supported two different agricultural communities (a river plantation community and a backwoods subsistence farming community), census data are not specific enough to fully understand agricultural practices and production in the pinelands. However, some sense of the landscape can be gleaned from the following census statistics, which indicate that western Louisiana’s upland farms were small and by necessity self-sufficient. In 1850, plantation-rich Rapides Parish had only 187 farms, while plantation-poor Sabine Parish had as many

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<sup>8</sup> This large, diverse population of white Anglo-American pioneers has been loosely classed as people of the Upland South, backcountry South, or sometimes the plain folk by historians, cultural geographers, and archaeologists. The cultural traits of Vernon Parish people will be more thoroughly discussed in the final chapter.

as 522, and Natchitoches Parish had 842. Along the Red River, Natchitoches farms and plantations accounted for 70,784 improved acres. In Rapides, farms and plantations had 69,653 improved acres. The Sabine pinelands had only 18,254 improved acres. Further, the Rapides property was valued at \$3.2 million, in contrast to \$6 million in Natchitoches and only \$262,000 in Sabine. By 1860, these figures rose to 105,839 improved acres, valued at \$9 million, in Rapides; 80,616 improved acres, valued at \$5 million, in Natchitoches; and 29,350 improved acres, valued at \$414,000 in Sabine.

Crop production statistics also reflect differences between the pineland and river parishes. Tables 4 and 5 list production of selected crops in the three parishes in 1850 and 1860. As might be expected, corn, sweet potatoes, peas, and beans were the staple crops. (Rye and oats appear to have gone out of favor by 1860). Census data indicate that in 1850, sugar cane was the major crop along the Red River, with cotton ranking a poor second. Cotton production increased right before the war, but in Rapides Parish along the river, cane was still important. Surprisingly, rice was an important crop in the Sabine region in the 1850s. But by 1860, rice production dropped dramatically in all three parishes. Drought in 1860 caused many creeks in the pine woods to dry up completely, and this probably affected production (O'Halloran,

January 10, 1952; Whittington 1935:127). Another important crop not shown in the tables was tobacco. In 1850, Natchitoches and Sabine Parishes produced 4,467 and 1,170 pounds respectively. In 1860, neither Natchitoches or Rapides produced tobacco, but Sabine produced 4,000 pounds. However, all the backwoods farmers of the Vernon-Sabine region were most likely producing some tobacco for home and neighborhood consumption. Wool was another important product. Natchitoches, Rapides and Sabine produced 5,382, 14,190, and 1,594 pounds, respectively, in 1850. By 1860, these figures rose to 7,867, 21,344, and 1,826 pounds, respectively.

Table 6 lists the major animal production for 1850, Table 7 for 1860. These figures reflect the importance of hogs to the backcountry farmer. In 1850, swine production in Sabine was roughly equal to that in Natchitoches—a larger parish with more people. These figures fell in the 1860s, but remained comparable, while swine production in Rapides increased significantly. Although horse production in 1860 fell in all three parishes, the drop was especially pronounced in Natchitoches.

Raw materials grown or gathered from the forests were being processed in the home. These cottage industries provided clothing and farming equipment that could not be easily obtained otherwise. Self-sufficiency was necessary for survival.

Table 4 — Selected major crop production, 1850.

<i>Parish</i>	<i>Corn</i> (bushels)	<i>Cotton</i> (bales)	<i>Rye/Oats</i> (bushels)	<i>Molasses</i> (gallons)	<i>Sweet Potatoes</i> (bushels)	<i>Peas/Beans</i> (bushels)	<i>Rice</i> (pounds)
Natchitoches	394,011	15,574	3,225	1,650	40,793	11,565	14,375
Rapides	357,480	4,222	5,730	438,170	37,035	3,660	4,500
Sabine	89,514	1,107	3,460	531	46,128	11,670	21,130

Table 5 — Selected major crop production, 1860.

<i>Parish</i>	<i>Corn</i> (bushels)	<i>Cotton</i> (bales)	<i>Rye/Oats</i> (bushels)	<i>Molasses</i> (gallons)	<i>Sweet Potatoes</i> (bushels)	<i>Peas/Beans</i> (bushels)	<i>Rice</i> (pounds)
Natchitoches	459,978	36,887	25,075	—	13,140	735	—
Rapides	820,378	49,168	1,137	854,585	98,880	12,825	45
Sabine	174,755	5,062	1,179	—	38,442	11,814	1,620

Although not isolated by mountains like some Upland South antebellum folk, Vernon Parish pioneers were confined in the pinelands because of poor roads and often impassable streams. The closest source of supplies was Alexandria. The round trip to Alexandria took three weeks, and east Texas pioneers made the trek only twice a year (Sitton 1995:63; Wright 1942:2). Starting the trip to Alexandria from Vernon Parish may have cut down the travel time by a week. Once in Alexandria, settlers could purchase sugar, flour, salt, coffee, whiskey, ammunition, and perhaps a plow or some other farming implement, but not much more. Everything else was made, traded, or grown locally.

Self-sufficiency meant survival for the parish's earliest residents and this extended into all aspects of their lives. But one critical industry that all pioneers had to rely on was the local mill. Mills were not only essential for grinding, they also provided a meeting place to exchange news and stories. Mills became centers of community interaction. Early mills in Vernon Parish are difficult to locate and date exactly. One would think there would be one or two on every usable stream in the region. Census data, however, do not reflect this. According to the 1840 census, Natchitoches Parish had only ten gristmills and twelve sawmills, while Rapides had no gristmills and only nine sawmills. These numbers seem low considering the importance of mills to pioneers. The dichotomy may lie

in what census takers considered to be a mill. Perhaps the mills in the Vernon Parish area were dependent on annual flooding or were mule driven, operating only seasonally. This could affect the numbers if census takers were counting only year-round establishments. Also, rural antebellum mills were often multifunctional, easily converted from sawing to grinding. The antebellum mills of Vernon Parish were likely small affairs in which an undershot wheel provided power to a set of belts that could turn either a grindstone or a saw depending on need.

Early mills in the Vernon region, dating to before 1871, included those of Will and Philip Koonce along Sandy Creek in the parish's northwestern part, George Stephens on Mill Creek, and Nathaniel S. Williams on Bayou Zourie (Williams 1976:2). Alec Airhart and Jacob Kile built another on Kisatchie Bayou around 1859 (Scoggins 1961:7). One local historian also included among "early mills" (assumed to date prior to 1871 based on the source's context) Kirk's Mill on Anacoco Creek, where modern state highway 171 crosses the creek; the Conerly Brothers Mill on the Anacoco's west fork; another on Sandy Creek built by the Langtons; the Leach Mill four miles north of Hornbeck; and Billy Golemon's Mill near Leander (Anonymous n.d.a). (The sources used in listing these mills here are questionable. The mills may not all date to this period; some may actually postdate the Civil War.)

Within or near the Main Fort, Clemmie Haymon built a mill on Bird's Creek, as did Jim McMacallan on the Whiskey Chitto "a few miles north of Pitkin" (Foster 1976; Williams 1976:2). McMacallan's mill processed three products—corn, cotton, and wood. The anonymous writer (n.d.a.) also lists in this area another Golemon mill on Little Six Mile about "7 miles NE of Fullerton," and Weeks Mill "five miles SE of Walnut

Table 6 — Selected major animal production, 1850.

<i>Parish</i>	<i>Horses</i>	<i>Neat Cattle</i>	<i>Sheep</i>	<i>Swine</i>
Natchitoches	4,456	15,928	4,094	33,103
Rapides	4,068	13,182	6,548*	18,739
Sabine	1,287	9,475	1,043	30,372

\* The correct count is 6,439.

Table 7 — Selected major animal production, 1860.

<i>Parish</i>	<i>Horses</i>	<i>Asses</i>	<i>Milch Cows</i>	<i>Oxen</i>	<i>Other Cattle</i>	<i>Sheep</i>	<i>Swine</i>
Natchitoches	2,837	2,789	5,226	2,594	11,045	7,745	15,956
Rapides	3,934	4,610	7,526	3,456	22,251	11,980	44,745
Sabine	1,269	427	2,935	1,236	7,593	1,662	17,047

Hill.” Finally, three miles south of the community of Providence on Bundick Creek, John Davis is said to have built a gristmill prior to the Civil War (Pool 1992:6).

Antebellum census data is also vague about other types of commercial development in west-central Louisiana. In 1840, Natchitoches Parish is noted as having only forty-nine retail stores, and Rapides Parish only twenty-five. Only sixty people were working in “commerce” in Natchitoches and 181 in manufacturing. In Rapides Parish at this same time, twenty-two people were employed in commerce and 193 in manufacturing. Census categories included bootmakers, brick makers, carpenters, wagon and carriage makers, saddle makers, coopers, blacksmiths, tanners, and other trades. It is important to note that most of these craftsmen would have had their establishments in the more populous Red River towns. In 1860, just prior to the Civil War, Sabine Parish had only five blacksmiths, one bootmaker, one leather shop, and one wagon establishment. Interestingly, at this time, Natchitoches had thirty-four people engaged in engineering and Rapides, thirty-six. Overall, the census data points to a pioneer community where individuals were heavily reliant on themselves and their immediate neighbors for most needs.

### EARLY ROADS AND TRAILS

The first hunters, adventurers, and pioneers traveling through the region used convenient routes created first by animals and Native Americans. As traffic increased and wagons left deep ruts, some roads became wider and better marked. Other less used roads became overgrown with vegetation.

Roads and trails in the Vernon Parish region developed much slower because colonial and early nineteenth-century settlement in north Louisiana concentrated along the Red River and to the north along the Camino Real.<sup>9</sup> Or, as Frederick Law Olmstead on his way to Texas in 1853 stated, “The roads leading into the state [Texas] through Louisiana, south of Natchitoches, are scarcely used, except by residents along them and herdsmen bringing cattle to the New Orleans market. The ferries across the numerous rivers and bayous are so costly and ill tended, the roads so wet and bad, and the distance from steam-conveyance to any vigorous part of the state so very great, that the current is entirely diverted from this region” (Olmstead 1978:43 [1857]).

Rediscovering the early road system in Vernon Parish is, like most other aspects of the region’s history, extremely difficult. And, that which is determined cannot always be reliably substantiated. Because the region was so poorly understood, except by the locals, mapmakers had little information for drawing their maps. Thus, maps are only helpful at the macrolevel; they are poor representations of the actual topography and routes. The maps show only major routes, which were inaccurately illustrated. Small, less prominent trails were rarely shown. But then, those using the maps were often more interested in getting through Vernon Parish than settling in it. Still, using a combination of maps and other historical data, some concept of the early road system can be reconstructed.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the Camino Real, which crossed east to west from Natchitoches to Nacogdoches and beyond, was the primary route

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<sup>9</sup> Besides the fact that the barren Vernon Parish pinelands were not the most attractive lands for many of the earliest settlers, the region was often bypassed because it was removed from the natural flow of human migration. The earliest explorers and settlers would have traveled along paths of least resistance, thus following streams and rivers and taking the high, clear ground. In looking at the macrogeography of western Louisiana and Texas, it is easy to see that the earliest peoples would have pushed west up the Red River and turned away from the river only when forced to do so by nature’s obstacles. The first roadblock, in this case, was the rapids at Alexandria; the great raft was the second. Thus, there was a portage at the rapids early in Louisiana’s history. Explorers and settlers might have pushed west from there across the Vernon Parish region into Texas (as some did), if not for a second factor—the flow of traffic from the west. In looking at Texas geography, the Spanish pushing east from Mexico would have naturally followed, as did the buffalo, the trail leading to the east closest to a water route connection (the Red River). Going east out of Texas, travelers reach the Red River near Natchitoches, just below the raft. Moving west from the rapids, they would turn north along smaller streams like Bayou Robert, eventually reaching the well-established Camino Real, which came to be the great migration route into Texas. Meanwhile, the Sabine River, clogged near its mouth, unreliable, and running north-south rather than east-west, never played a major part in the migration.



into Texas since the late seventeenth century. However, during the eighteenth century other land routes developed across Louisiana to and from the largest settlements, Natchez, Opelousas, and Alexandria. Darby's map, dated 1816 (Figure 10), shows these and several other routes. It is important to note that on such early maps the marked routes do not depict single trails, but rather a concentration of several crisscrossing trails, which were used as local conditions permitted.

From Opelousas, one could get to Texas via the Spanish Trace, which cut straight west across the barren prairie (Sugar 1927). But of special interest is the road that led from Opelousas north to Alexandria and Natchitoches. This road would continue to serve as a main route to the Camino Real throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. During the antebellum period and the Civil War, the "road to Natchitoches," also called the "Opelousas Road," would be well traveled by pioneers, filibusters, soldiers, and bandits.

By the nineteenth century at least one major trail led out of Alexandria, crossing the north-south road to Natchitoches, winding generally west into the pine barrens and beyond to Texas. This road and the road to Natchitoches intersected near Hineston and Paul's. During the Neutral Ground days, these two small hamlets were the bravehearted travelers' "last stop" before entering "no man's land." Beyond Hineston, the trails west through the Vernon Parish region became confusing for both the traveler and the mapmaker. Antebellum and Civil War period maps illustrate the confusion.

Generally, it appears that there were two main routes through the Vernon Parish region, one crossing the Sabine at Bevil's Ferry (Figure 11) and the other crossing at Burr's Ferry (Figure 12). Of the two, the route leading to Burr's Ferry is of greatest interest, as most maps indicate that it probably crossed just above or through the northern part of Fort Polk's Main Fort. An 1863 map by Johnson and Ward (not illustrated) contradicts this, showing the road passing south of the Main Fort on its way to Hickman's Ferry. This map is most assuredly inaccurate, but the road from Hineston to Burr's Ferry did indeed branch off to Hickman's

Ferry, perhaps explaining Johnson and Ward's mistake. The 1842 map indicates that this branch splits within Fort Polk (Figure 11). Colton's 1864 map (Figure 12) shows no branches to Hickman's Ferry, but his later 1876 map (Figure 13) indicates two splits, one within the Main Fort, which eventually leads to Hickman's Ferry after meandering south to Davis's Mill (now in Beauregard Parish), the other between Huddleston and Burr's Ferry. It would appear that Colton's 1876 map and his 1891 revision were the most accurate road maps during the Civil War and postwar periods (Post in Lockett 1969:v [1874]).

In 1860, an editor with the *New Orleans Crescent* traveled the byways of Louisiana providing an invaluable snapshot of the state at that time. His description of the stage road from Alexandria to Texas provides the most convincing evidence that the road to Burr's Ferry passed through or just north of the Main Fort.

*Following the stage road to Texas, it brings you first to Lucky Hit post office, twenty-eight miles from Alexandria; then to Spring Creek, thirty-five miles, where N. Paul has a store; then to Hineston, forty-two miles, where a large store is kept by Mr. Hosea; then to Liberty Creek, sixty-five miles, where there is a store; and then to Huddleston, seventy-five miles, where are several mercantile establishments, those of Hatch, Robinson & Co., J. P. Ettleman & Co. being among them. (Pritchard 1938:1159–1160)*

Huddleston, (Figure 13) one of Vernon Parish's earliest settlements (see description later in this chapter) was located just outside the main gate of Fort Polk. Thus, the route from Hineston to Huddleston would almost have had to cross through or very near the fort's northern corner. Dorr mentions another post office called Liberty Creek between Hineston and Huddleston. Today Liberty Creek is a small stream found in the Main Fort's northwest corner. Assuming that the post office of Liberty Creek (probably a little hamlet) was near or on modern Liberty Creek, the Burr's Ferry road could have passed a little north of the





Figure 10 — Section of William Darby's 1816 map showing routes (dashed lines) used by early travelers (Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge).



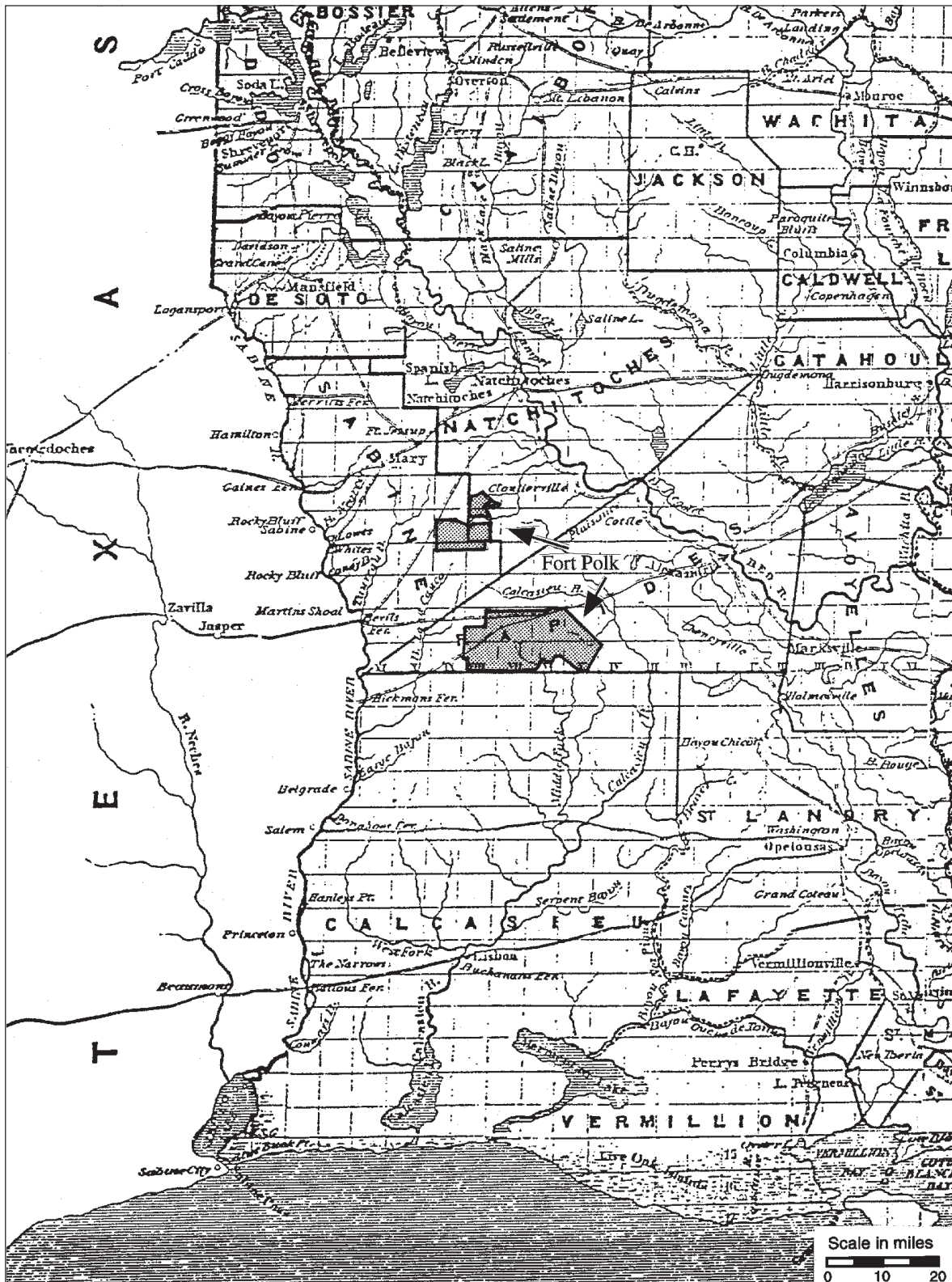


Figure 11 — Ports on the Sabine, from Sidney Morse and Samuel Breeze's 1842 map (Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge).





Figure 12 — Segment of J. H. Colton's 1864 map of Louisiana showing several hamlets and landmarks.



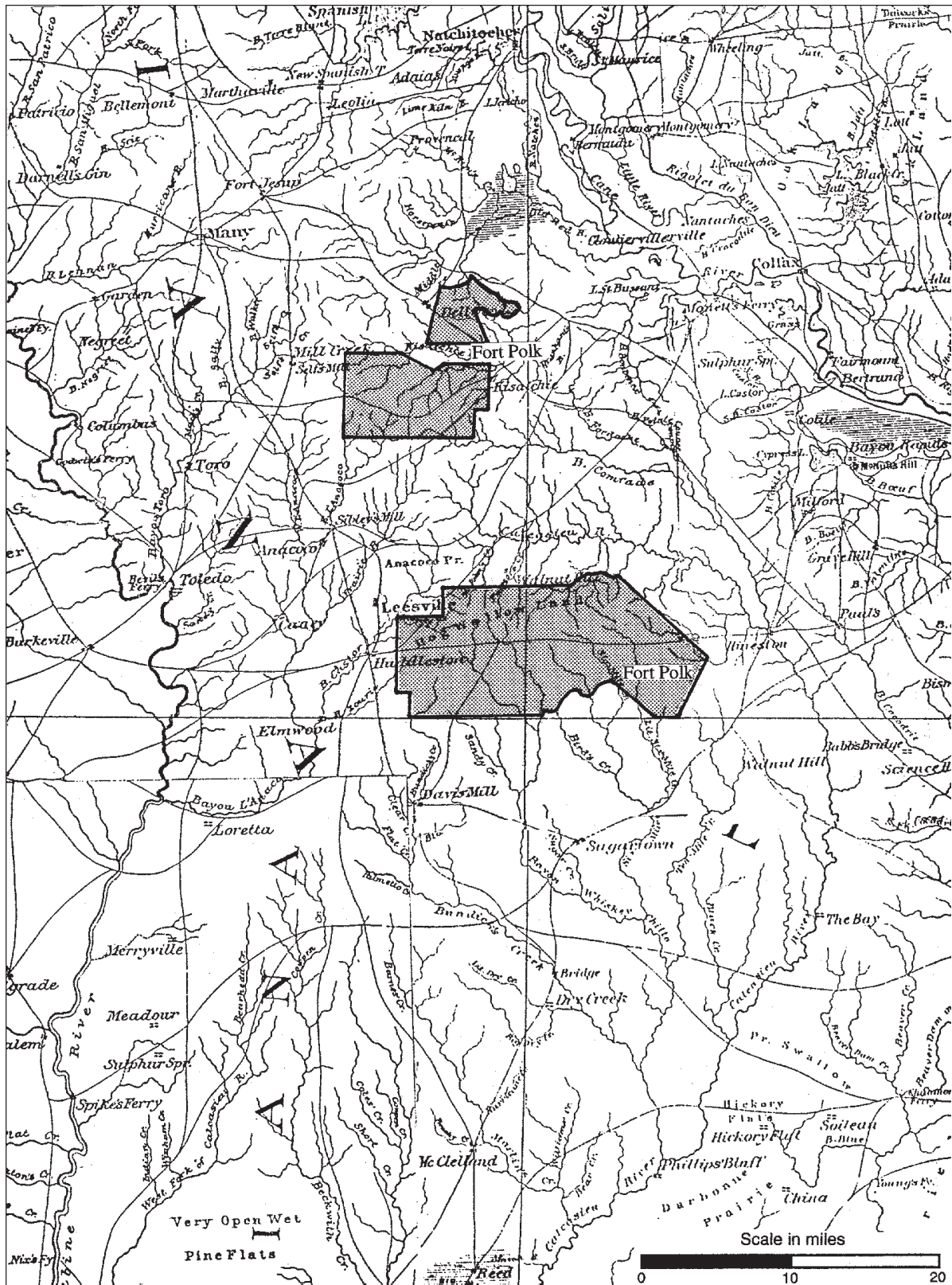


Figure 13 — Segment of Colton's 1876 map of Louisiana and Texas (Davis et al. 1895, plate CLV).

Main Fort boundary line before turning sharply south to Huddleston. A portion of state highway 121 out of Hineston may follow this old road.

The road to Bevil's Ferry, located in the northwest corner of modern Vernon Parish and the southwest corner of Sabine Parish, is even more problematic. Again, Colton's 1876 (Figure 13) map probably provides the best indication as to where this road traversed the pinelands. It indicates that one could get to Bevil's Ferry from two roads that came off the road to Natchitoches. One of these roads passed through the Peason Ridge region.

As noted, the 1876 Colton map seems to provide the most accurate picture of the road system in the mid-nineteenth century. Focusing on this map, one gets a feel for the complex system of roads and trails that crisscrossed the region at that time. There appears to be only one major road traversing the land from north to south. This road ran from Many southeast through Huddleston to Davis Mill and then east, eventually to Opelousas. Its general route was the precursor of modern U.S. Highway 171.

Another interesting road on the 1876 map heads south from Hineston, passing southeast of Fort Polk and eventually reaching Sugartown in Calcasieu (now Beauregard) Parish. This may be the same route indicated in Carey's 1814 map (see Figure 7), which seems to dead-end in the heart of the Neutral Ground south of Fort Polk. Carey obviously had no idea exactly where this road went except towards the Sabine River. However, another map (Figure 14), one of a series of maps captured from the Confederates by the Union army, shows this trail heading out of Hineston in the same location as on Carey's and Colton's maps (see Figures 7 and 13). Today state route 463, which provides a southeastern border for the Main Fort, closely follows this old trail.

While the captured Confederate maps provide outstanding details about the Alexandria, Many, and Natchitoches area, they are exceedingly dis-

appointing for the study of the Fort Polk Main Fort region (Parish Maps of Louisiana n.d.). While Hineston is indicated on the Figure 14 map, the Burr's Ferry road is not. According to this map, the road ends at Hineston. Yet, it is known that the road existed then, as did Huddleston and Liberty Creek, because supplies and men were placed along this road (see *The Civil War*, this chapter). Why these landmarks are not depicted on the map is unclear.<sup>10</sup> Though the map does not illustrate the Hineston to Burr's Ferry road running through Fort Polk, it does depict a dash of a road from the Carroll Jones Plantation (on the Natchitoches-Opelousas Road) to Burr's Ferry (Figure 15). This road may be the same one shown on a Confederate map that originates at Monette's Ferry, crosses the Natchitoches-Opelousas Road, Comrade Creek, and the Calcasieu, and ends at Huddleston. Perhaps, the mapmaker thought Huddleston was further west. Today, state route 8 follows this same general route.

Despite mapping confusion, the trail and road system in and around Fort Polk's Main Fort was probably more like that illustrated in the Confederate maps of the region. In Figure 15, for example, the Carroll Jones Plantation is shown with the Opelousas (Natchitoches) Road, the Alexandria Road, and the roads to Burr's Ferry and Sabinetown all converging. The Carroll Jones Plantation would become a strategic location in the Red River campaign (see *The Civil War*, this chapter).

In 1820, the parish governments attempted to maintain some of the more heavily traveled routes by assigning road managers from among the citizens living along the roads (Whittington 1935:70). However, these paths during the antebellum period were nothing more than wagon-rutted mud trails cutting through the pinewoods. Even the Camino Real was described in the 1830s as "some places running through swamps and muddy; occasionally, a bridge over the most miry streams; but generally in a state of Nature" (Parker 1973:115

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<sup>10</sup> Perhaps it is because of the maneuvers of the two armies during the Red River Campaign. Simply put, although the Confederates planned to use the Burr's Ferry road as a route of concentration at Alexandria, they were forced north when the Federals pushed into the town. The Vernon Parish region was bypassed by both armies. This sounds reasonable, yet, a careful examination of the area does show some interesting details, such as some short trails branching off from the Calcasieu River.



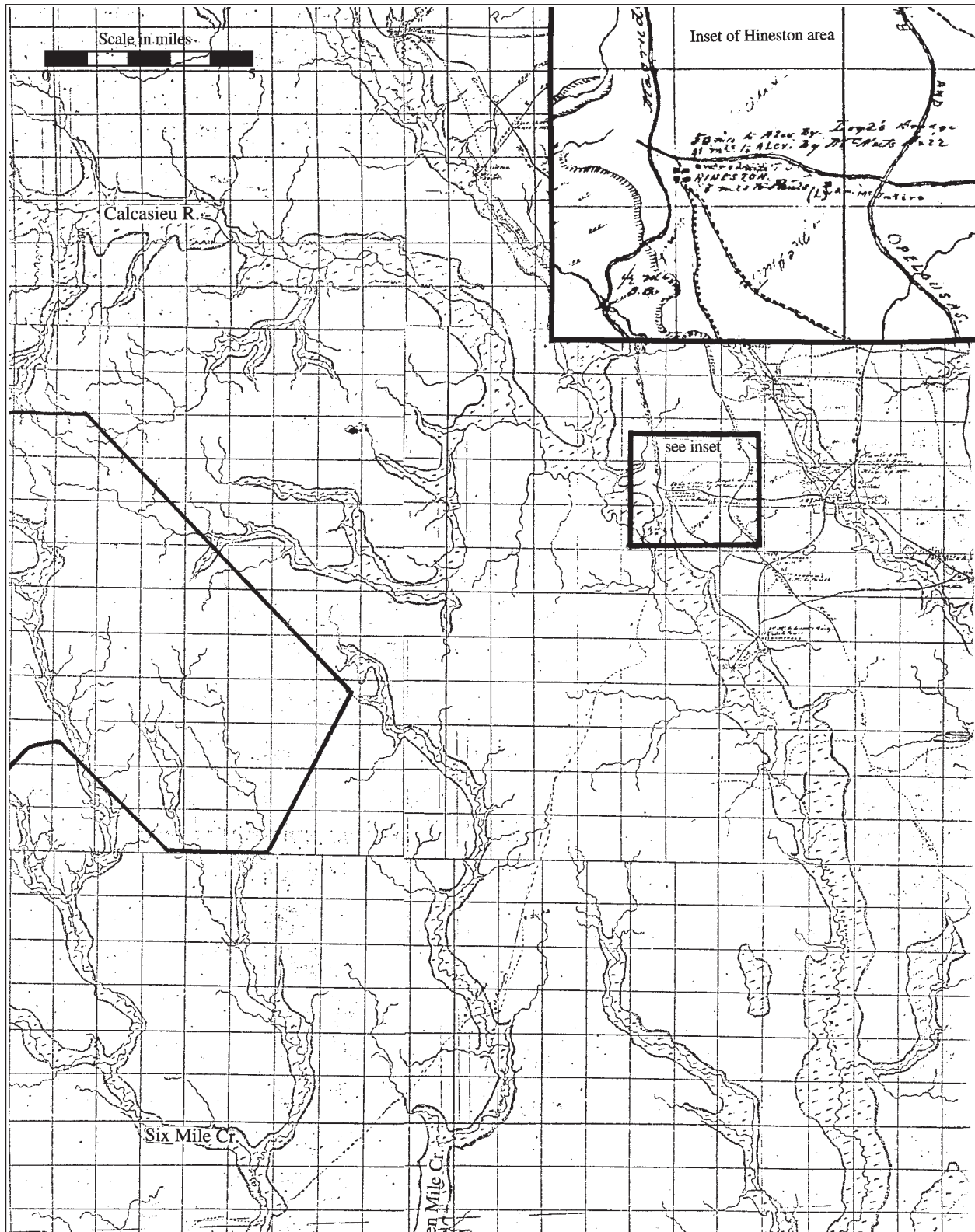


Figure 14 — Portion of western Louisiana from “Parish Maps Captured from the Confederates” (National Archives, on file Cammie G. Henry Research Center, Watson Memorial Library, Northwestern State University of Louisiana).

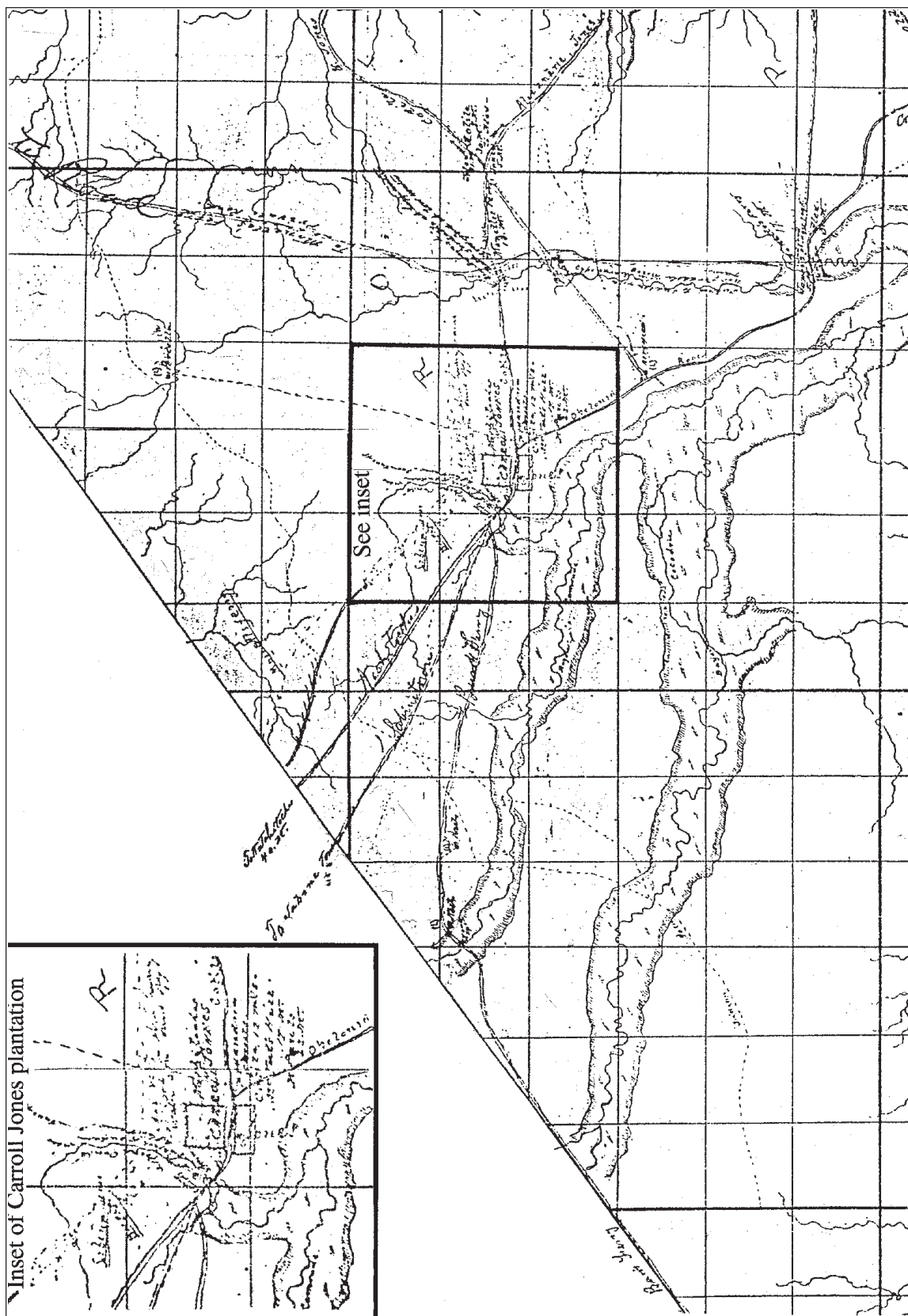


Figure 15 — Close-up from “Parish Maps Captured from the Confederates” (National Archives, on file Cammie G. Henry Research Center, Watson Memorial Library, Northwestern State University of Louisiana).

[1835]). Olmstead added that “the road was hardly a road. It was only a way where people had passed along before. Each man had taken such a path as suited him, turning aside to avoid, on high ground, the sand, on low ground, the mud” (Olmstead 1978:55 [1857]). Streams would be crossed at the shallowest spots, and the road would wind around trees and areas of heavy brush.

Gustav Dresel was one of the few travelers to write about the region and its roads during the antebellum period. He chronicled his journey through western Rapides to Texas during the month of August 1839 (in Freund 1954:52–60). His entries indicated that he most assuredly passed through Vernon Parish and possibly the Main Fort area. Dresel was advised to bypass Alexandria, as yellow fever was raging through the town. Turning west outside of Alexandria, his party was joined by “a whole caravan” emigrating to Texas. Dresel tells of taking a new path and how the others fell behind. Somewhere between Alexandria and Bevil’s Ferry<sup>11</sup> on the Sabine River, the party met with “severe misfortune” when a grazing horse wandered into the camp. In trying to get at the salt supply, the horse pushed it into a little bayou. With no salt for their food, they continued on.

*Now and then, to be sure, we succeeded in killing some game, but we had to give our animals so much attention and we were so tired that we lost the desire for hunting. The hardships of such an expedition with such a heat are unbelievable. Frequently, one of the wagons would be stalled between the trees, and we had to force our way with the ax.*

In a colorful account, Dresel describes straying from the trail and spending a whole day crisscrossing the woods. On arriving at a blockhouse that evening, the amazed occupant cheerfully announced that the travelers were about an hour’s journey from where they left that morning.

Dresel described the soils in the region (quoted in Chapter 2), and wrote about getting caught in a

forest fire. He attributed his survival to the barren soils, which “did not yield any underbrush.” Dead tired, Dresel and his companions fell asleep and were awakened the next morning by their mare’s neighing. The other horses had disappeared, and the travelers found themselves in the “wilderness” with three wagons and one horse.

*We traversed the region [looking for their horses], now entering the forest and now leaving it, and always going by the moss on the trees in order to find the brook again. At length we heard a neighing that was called forth by the barking of my dog. We moved nearer and beheld a log cabin of considerable size. I feared treason or at least swindling, for it was clear that the horses had been seized. But we were informed otherwise by the scolding backwoods lady who received us with abuse and raging and who declared that one of the horses was insufficient pay for the damage the animals had caused....I proved to the woman that the invasion was a lie and offered her a dollar for the trouble of catching the horses. But with a shower of insolent phrases she insisted on ten. Thereupon an elderly man stepped out of the log cabin, assured me that the horses had really done damage but that he could not be as hard on strangers as his wife and that he would therefore be satisfied with four dollars, my last offer. We paid and rode away, glad to get off so cheaply. From a distance we still heard the old witch calling her husband a good-hearted fool. About noontime we rejoined our disconsolate comrade with our horses.*

*After crossing the Rubicon [Sabine River], when I stood again on Texas soil, I raised a loud “Hurrah for Texas!” in which my Irishmen, willy-nilly, had to join. As an echo, the ferryman thundered over from the Louisiana bank a “Damn your God-damned Texas! Go to hell with your lone star!” So jealous at that*

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<sup>11</sup> Once Dresel crossed the Sabine, the party made its way to Jasper. It is quite possible that Dresel crossed at Burr’s Ferry rather than Bevil’s Ferry (Dalehite 1963:4).

*time were the neighbors of the fertile virgin Republic.*

Dresel's trip was particularly rough that August. But the characters he met were probably quite typical of the highly self-sufficient and independent pioneers living in the region at the time.

After Texas was opened for settlement and development by Americans and Texicans, more and more of the Vernon Parish roads were becoming migration and commerce routes to the fertile lands west. A. A. Parker described the migrants along the Camino Real in the 1830s:

*We passed a number of covered wagons, generally with four horses, loaded with goods and families bound for Texas. They invariably lodge out doors over night. They carry their own provisions with them, and select some spot where there is plenty of wood and water, build up a fire, cook their meals, turn their horses or oxen loose to feed on the prairie, or in the woods, and camp down on the grass by the side of the fire. I saw some who had been thirty and forty and sixty days on the road; from Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, & c. and said they had not put up at a house for a single night. Some of them looked quite "wearied and worn;" and if they do indeed find rest at last it must be confessed, that "through great tribulation" they entered the promised land. (Parker 1973:117 [1835])*

This migration continued throughout the antebellum period with a peak period between 1850 and 1853 and a sharp rise just prior to the Civil War, which continued throughout the war (Lathrop 1949:64). Louisiana became a way station for many of these settlers, especially those from Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee, and Georgia, who moved into east Texas during the late antebellum period. In fact, Lathrop (1949:51) estimated that,

prior to 1860, half of the east Texas settlers came through Louisiana.

### ***The Beef Trail***

But not only were people migrating west, early east Texas settlers were moving large numbers of horses, swine, and especially cattle east along these same roads to markets in Louisiana.<sup>12</sup> One of the most used trails leading to Alexandria came to be known as the Beef Trail. Jordan (1981:72), Sitton (1995:67), and Wright (1942:49–50) place this road south of Vernon Parish. But it would make sense that the road from Burr's Ferry to Alexandria, or at least the portion of the road that branches to the south within Fort Polk's Main Fort, was a branch of this Beef Trail. Furthermore, most historians agree that the trail passed through Jasper and ended in Alexandria, so the Burr's Ferry road, if not the main route, must have also been used for cattle and hog drives from east Texas. John R. Bevil surveyed the Texas side of this road around 1823 (Webb 1952:1:138), so the Burr's Ferry road was in existence early in the east Texas cattle industry's development.

Along these trails were commercial stands where cowboys could rent pens for their stock and lodging for themselves. These were spaced about every ten miles all along the Beef Trail (Sitton 1995:67). J. W. Dorr described a group of cattlemen leaving Alexandria for Texas on the eve of the Civil War:

*The parish extends to the Sabine, and the drovers and emigrants to or from Texas generally follow the Huntsville stage line [Burr's Ferry] road across that river and through the country. These drovers are rancho-looking fellows, with their wide hats, rough attire, bearded faces, and belted armaments of long bowie knives and army revolvers. I saw a squad of them so accoutered ride into town the other day. These large revolvers, worn in holster, are*

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<sup>12</sup> And, on one occasion, the trails were clogged with a flood of eastward streaming refugees seeking escape from the Mexican army. This exodus was called the "Run-a-way Scrape" (Wright 1942:8). One east Texas pioneer living along the major migration route tells the tale that one night a continuous string of wagons heading for Louisiana passed by their cabin, the trail well lit by torches.



*secured at the belt above, and below by a strap passing around the thigh, on the left side. They looked savagely anti-Comanche and anti-Greaser—not to say particularly dirty and dusty. (in Pritchard 1938:1160)*

The Beef Trail was well worn by cowboys even into the late nineteenth century.

### *Nolan's Trace*

Philip Nolan (see Chapter 2) was an employee of and probably a coconspirator with General James Wilkinson (a controversial figure in the Burr Conspiracy and other affairs of the early nineteenth-century westward expansion). Nolan, legendary in west-central Louisiana, remains a mystery to historians today (Wilson and Jackson 1987). His mark on the pages of Vernon Parish history is defined by Nolan's Trace, the route he purportedly used to enter and leave Spanish Texas during his expeditions to obtain horses to sell in Louisiana.

In attempting to relocate the exact route of Nolan's Trace, it must be remembered that, between 1791 and 1801, Philip Nolan made only four trade expeditions into Spanish Texas (Chipman 1992:213). During the last expedition, he took a route far to the north of Vernon Parish (Wilson and Jackson 1987:48). Thus, whatever the route Nolan actually took into Texas, Nolan's Trace was indeed a trace although never as well-trodden as other famous traces west, such as the Natchez Trace or the San Antonio Trace (El Camino Real).

On the other hand, the facts are clear that Nolan visited Nacogdoches on his first three trips (Wilson and Jackson 1987:12–13, 26), and it is likely that he used a route through west-central Louisiana to get there. Nolan most likely followed the trail that passed east and north of Vernon Parish on his way to Nacogdoches, bypassing the pine-lands of Fort Polk. It is possible that Nolan realized his precarious position with Spanish authorities (he had obtained passports, but they were not recognized and he was arrested as a spy on his first trip), and used a less-traveled, more indirect route into and out of Texas during his second and third trips. Still, it is unlikely that Nolan crossed Fort Polk.

Ross Phares (1935) agrees with this assessment, stating that the route “lay between what is now Alexandria, La., and what at one time was Sabinetown on the Sabine River north of Vernon Parish.” This route would have crossed Fallen Springs, a favorite campground along the trace used by Nolan and other bandits (Belisle 1912:62). As Nolan organized his expeditions in New Orleans or Natchez, this makes sense. But other local historians disagree. A handwritten note by Jack Hadnot Jr. stated the following:

*At that time [1805] what was called the Nolan Trace was from Alexandria thru the present community of Seiper in Rapides Parish, thence to Spring Creek, thence thru Vernon Parish near what is now called Hicks Crossing on Calcasieu River thence thru what was called Burton's Station which was located where the present Glass Window Cemetery now stands as what was then called Walnut Hill. What is now called Walnut Hill is about one mile from the original Walnut Hill. From Burton's Tavern the trace thence went a little north of what is now called Slagle into the Northern part of present Leesville running past the home of the writer, thence dividing; one trail going thru Leesville at what is called Hell's Bay [?] thence on west thru the Caney Community past the “Lone Sassafras” a famous old land mark that was destroyed when the present Texas Road was built thence on to Burr Ferry. The other trail going northwest through what is called Hawthorne thence to Hadden's Ferry which was north of Burr Ferry about twelve miles. (Hadnot n.d.)*

Yet another historian depicts the trace as passing just north of Fort Polk through the Walnut Hill area along what is now state routes 121 and 8, then turning north and meeting the Camino Real in the Sabinetown region (Marler 1994:147). Erbon Wise places Nolan's Trace to the northwest of Leesville, along the “Texas Road” marked by a famous landmark called the “Lone Sassafras” (Wise 1971:45).

Adding to the debate, Virginia Miller believes that “Nolan never really established Nolan's



Trace” or “never actually established a definite trail” (quoted in Kadlecek and Bullard 1994:61), essentially taking the position argued by this author. But then, Miller states that Peter Ellis Bean, one of Nolan’s lieutenants, established Nolan’s Trace forty years later. According to this version, the trace “came near what is now Monette’s Ferry, the Kisatchie Forest Hills, in Natchitoches Parish, south of Fort Jesup, to Fallen Springs, in Sabine Parish, and across the Sabine at Old Sabinetown Ferry, then on to San Augustine” (Kadlecek and Bullard 1994:61). Miller places the route’s eastern section farther to the north than does any other historian, although the course through Fallen Springs remains consistent with other proposed routes.

Thus, Nolan’s route and Nolan’s Trace are subject to many interpretations. Indeed, Vernon Parish historians should recognize two Nolan’s Traces. One is the exact route that Philip Nolan took during three of his notorious expeditions into Texas.

This route will never be known completely, but the best evidence would place it passing north of Vernon Parish. The second trace is the route that was named after, or came to be called, Nolan’s Trace by the people of Vernon Parish. This traditional route, as defined by Jack Hadnot, is as legitimate a part of Vernon Parish history as the former.

#### HAMLETS

As people began moving into the Vernon Parish region after the Neutral Ground issue was settled, most built small, subsistence-level farms consisting of a log house and perhaps a shed along some high ground near a creek, such as the Whiskey Chitto or the Anacoco (Figure 16). Eventually, some of these farmsteads grew into clusters of buildings housing several families, often related. Along the better and more used trails, some of these homesteads soon expanded to include a store or mill, a ferry, or other small enterprises. These clusters of development within the pinelands eventu-



Figure 16 — The first settlers built homes of logs with stick and mud chimneys, like this extended dogtrot cabin (courtesy Museum of West Louisiana).

ally came to be identified with local prominent families or land features and were Vernon Parish's first hamlets and villages.

In an earlier section, *Population and Settlement*, antebellum population clusters were noted. In this section some insights into the origin of the more prominent antebellum hamlets are discussed. The distinction herein between settlement concentrations and hamlets is somewhat arbitrary. Generally, a concentration of buildings is considered a hamlet if there was evidence of nonfarm structures—a store/post office, mill, tavern, or ferry, for example—clustered within visible site of each other. A settlement, as previously described, was simply a series of farms within a few miles of each other—in other words, a rural community sharing a school or church.

### **Huddleston**

J. W. Dorr's antebellum description of the regional development in and around Fort Polk mentions two hamlets, both of which no longer exist (Pritchard 1938). The first, the little hamlet of Huddleston (Wise 1971:48), was probably Vernon Parish's first village. The site of Huddleston, originally called Petersburg, is just outside Fort Polk's main gate near St. Petersburg Church. John Cupit places the settlement's beginnings as early as the 1830s. It was first named for early settler Peter Eddleman (Frazar 1933:20; O'Halloran, 3/27/1952). According to Wise (1971:48), a mail route was established from Lake Charles to Petersburg in 1841. However, Huddleston was not a post office until January 1847 (Post Office Department 1973) when Issac Huddleston was appointed postmaster. The town first appears on an 1857 map (Figure 17).

Huddleston probably was the largest antebellum settlement in the Fort Polk region. Dorr wrote that by 1860 it had "several mercantile establishments, those of Hatch, Robinson & Co., J. P. Ettleman & Co. being among them" (Pritchard 1938:1159–1160). In 1859, Rapides Lodge No. 167 was established there with eleven charter members (Hadnot n.d.). A Nathaniel Sanders was

the postmaster from 1856 until 1866, when the position was discontinued (Post Office Department 1864:407–411, 1973).<sup>13</sup> During the Civil War, Huddleston became a supply depot for Confederate troops expected to pass through from Texas.

### **Liberty Creek**

The second hamlet mentioned by Dorr, Liberty Creek, may actually have been within Fort Polk. The exact location is not known, but it is assumed that it was near Liberty Creek, a small stream in the fort's northwest corner. Dorr states that the hamlet was sixty-five miles from Alexandria, or twenty-three miles west of Hinston and ten miles east of Huddleston (Pritchard 1938:1159–1160). This would place it near the present-day 8W-7W township line approximately along Liberty Creek. A post office was established there in October 1853, and the first postmaster was Willie Goynes (Post Office Department 1973). Dorr states there was a store at Liberty Creek in the 1850s, and this is probably where the post office was located. The post office was discontinued in 1866 and never reopened (Post Office Department 1973).

### **Walnut Hill**

Another hamlet serving the Fort Polk area was Walnut Hill, located just north of the Main Fort. Wise (1971:48) states that it was "settled before there was a parish" around 1810. But this seems too early for an actual hamlet, although one or two families might have already settled there. Dorr makes no mention of Walnut Hill in his list of post offices along the stage road to Texas in 1860, although local historians insist that it was in existence by then (Cupit 1963:29; Hadnot n.d.; Marler 1994:143), and they may have a point. The reason Dorr does not mention Walnut Hill is that, although the post office was first established there in February 1849, it was discontinued in 1851 (Post Office Department 1973). Interestingly, the Liberty Creek post office was established in 1853. The creek is only about four miles away from present-day Walnut Hill Church, and, according to Hadnot,

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<sup>13</sup> Records indicate that a number of post offices in the region were closed in 1866 or 1867, the result of the Civil War and the later reestablishment of the postal service in the South.

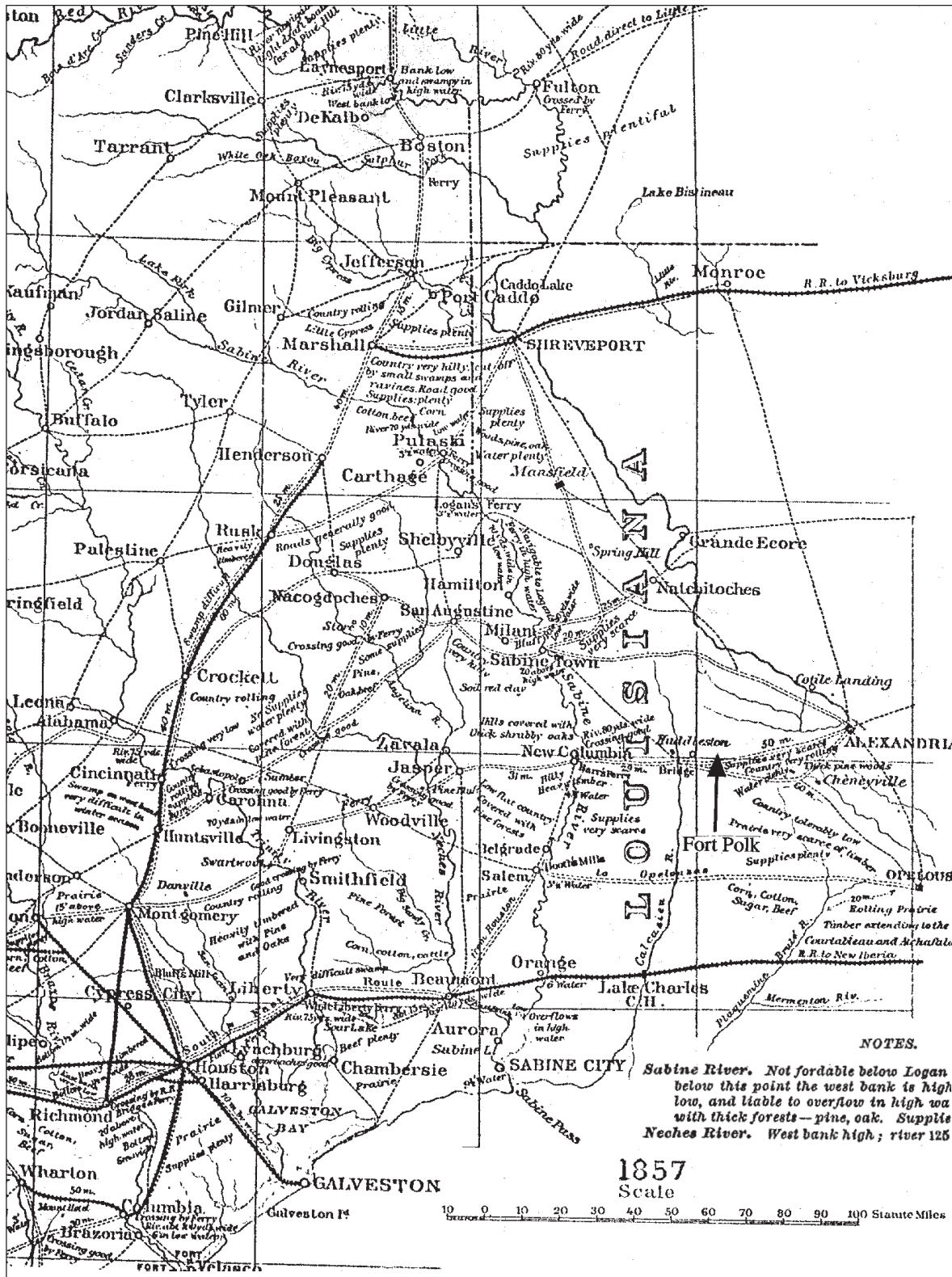


Figure 17 — Segment of 1857 map showing Huddleston in the lower right quadrant, directly above the tip of the arrow overlay (from Davis et al. 1895, plate LIV).



the original Walnut Hill was a mile from modern Walnut Hill. So, obviously Liberty Creek became the post office for Walnut Hill residents from 1853 until 1866. The Walnut Hill post office was reestablished in 1873.

The earliest settlers in the area were the Groves and Dail families (Wise 1971:53). Walnut Hill had an inn and a store (Cupit 1963:29) and became famous as the site of the Rawhide Fight in the 1850s (see later in this chapter). A prominent landmark in the region, the inn became a polling place before 1840 (Whittington 1935:68). It was called Burton's Tavern or Stage Stand Hill (Wise 1971:53) and was owned by two men named Hawkins and Burton (Ford in Hadnot n.d.). William Burton was the postmaster at Walnut Hill from March 1849 to December 1849 (Post Office Department 1864) so the inn probably also housed the post office. Two Walnut Hills are illustrated on Colton's 1876 map (see Figure 13). One is immediately north of Fort Polk and the other, south-east of the installation.

While the above three hamlets are the only known antebellum community centers near or within Fort Polk, several other Vernon Parish regional settlements played a part in the development of west-central Louisiana.

### ***Pitkin***

Pitkin, located near the fork of Big Six Mile and Little Six Mile Creeks and along the old trail from Sugartown to Hineston, is considered by one local historian to be the earliest settlement in Vernon Parish (Cupit 1963:23). However, the village, originally called Slabtown then Lydia, was not really established until 1872 (Wise 1971:50). The claim to first settlement may stem from the belief that Reverend Joseph Willis traveled through this area around 1795 (Wise 1971:50), and, as discussed in Chapter 2, this date is probably too early. Slabtown will be further described in Chapter 4.

### ***Hineston***

Although outside modern Vernon Parish borders, Hineston played an important role in the parish's development. Located just outside the Neutral Ground, Hineston was the last settlement before

crossing the Calcasieu into the no man's land. The Golemon family was the first to arrive in the area, perhaps before 1800 (Marler 1994:16). This is supported by a gravestone at Mt. Moriah Cemetery dating the 1807 death of one family member. By the 1820s, Hineston was the largest settlement on Rapides Parish's western frontier. It is depicted on most Civil War period maps. As it was at the crossroads of the Alexandria to Burr's Ferry road and the Opelousas to Natchitoches road, it also played a role as a Confederate campsite and depot.

Hineston may have been named for William Hines, who, according to local legend, opened a store there during the Neutral Ground days (Marler 1994:24). Hineston had a post office beginning as early as 1847. The first postmaster was James Hines (Post Office Department 1973), followed by Henry Levy, Caliste Raujeot, Joseph T. Hatch, Edourd Weil, and Calvin E. Hosea. Postal service was discontinued in 1873 (Marler 1994:27; Post Office Department 1864:407–411, 1973). Hineston was also supposed to have had a race track early in its establishment. Whittington (1935:71) states that a notary public lived there during the antebellum period, evidence of Hineston's importance to the region.

### ***Spring Creek***

About four miles east of Hineston was a small stop called Paul's, which was also called Spring Creek and is now called Elmer (Marler 1994:97–98). The first post office was established there in 1858 with John Swan as the first postmaster (Post Office Department 1973). Michael Paul, postmaster from 1859 until 1866, was described as a French Creole who offered his house as a hospital during the Civil War (Post Office Department 1973; Zuber 1971:219). The hamlet was originally named for the Paul family, the most prominent member being David Paul, sheriff of Rapides Parish in the 1880s. He led Confederate troops against jayhawkers (Unionist guerrillas) in the region. The Spring Creek school was located nearby. The settlement date of Paul's is not known, but it was probably early in the nineteenth century, during the Neutral Ground period.

### ***Burr('s) Ferry***

Along the Texas stage road, Burr's Ferry was the last stop before entering Texas (Figure 18). Settlers arrived at Burr's Ferry, or Burr Ferry, as early as 1805, but Dr. Timothy Burr did not establish a ferry until around 1827 (Wise 1971:47). It has been noted that Burr was in the area about ten years before this, and a grave marker at the Burr family cemetery even dates to as early as 1810 (Leesville–Vernon Parish Chamber of Commerce n.d.:5). Burr built a plantation at Burr's Ferry, which included a gristmill, sawmill, and cotton gin. It is possible Burr built the ferry to transport his slaves back and forth from his plantation to his fields across the Sabine.

Gilman Burr was the first Burr's Ferry postmaster. Originally established in 1847 (Post Office Department 1973), the post office was discontinued in 1867 and then reestablished in 1873.

Aaron Burr was said to have visited his cousin Timothy at the plantation (Gill and Wise 1940), but there is little evidence for this. Burr would have had to have visited between 1825 and 1836 (when he died), which is unlikely.

The Burrs were Northern sympathizers during the war. William Zuber, a soldier in the Twenty-first Texas Cavalry, described a visit to the Burr residence at the end of the Red River campaign when the unit was retiring back into Texas:

*We arrived before night, and the regiment camped on the Louisiana side of the river. However, I called at the residence of Mr. Burr, owner of the ferry, and applied for entertainment. Burr, a widower, was out, but his daughter received me. She said her father never received soldiers, but her husband was an unwilling conscript in the Confederate army, and,*



Figure 18 — Burr's Ferry salon (courtesy Museum of West Louisiana).



*for his sake, she would not turn me away. I learned that her father was a Yankee, born and reared in some Northern state, and that they both were unionists. At dusk Mr. Burr came in. He was sour and reticent, but he did not send me away. I endured my unpleasant situation patiently, and in the morning Mr. Burr charged me with a big bill for my fare. (Zuber 1971:221)*

Burr's Ferry is illustrated on mid-nineteenth-century west-central Louisiana maps. During the Civil War, a breastworks was built there to defend the crossing. The hamlet also served as a supply depot for the Confederate troops expected to cross there from Texas on their way to join the Confederate forces defending the Red River (see later in this chapter).

### ***Bevil's Ferry***

Bevil's Ferry, twelve miles north of Burr's Ferry on the Sabine, probably was also called Hadden's Ferry later in its history (O'Halloran, December 27, 1951). Some historians have confused Burr's Ferry with Bevil's Ferry; another stated that Bevil's was in east Texas on the Trinity (Dalehite 1963:4). However, it is believed that Bevil's Ferry and Burr's Ferry were two different sites on the Sabine. Both ferries appear on Colton's 1864 map (see Figure 12), and, although it exhibits inaccuracies as do other nineteenth-century maps, Colton's map supports Civil War documents (see later in this chapter). Also, Belisle (1912:104) lists both of the ferries, even though he calls Burr's Ferry, Barr's Ferry.

Bevil's Ferry is probably associated with an early substantial settlement in east Texas called Bevil's, established by John R. Bevil as early as 1830 (Seale 1966:9). Providing clear evidence of the large numbers of persons passing through west-central Louisiana to colonize east Spanish Texas, an 1835 census indicates that as many as 713 individuals in 152 families were living at Bevil's Settlement (as it was called) located between "the Neches and Sabine Rivers" (Records of the States of the United States 1949; Webb 1952:153). In 1836, Bevil's became the municipality of Jasper and was one of the twenty-three original counties in the Republic of Texas (Jasper County Histori-

cal Commission 1990:vii; Seale 1966:26). Additionally, the village of Bevelport was created in 1837 along the Angelina River (Seale 1966:39). It is not known if there was a settlement at the ferry back on the Sabine River's eastern bank. The closest mail stops were Toro, established in 1849, and Anacoco, established in 1852 (Post Office Department 1973), which may indicate that settlement on the east bank of the Sabine still remained sparse throughout the nineteenth century.

### ***Anacoco***

The exact date Anacoco could be considered a hamlet cannot be determined, but folks had settled there as early as 1834 and established the Holly Grove Methodist Church shortly thereafter. The hamlet is depicted on Colton's 1876 map (see Figure 13) but not on his 1864 map (see Figure 12). The Anacoco post office, opened in 1852, was discontinued in 1866, then reestablished in 1875. Isiah Kirk was the first postmaster (Post Office Department 1973).

### ***Kisatchie***

Kisatchie, first shown as a hamlet on Colton's 1876 map (see Figure 13), was situated immediately east of modern Fort Polk's Peason Ridge. Of the hamlets mentioned herein, Kisatchie developed rather late. Scoggins (1961:4) claims the Dowdens settled there as early as 1818, but Kadlecek and Bullard (1994:175) place the first settlers as late as 1843. By 1848, Kisatchie had a school. A postal stop was established in the hamlet in 1854, discontinued in 1867, and reestablished in the 1870s.

The Post Office Department records (1973) indicate that William Owings served as the first postmaster. But confusion still exists concerning postmasters at Kisatchie. Scoggins (1961:7) states that a Jacob Kile, who operated a mill there, opened the first store and post office. But according to post office records, Kile was not the postmaster until the 1870s. Meanwhile, Kadlecek and Bullard (1994:174) state that the first post office was established under A. R. Dowden. Again according to the postal records, the first postmaster at Kisatchie who was named Dowden was Nathan Dowden in 1884.

### **Ten Mile**

This settlement is not found on any period maps, but twentieth-century maps note a “Ten Mile” in the northwest corner of Allen Parish. In fact, if Ten Mile existed during the antebellum period, it was probably in southern Rapides Parish because at that time the parish line was farther south than today (see Chapter 4).

Ten Mile, mentioned by Dorr in his overview of the state and parish, may have been a free Black settlement in a region where few African Americans were found. Dorr wrote:

*In the western part of this parish is the celebrated free colored settlement of “Ten Mile”, from circumstances connected with which a certain well-known politician of the State acquired his distinctive soubriquet of “Ten-Mile-Bob”. It is said that about eighty colored men are voted at Ten Mile by the unterrified Democracy whenever an emergency demands their loyal aid in carrying an election, and that the above referred to Robert inaugurated this business. Quien Sabe? (Dorr in Pritchard 1938:1160)<sup>14</sup>*

Whittington (1935:70) also refers to an interesting, out-of-place settlement on Ten Mile Creek. According to Whittington, settlers who were either shipwrecked Portuguese or descendants of pirate Jean Lafittes’s gang had taken residence there. This “fact” may derive from the legends of the mysterious Redbones (Marler and McManus 1993), an amalgam of people of mixed Indian and other ethnic groups whose history is yet to be wrestled from regional folktales (see Chapters 2 and 4).

There were undoubtedly other such hamlets in the Vernon Parish region during the antebellum period, but the information is scarce. Colton’s 1876 map, for instance, shows Elmwood (see Figure 13, west and slightly south of the Main Fort) in Vernon Parish’s southwestern corner. Wise (1971:48) provides the only information about this settlement and does not date it. A guess would place its es-

tablishment between the time of the Civil War and 1876. Chapter 4 discusses the post offices at this hamlet beginning in the 1880s.

### **SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CENTERS**

Asked where they were from by an outsider, nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century rural people would most likely identify a nearby village or creek as their home. But locally, church affiliation was the primary means of community identification (Smith et al. 1982). On a frontier like Vernon Parish, churches were built and church communities established before there were hamlets and villages. A hamlet may have included a church, or may have developed as a result of a church having been built first; but, just as often, a church would stand alone in the country, drawing the faithful from miles around. While Vernon Parish history and local folklore paint a picture of rather violent, lawless beginnings, the early establishment of churches there also indicates a strong community commitment to taming the wilderness and saving its souls—or at least keeping them under control.

### **Circuit Riders**

The first to spread the gospel in the region were circuit-riding ministers who were welcomed into the pioneer home as much for *any* news as for the “good news” they preached. As churches developed, these circuit riders would travel from congregation to congregation serving many needs within a large rural area. The most famous of such men in west-central Louisiana was the Baptist missionary Joseph Willis (see Chapter 2). He probably entered the area for the first time between 1813 and 1820 (Paxton 1888:143–144). Towards the end of his life, he settled along Ten Mile Creek. Willis, a mulatto, was active until his death in 1854. He was buried at Occupy Cemetery. Occupy Church No. 2 is today located just four or five miles southeast of the Main Fort.

Willis was an active member of Occupy Church, which was constituted in 1833 (Paxton 1888:184). He is likely to have been its founder and first min-

<sup>14</sup> Dorr is making a sarcastic political statement about ballot box stuffing in Rapides Parish. It is doubtful there were eighty males in this little settlement.

ister. Paxton (1888:153) states that during the same year Occupy Church was established, the churches between the Ouachita and Red Rivers were dismissed from their associations, and that Willis, a member of the Beulah Church at Cheneyville, “removed to Rapides Parish.” This also implies that Willis may not have been in the area until this time. However, Willis’s career was extremely active, and it is more probable that Willis settled in western Rapides Parish because he was familiar with the area around Ten Mile from his earlier missionary work and knew there was no established church.

Another traveling Baptist missionary who had great influence on the region was Nathan H. Bray. Bray began his preaching career in 1847 and became the father of the Sabine Association, which would later found the Vernon Parish and Calcasieu Parish Associations (Paxton 1888:494). Of Bray, Paxton wrote, “His labors were incessant, and he traversed that immense region lying between the Calcasieu and Sabine Rivers and extending north as far as Spanish Lake and the southern part of De Soto Parish.” Bray is buried at Anacoco Church (Dalehite 1962:2). Bray was also active in early regional politics, being a member of the Sabine Police Jury in 1850 (Armstrong 1958:71).

Yet another minister to travel the Sabine region was Joel Sanders, an Episcopal Methodist (Franklin in Wise 1971:59).

### ***Religious Denominations***

Census information provides insights into the religious mix on the Rapides and Sabine frontier during the antebellum period. In 1850, Rapides had two Baptist, two Christian, one Roman Catholic, and six Methodist churches. Sabine had four Baptist, one Roman Catholic, and eleven Methodist churches. Natchitoches had two Baptist, one Episcopal, one Free, four Methodist, and five Roman Catholic churches. Because Roman Catholicism was the predominant religion of the French and Spanish, the census indirectly supports Hackett’s study (1973), which indicates that Natchitoches still had a large French and Spanish ethnic mix during the early antebellum period, while both the Sabine and Rapides Parish populations were largely Anglo Americans.

But, by the Civil War, Anglo Americans (and Black slaves) dominated the whole region. By the 1860s, the Rapides population supported one Baptist, one Christian, three Episcopal, eleven Methodist, and four Roman Catholic churches; Sabine’s faithful attended nine Baptist, one Roman Catholic, and four Methodist churches; and Natchitoches believers attended six Baptist, one Episcopal, eight Methodist, and four Roman Catholic churches. The population statistics for Sabine Parish probably best represent the people living where Vernon Parish was to be established. Local historical sources indicate that these people were primarily Baptist and Methodist.

### ***Baptist Congregations***

The Baptist sect, with Joseph Willis and his sons spearheading the movement, was the predominant religion in the Vernon Parish region. Good Hope Baptist Church, ten miles west of Anacoco on Big Sandy Creek, was founded in 1853 or 1854 (Vernon Missionary Baptist Association 1945; Wise 1971:61). South of Fort Polk and a mile east of modern Pitkin, the Mount Olive Baptist Church was formed in 1862 (Vernon Missionary Baptist Association 1945; Wise 1971:69). The original church was on Brushy Creek until 1877. The Old Anacoco Missionary Baptist Church was organized around 1853. Today, it is located just north of Leesville (Wise 1971:89). Also in the area was the Gravel Hill Church, established in 1862 (Vernon Missionary Baptist Association 1945). South of Burr’s Ferry “on the bluffs of the Sabine” the Baptists established Mt. Pleasant Church in 1855 with seven members (Dalehite, August 1962:1). One source mentions an Enon Primitive Baptist Church established in 1852, but no other source supports this (Williams 1976:3).

### ***Other Religious Congregations***

The early Baptist circuit riders were not alone in their missionary work. The Methodists also organized early in Vernon parish history, their most famous church being the Holly Grove Church near Anacoco. Holly Grove’s establishment date is traditionally placed at 1835, with the first minister, Reverend James Ford, arriving in 1836 (Guy n.d.;

Wise 1971:43, 68; Wright 1976). The church building also served as a school house. Holly Grove is still a thriving church in Vernon Parish, and some descendants of the charter families—the Franklins, Balls, Lambs, Martins, and Sardells—still attend today. Near the church is the Mitchell Cemetery, where many of these pioneering families buried their dead. Another Methodist church in this area was the Kisatchie Union Church near Kisatchie Falls, established around 1840 (Scoggins 1961:14).

With the history of Spanish and French influence in the northern part of west Louisiana, the Roman Catholic church was the earliest organized religion in the area. But as census records indicate, the Spanish and French influence was overtaken by Americans settling in the region. The Catholic population was soon overshadowed by the Protestants. Still, at Spring Creek (Paul's), a St. Peter's Catholic Church was built in 1847 (Marler 1994:97).

### **Schools**

Besides churches, schools were also established very early in the antebellum pinelands of Vernon Parish. Often a single building served as both church and school. Most children were educated at home during the nineteenth century, but as soon as enough settlers arrived in an area, the community would gather together in a concerted effort to build a school and find a teacher. Funds to operate the earliest schools and pay teachers' salaries was derived from private tuition (Belisle 1912:166). With the formation of parishes, public schools were opened, although private schools continued to operate. Public schools were funded through the police juries.

Census figures indicate that in 1850, Rapides Parish operated twenty-eight public schools, with as many teachers instructing 980 students. Sabine operated thirty-three schools with thirty-three teachers and 1,051 students. Natchitoches, interestingly, had only one school, one teacher, and thirty-five students. Information provided by parents to census takers indicated that 519, 783, and 705 children in Rapides, Sabine, and Natchitoches Parishes, respectively, were attending school. The difference between the two attendance figures may

be attributed to children only attending public school part time.

### **Spring Creek Academy**

One famous early public school in the area was the Spring Creek Academy, chartered by the state legislature on March 13, 1837 (Fay 1898:60; Whittington 1935:98). Its exact location is a mystery. Whittington states that it was on Spring Creek near the Calcasieu, which implies it was at the settlement of Spring Creek (Paul's). But he also states that the board of trustees were all from Cheneyville, which is quite a distance from Spring Creek. Mobley (1947:893) states that it was "on Spring Creek in the Bayou Boeuf piney woods eight miles from LeCompte." LeCompte is more than eight miles from Paul's. So it is possible that there may have been another Spring Creek, closer to Cheneyville, where the school was actually located.

The first appropriation for the school was \$1,500 a year, but in 1839 it received a huge sum of \$7,500 for buildings (Fay 1898:60). Mobley (1947:894) writes that the academy also received an additional \$1,000 for the poor children in the neighborhood of the "Calcasou," again implying that the school was on the Spring Creek branch of the Calcasieu—further confusing the location issue. Between 1839 and 1841, the academy received \$13,825.55 (Fay 1898:66).

The faculty comprised Joseph E. Eastburn, his wife Michele Ryan, and four others (Gremillion n.d.b:11). The academy continued to operate until the Civil War, but never reopened afterwards (Whittington 1935:98).

### **A Commitment to Education**

Another sign of the early settlers' commitment to education was an 1848 decision by the Sabine Parish Police Jury to appropriate \$200 for the tuition of indigent children in public schools (Belisle 1912:110), and, in 1849, \$49 was set aside for a census of school children (Belisle 1912:111).

A formal commitment to provide public education in Sabine Parish came in 1850 with the election of William D. Stephens as superintendent (Belisle 1912:167). A school was built at Bayou Toro in Vernon Parish's northwest section. The



popular Bellwood Academy was opened in the 1850s and moved, in 1861, to New Bellwood near Kisatchie (Belisle 1912:168). But this was not Kisatchie's first school; the Kisatchie Union School had already been established in 1848 (Scoggins 1961:8).

### ***The Rawhide Fight***

Education was taken seriously, sometimes too seriously. One of the famous stories of disorder in the Fort Polk area describes the "Rawhide Fight," traditionally dated to 1850 (Ford in Hadnot n.d.).

According to legend, the local community in and around Walnut Hill decided to build a schoolhouse. By the time a teacher was hired, the community was in high spirits over the new undertaking. Mysteriously, though, the school burned down before classes ever began. Two factions soon developed over who started the fire. A meeting was arranged—guns checked at the door—in an attempt to settle the issue. The meeting had the exact opposite effect desired.

Despite conflicting versions of the story, it is believed that the meeting was held either at the home of James Groves—a prominent Walnut Hill resident—or at the Burton Inn (Cupit and Hadnot n.d.; Ford 1955; Wise 1971:54). Speeches on both sides apparently became more and more heated. Eventually a knife fight broke out between the two sides; knives were soon replaced by clubs. The fight ended in the deaths of six men—Weeks, Harrison, Hawkins, Hardcastle, Simon, and an unknown person. The dead were laid out on dry rawhides, from which the fight derived its name.

### ***Freemason Lodges***

Freemasonry also played an important part in the region's settlement and civic organization. While most of the lodges were established in the late nineteenth century, some in west-central Louisiana formed earlier. The Anacoco or Orange Lodge (Number 147) was one of the first in the region, organizing in 1857 (Dalehite 1963). J. J. Franklin, a prominent early settler, was one of the officers. At Huddleston, Rapides Lodge Number 167, was organized in 1859 with eleven members (Hadnot n.d.).

## **RIVER LIFE ALONG THE SABINE**

### ***Migration and the Sabine***

Unlike the Red River, the Sabine played only a minor role in the settlement of west-central Louisiana until the late antebellum period. As Flint noted in 1833, "This stream derives its chief consequence from its position, as the line of separation between the United States and Mexico" (1833:254). At least until the 1840s, the Sabine's role was more important as a boundary—initially as the border between countries and the western border of a Neutral Ground and later as a border between the United States and independent Texas—than as a means of transportation into the interior.

Large-scale settlement and urban centers did not ever develop along the Sabine. Settlers heading west found the Red River a natural channel toward their destinations. They traveled easily upstream to Natchitoches and from there they entered Texas via the Camino Real. The Sabine flowed south to the Gulf, which was the wrong direction for most pioneers, and it was never a popular route to the interior (Sullivan 1967:6). Furthermore, the Sabine's mouth was found within a "vast and solitary prairie of uncommon sterility," and as the early-nineteenth-century travelers wandered upstream they came upon pineland with only "good second rate land" (Flint 1833:254).

### ***Navigation and Shipping***

The Sabine was also an unreliable transportation stream, navigable only from November to April. Like the Red River before Colonel Shreve, it was full of rafts and snags (Sullivan 1967:4–5).

*It has a course of four hundred miles; and in high stages of its waters, when the obstructions of small timber rafts are cleared out of it, is susceptible of good steam boat navigation, as high as the great crossing on the road from Natchitoches to the Spanish country. In low stages of water it has but four feet water over the bar at its mouth. Like the other rivers of this state, it broadens into a wide lake before it enters the gulf. (Flint 1833:254)*



Nevertheless, antebellum entrepreneurs and public commerce officials saw the Sabine as a cheaper route for transporting east-Texas cotton from the pineland to ports in Texas and Louisiana than shipping the bales in wagons across west Louisiana (Sullivan 1967:10–13). Therefore, the army was sent to clear the river. In March 1838, Issac Wright, captain of the steamer *Velocipede* (143 tons, drawing five feet of water) ascended the Sabine some three hundred miles upstream to the town of Sabine, north of Vernon Parish (Secretary of War 1838:2). Freight was set at five or six cents per pound from Natchitoches to the mouth of the river at Camp Sabine. The *New Orleans Picayune* predicted “a dense population along its banks, driving an extensive and lucrative trade with the neighboring districts both of Louisiana and Texas” (Pritchard 1941:37).

Although a few flatboats made the trip down the Sabine prior to 1838 (Block 1995:7; Sullivan 1967:17), river traffic really began from that point in time. Throughout the 1840s, flatboats and, to a lesser extent, keelboats were used fairly regularly to move cotton, which eventually made its way to the markets in New Orleans and Galveston (Sullivan 1967:19). For instance, in 1840, partners S. Steadman and Van Dusen, were operating five keelboats from East Hamilton (near Sabinetown) to the mouth of the Sabine (Block 1995:8).

Steamboat traffic up and down the Sabine also began at this point, although north of Burr’s Ferry navigation was hazardous, possible only at high water (O’Halloran, January 10, 1952). *Big Ben*, one of the first steamboats, supposedly reached Belgrade as early as 1838 (Maxwell 1971:110). The Sabine was “used quite extensively for navigation until the introduction of railroads” (Andrew 1949:11n). “Sternwheelers plied up and down the river between Logansport and Orange, Texas” (O’Halloran, January 10, 1952). Nevertheless, although the cost of shipping via the Sabine came to be cheaper than by overland routes, throughout the 1840s most east-Texas cotton continued to be transported overland by wagons because of inadequate steamboat facilities and an unreliable flow (Block 1995:9).

### **Settlement**

It is estimated that by the 1850s, forty boats, including the *Sun Flower* and the *Camargo* (Puryear and Winfield 1976:91, 96), were operating on the Sabine and the Neches Rivers. Sabine City, Point Young, Green’s Bluff, Princeton, Salem, Belgrade, New Columbia, Sabine Town, Patterson’s Ferry, Logan’s Port, and Hamilton were some of the port towns that sprang up on the Sabine (Maxwell 1971:110; Maxwell and Baker 1983:7). Figure 17 and other maps indicate that these are all east Texas ports. The closest port to Vernon Parish was New Columbia, just south of Burr’s Ferry. But there were probably landings along the Louisiana side also, although the Sabine’s east bank was usually low and swampy, unlike the high west bank (Davis et al. 1895, plate LIV). Still, some fifty-nine landings were known to have been established between Logansport and Sabine Pass (Sullivan 1967:32). This figure does not even include all the private landings at which steamboats would stop along the way, for “nearly every farm along the banks had its own landing” (Sullivan 1967:32).

Sullivan estimates that at least seventy-five steamers traveled the Neches and Sabine from 1838 to the 1890s (Sullivan 1967:37). Block’s research of old newspaper advertisements (1995:14) increases this estimate to as many as eighty or more steamboats that made their way up or down the Sabine at least once during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

### **Logging and the River**

The Sabine was used for floating logs to mills as well as for flatboating and steamboating. While cotton, hides, and beef were the major commodities sent downstream during the antebellum years (Maxwell and Baker 1983:7), timber became the most plentiful raw material of the postwar period.

Exactly when commercial logging began in Vernon Parish is not known. It is reasonable to speculate that it started at least by the mid-1840s, and that it began along the Sabine River or such Vernon Parish tributaries as the Anacoco. It is known that Robert Booth built a mill north of Orange, Texas, in 1836, and that Robert Jackson had

another at Turner Ferry on the Sabine in the 1840s (Maxwell and Baker 1983:18–19). A steam lumber mill also began operating at Lake Charles as early as 1855 (Block 1995:42). Vernon Parish pioneers may have contributed logs to these mills.

The early loggers would cut timber during the summer. When the winter rains filled the creeks, the logs would be floated down the Vernon Parish streams to the Sabine, where timber rafts were made, and floated down to large sawmills at Orange, Texas (Williams 1976:3). Cutting and rafting the timber at this time was a cottage industry; the great cut-over of west-central Louisiana would not begin until well after the Civil War.

### FRONTIER VIOLENCE AND OUTLAWS

The Louisiana and east Texas backcountry woodsmen were not known for their easy manner (Maxwell and Baker 1983:14). The region developed in tumultuous times beginning with the conflicts created by the arrival of Anglo-Americans and the subsequent competition between Native American tribes for their favor and tribute. Located on the western edge of the United States, as a neutral ground during the early nineteenth century, the Vernon Parish region soon became a refuge for filibusters, outlaws, and renegades. Self-sufficient pioneers had to be self-sufficient in all aspects of life, including defending their own—as illustrated by the Rawhide Fight in reaction to a schoolhouse burning.

Fighting was not a daily occurrence, but it was not unusual either. Religion was also taken seriously and debated. Social gatherings, like schoolhouse meetings, a logrolling, or a dance might create friction between feuding families or suitors. Add moonshine to any of these gatherings and fights often ended the party (Sitton 1995:73).

Several historians have noted that the infamous land pirate John A. Murrell preyed upon travelers in Vernon Parish (Hadnot n.d.; O'Halloran, May

15, 1952). Some stated that he had a hideout at Murrell's Cave near Sandel (O'Halloran, May 15, 1952; Williams 1976:1). But the historical Murrell most certainly never stepped foot in the Vernon Parish region, or even in Louisiana for that matter. In fact, Murrell probably never traveled very far beyond his home state of Tennessee, where he spent most of the 1820s and 1830s, a large part of his life, in and out of jail (Penick 1981:9–31). Murrell was indeed a horse thief, counterfeiter, and slave stealer. But Murrell's fame came from a book written by V. A. Stewart in 1835, in which Murrell was portrayed as a crafty highwayman who often disguised himself as a clergyman and killed his victims.<sup>15</sup> His greatest infamy though was the claim that he was organizing a widespread criminal gang that would infiltrate the slave population and, at the given signal, start a general slave rebellion. Once the rebellion was in full swing and the South burned, Murrell and his gang would rob banks and merchants and steal away, leaving the slaves to their fate (Penick 1981:1–2). Murrell's legend was thus fueled by a constant fear of slave revolts during the antebellum period, giving the story great credence among the rural southern populations.

### THE CIVIL WAR

Although no battles took place within modern Vernon Parish or Fort Polk, the Civil War brought upheaval and danger to the area, as it did all across the South, and people began choosing sides. The Red River plantation owners risked losing their property and very culture. In western Rapides and Sabine Parishes, few farmers owned slaves or had large landholdings to protect. These self-sufficient hunter-stockmen just wanted to be left alone. In the crucial 1860 election, more than 59 percent of voters in Sabine, Rapides, and Natchitoches Parishes supported the proslavery candidate Brecken-

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<sup>15</sup> This book was titled *A History of the Detection, Conviction, Life and Designs of John A. Murrell, the Great Western Land Pirate, Together With His System of Villainy, and Plan of Exciting a Negro Rebellion, and a Catalogue of the Names of Four Hundred and Forty Five of His Mystic Clan Fellows and Followers; and Their Efforts for the Destruction of Mr. Virgil A. Stewart, the Young Man Who Detected Him; to which is added a Biographical Sketch of Mr. V. A. Stewart* by Augustus Q. Walton Esq. Walton, like the book itself, was fiction. Stewart probably wrote the book himself (Penick 1981:3).

ridge (Cantley and Kern 1984:48). But in January 1861, three-fifths of Sabine Parish and more than half of Natchitoches Parish voters opposed secession. In Rapides Parish, where most of the large plantations were located, more than three-fifths of the population voted for secession (Cantley and Kern 1984:48).

### *The Call to Arms*

Once the secession issue was decided, western Louisiana men answered the call for recruits. Those who joined the Confederacy probably did so not because of the slavery issue, but so as “not to submit their destinies into the hands of a hostile Government,” as was proclaimed in a series of resolutions at a public meeting in Alexandria on December 26, 1860 (Whittington 1935:139).

Rapides Parish men eventually formed some eighteen companies, most of which were absorbed into the Confederate army, and the men sent to fight and die far from home (Bergeron 1989). Some of the most ardent secessionists in the parish’s western frontier probably traveled to Alexandria or Cheneyville at first call and were marched to such major muster grounds as Baton Rouge to join regiments.<sup>16</sup>

But other volunteers in western Rapides and southwestern Sabine Parishes formed their own company called the Anacoco Rangers, which later became Company K of the Nineteenth Louisiana Infantry. Led by William W. Smart and later by John W. Jones, the company was shipped east for campaigns in Tennessee, Alabama, and Georgia (Bergeron 1989:121–122).

Those from the Fort Polk area who had not joined at the war’s start probably later joined the Calcasieu Rangers. This cavalry unit, under the command of Captain William Ivey, was organized in the fall of 1863. In 1864, it was officially mustered into Confederate service at Hineston and was

used to patrol the local region for deserters and jayhawkers.<sup>17</sup>

In the Bayou Toro area, the Sabine Rifles, organized by Arthur McArthur, became Company A of the Sixth Louisiana Infantry (Belisle 1912:148–149; Bergeron 1989:84–85). Sabine Parish eventually provided four companies to the Confederacy. It is not known how many within the Vernon Parish region joined Natchitoches Parish companies.

### *On the Home Front*

As young men joined the Confederacy’s ranks, their farms were left to the older men, women, and children to manage. Women also volunteered to work in aid societies to make uniforms, cartridges, and food packages. If the region was like other Southern rural areas, many isolated farms were abandoned during this time, the women and children moving to towns where they felt they would be safer. This left their farms to the mercy of the next band of raiders that came along. No doubt, many west Rapides Parish and Sabine Parish farms suffered this fate.

In Alexandria, those that did not join the ranks gathered supplies at a major depot and worked in a meat packing plant that sent pickled beef to the front lines (Whittington 1935:148). The beef, which came from southwestern Louisiana and Texas, was transported along such trails as the Burr’s Ferry to Alexandria road (see Figure 12) and the road that came north from Sugartown to Hineston (Marler 1994:21).

As the war continued, food and other necessities became more scarce. This encouraged a brisk, illegal trade in cotton, which was supposed to be destroyed by Confederate authorities so as not to fall into Union hands. But the authorities were easy to bribe, and some of this cotton went to Texas, probably along the route to Burr’s Ferry through the Fort Polk area.

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<sup>16</sup> Among those in the Fort Polk area who joined the Red River Rebels, for instance, were: J. M. Cavanaugh, J. P. Groves, W. W. Goynes, and W. F. Roberts from Liberty Creek; J. R. Miller, Z. R. Speights, J. Amons, Thomas Bonnette, J. W. Bush, and E. V. Cain from Huddleston (Hadnot n.d.).

<sup>17</sup> Whittington (1935:146) mentions Paul’s Rangers, a unit organized by David C. Paul (possibly one of the Pauls who lived at the town of Paul’s or Spring Creek). The unit may have organized locally as vigilantes for protection against the jayhawkers. Paul’s Rangers are not referenced in Bergeron (1989) but may actually be the Calcasieu Rangers.

### ***The Red River Campaign***

The Vernon Parish pinelands had little strategic value to either the North or South, and the people who remained in the area saw no major action. Early in the war, it was relatively quiet around Vernon Parish. However, after the fall of Vicksburg and Port Hudson, Union strategists decided that control of Texas was critical.

The best route into the Texas interior appeared to be up the Red River. Also, the presence of all that cotton around Alexandria probably motivated some Union generals to argue loudly for a campaign to capture Shreveport, the capitol of Confederate Louisiana, which would, coincidentally, sweep through the cotton area (Smith 1986:2–4; Winters 1963:317–321). Thus, in the spring of 1864, the Union army, under the command of Major General Nathaniel P. Banks, began to move up the Red River, threatening destruction to Rapides Parish and Alexandria.

This move had been long anticipated by Confederate Major General Richard Taylor. He knew that his army of 6,000 troops, spread throughout north Louisiana and the Red River area from Bayou Teche to Alexandria, would need supplies and reinforcements if he was to stop Banks. He also knew that as far as forage was concerned, the pinelands were “utterly barren” (Taylor 1879:152). He was not alone in making this assessment, as another general described the region between the Calcasieu and the Sabine as a “desert” (Walker 1864). Taylor’s initial plans were to concentrate his forces around Alexandria, and he proceeded accordingly.

Beginning in late summer 1863, gray-clad soldiers were seen along the western Rapides roads to Texas as the Confederate army prepared to defend the Red River. First, “works were ordered on the Sabine and the crossings of the upper Red River” (Smith 1864). One of these breastworks was built at Burr’s Ferry (Wise 1971:47). Second, along the roads leading to and from Texas “depots were established, with small detachments to guard them” (Taylor 1879:152). Burr’s Ferry, Huddleston, and Hineston became depots for storing forage, bread stuffs, salt, and corn in preparation for the Texas reinforcements en route to join Taylor’s

forces at Alexandria (Anderson 1864; Taylor 1864a).

The Union forces’s thrust up the Red River was a joint operation of Banks’s army and a gunboat flotilla under the command of Rear Admiral David D. Porter, combining some 30,000 troops, thirteen gunboats, and sixty other vessels (Smith 1986:4). Porter began the campaign on March 12, 1864, entering the Red River at its mouth and capturing Fort De Russey, a Confederate stronghold near Marksville, Louisiana. Taylor abandoned Alexandria, moving his small army to the Carroll Jones plantation (see Figure 15), about fourteen miles north of Hineston, close to the modern Vernon Parish-Rapides Parish line (Winters 1963:329). The roads to Alexandria, Burr’s Ferry, Natchitoches, and Sabinetown all converged at the plantation. Here Taylor waited for Texas reinforcements commanded by Brigadier General Thomas Green. Porter’s forces entered Alexandria around March 16, and Banks entered a few days later.

At Alexandria, Porter and Banks found that the water was too shallow at the rapids for the flotilla to continue northward. As they waited for the water to rise, they collected cotton and recruited more troops from among Union sympathizers and jayhawkers, who were now more bold with the Union army’s arrival (Winters 1963:333).

But Taylor was also gaining strength as troops slowly arrived from Texas. Still, with Banks in Alexandria, Taylor’s army was in a precarious position. He needed to keep it between Banks’s troops and Shreveport, and thus close to the Red River. At the same time, he had to protect the western routes from which more Texas troops were expected to arrive. Taylor retreated even further north, eventually to Mansfield. As he did so, Texas reinforcements were ordered to cross the Sabine further and further north of the Vernon Parish area. Eventually they crossed as far north as Sabinetown and Logansport (Bee 1864).

Banks moved north in early April, but at Natchitoches he made an error. Thinking the Confederates would not make a stand until he got to Shreveport, he took a well-traveled route toward the town—one that led away from the Red River and Porter’s supporting navy directly into Taylor’s



waiting army. On April 8 at Mansfield, the Confederates stood their ground and drove back the Union army, now strung out for some twenty miles along the road (Winters 1963:347). Banks reorganized his troops the following day at Pleasant Hill, where both sides sustained heavy losses, around 1,500 men apiece (Winters 1963:355). Banks retreated the next day to Grand Ecore, his army diminished and demoralized.

Originally, Banks's thrust toward Shreveport was to be one arm of a pincer movement against the town, the other being General Frederick Steele's army moving in from Arkansas. But, Banks had heard nothing from Steele and, fearing he could not take Shreveport without Steele's support, he wavered. Meanwhile, the Red River water level was again falling, and Porter began to move his fleet south to avoid entrapment above the rapids at Alexandria. Banks followed with the infantry around April 21.

While Taylor's army hounded Banks's retreat along the Red River, Taylor sent Colonel Vincent's Second Louisiana Cavalry on a wide swing south through the pinelands and Vernon Parish to try to "capture and destroy any small bands of the enemy found roving in that region" and to reach Opelousas, south of Banks's army (Taylor 1864b). Felix Pierre Poche, a staff officer with the Twenty-eighth Louisiana, got permission to follow them. Poche has left a colorful description of the region, depicting Many as "an ugly little town full of pine trees." He described the march down the road from Many, south through the heart of Vernon Parish:

*Thursday April 14. Today we marched 30 miles and encamped at Kirk's mill on Bayou Lanacoco.<sup>18</sup> Luckily I was able to be received and well provided by Mr. Kirk, as I was suffering greatly, especially from hunger as I had no provisions, and not belonging to any mess I depended on my friends, who could provide little for me, as they were so short themselves.*

*We heard rumors that Genl Greene has been killed, and that we have captured a large num-*

*ber of prisoners, gunboats, and transports. We had news of those infamous Jay-hawkers who were last seen 6 or 7 miles from here, but they fled at the approach of our Cavalry.*

*Saturday April 16. Today we marched 25 miles, always in the hideous and monotonous pine forests. Today I had no corn for my horses and very little for myself....*

*Sunday April 17. Today we marched 25 miles and camped tonight 1½ miles from the Calcasieu. Again nothing for my horses. This is decidedly the most terrible journey that I have every made in my life.*

*Monday April 18. Today Col Vincent's very famous Quartermaster, Capt Logan, spent almost all day trying to construct a pontoon bridge of green pine which sank to the bottom like so much lead. At last the River was crossed by means of a skiff and a flat boat to transport the men and their belongings, and by making the horses swim across. (Poche 1972:112–113)*

Meanwhile at Alexandria, in a miraculous effort, the Federals built a dam and floated Porter's fleet over the rapids and continued their retreat back down the Red River (Smith 1986). Banks left the town on May 13. Someone—looters, troops, or both—started a series of fires that soon leveled a large section of the town. Taylor and Banks again met at Norwood's plantation near Yellow Bayou, but Taylor could not hold the retreating Federals (Winters 1963:376). This action effectively ended the Union's presence on the Red River and the presence of regular armies near the Vernon Parish region.

### ***Collateral Dangers of War***

Keeping the farm going in rural western Louisiana was tough and dangerous enough during peacetime, but the war and especially the Union army's arrival along the Red River that spring brought other dangers besides bandits and outlaws. Desert-

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<sup>18</sup> Poche's editor Edwin Bearss states that Kirk's Mill was eight miles north of Huddleston, thus placing it just north of Leesville.

ers, draft-dodgers, and jayhawkers increased their raiding and plundering across the Vernon Parish region (Gallien 1968:355). General Taylor and other Confederate commanders made several attempts to route out these miscreants. One attempt was made as early as June 1863. Then, Brigadier General Alfred A. Mouton issued secret orders to sweep the region:

*Information has been received that there are bands of outlaws, deserters, conscripts, and stragglers from a point above Hineston... in the parish of Rapides, down to the lower parishes extending into Calcasieu, through to the Bayou Teche, which are committing depredations, robberies and incendiarism, and who are openly violating the Confederate laws.... Such men can only be considered as outlaws, highwaymen, and traitors.*

*In consequence: You will proceed...to scour the whole country ...in search of these bands [who]...must be exterminated, especially the leaders; and every man found with arms for the purpose of resisting Confederate laws, or against whom satisfactory evidence may be given, must be executed on the spot.*

*No prisoners should be taken....*

*These instructions are to be kept secret, and no one is allowed to know the object of your movements. (Edmonds 1979:234)*

While the results of this sweep are unknown, it is obvious that soon after it was completed, the region was once again filled with the same sort of desperadoes. In February 1864, Taylor reported:

*In the section of the district known as the Calcasieu and Mermentou country, and in the pine woods extending therefrom to Sabine Parish, there are large bodies of deserters and recusant conscripts whom it would require a large cavalry brigade to break up or force into service. Indeed, their nearness to the enemy, facility of reaching them, and the influence*

*which their strength exercises upon the minds of people of those neighborhoods render it impossible, with the limited cavalry force in my command, to bring these recusants into service. (Taylor 1864c)*

Again in March, Taylor, short on mobile forces to stop the guerrilla attacks, finds himself hindered by the jayhawkers as he attempts to gather intelligence on Banks's movements up the Red River:

*I am ignorant of what disposition the enemy has made or is making of his large force, and have no news of Green since I last wrote you. The difficulty of obtaining accurate intelligence is greatly enhanced by jayhawkers. The whole county between this and Alexandria swarms with these outlaws, who are allied with the enemy and acting in his interests. Several of our scouts have been murdered, and it is more dangerous for small parties to pass through the pine woods than it would be to penetrate the enemy's lines. Besides, the intimate acquaintance of the country possessed by these people renders it impossible to escape their vigilance. (Taylor 1864d)*

This communication reveals much about the atmosphere in the region at this time. The woods and roads were dangerous for travel, especially for the Confederates. In small camps throughout the area, deserters and jayhawkers, probably mostly local Union sympathizers, were ambushing Confederate couriers and scouts. One of these groups may have been commanded by Colonel Dudley, a local jayhawker who operated in western Rapides Parish (Whittington 1935:146). Throughout most of the Red River campaign, Taylor was extremely short of cavalry and unable to spare the necessary forces to keep the jayhawkers on the run. Thus, he was desperately waiting for the arrival of Green's cavalry to help patrol the roads and provide his army with "eyes" to watch Banks.

With Banks's retreat and north Louisiana in Confederate control, the jayhawkers probably went to ground. Dudley, for instance, supposedly fol-

lowed Banks and joined the Union army. In May 1864, Confederate forces prepared for a possible thrust by Banks at Texas. Orders were given to store 20,000 rations and 2,000 bushels of corn at Burr's Ferry for troops on the march (Magruder 1864). But for the most part, as the war progressed through 1864, military activities in Louisiana came to a standstill as both forces recovered and events elsewhere took precedent (Winters 1963:395). The next major influx of soldiers into the Vernon Parish region would be the survivors returning home.

### RECONSTRUCTION TO 1871

From 1862, when New Orleans fell, until as late as 1877, when President Hayes withdrew Federal forces, Louisiana was an occupied state (Davis 1971:266). Reconstruction—a word describing a historical period rather than an accomplishment—was a time of confusion, controversy, complexity, and political chaos. It is beyond the goals and objectives of this work to examine Reconstruction in detail. Briefly, the state's political fortunes were controlled by the U.S. Army, along with radical reformers and carpetbaggers, who as often as not sought personal fortunes and revenge rather than reconstruction of the devastated South. The people, both Black and White, were left to deal with a society and economy in total devastation. Most of

the soldiers who returned found their homes destroyed with no means of rebuilding. Many western Louisiana soldiers who had faced war found that peace was not to be found when they returned, for the region was still infested with desperadoes. Many veterans, broken families, and free African Americans across the South took to the road to start over. For most, that meant heading west.

Census data show the war's impact on west-central Louisiana just prior to the formation of Vernon Parish. Natchitoches Parish had 80,616 improved acres in 1860 with a value of \$5 million. Ten years later, the number of acres had increased slightly to 81,782, but the value had dropped to only \$1.9 million. The Rapides plantation economy had been destroyed. Its 105,839 improved acres were reduced to 63,265, their value dropping from \$9 million to \$1.5 million. In the pinelands, Sabine's 29,350 acres of improved lands in 1860 had fallen to 16,576 acres, their value dropping from \$414,746 to \$223,805.

Tables 8 and 9 list the major crops and animals in west-central Louisiana during the Reconstruction period. In comparison with the 1860 figures, crop production was down across the board. Interestingly, rice production in Sabine Parish in 1870 was nonexistent. Likewise, animal production was also down significantly from 1860. All these statistics reflect a people struggling with recovery from a costly war.

Table 8 — Selected crop production, 1870.

<i>Parish</i>	<i>Corn (bushels)</i>	<i>Cotton (bales)</i>	<i>Irish Potatoes (bushels)</i>	<i>Sweet Potatoes (bushels)</i>	<i>Wool (pounds)</i>	<i>Molasses (gallons)</i>
Natchitoches	231,746	15,671	779	12,356	3,180	20
Rapides	261,579	9,133	3,020	54,276	8,868	212,860
Sabine	74,520	2,350	56	15,032	746	882

Table 9 — Selected animal production, 1870.

<i>Parish</i>	<i>Horses</i>	<i>Mules/Asses</i>	<i>Milch Cows</i>	<i>Oxen</i>	<i>Sheep</i>	<i>Swine</i>
Natchitoches	2,949	1,845	3,527	1,644	5,442	10,244
Rapides	2,225	1,976	3,748	1,218	3,848	14,724
Sabine	736	222	1,521	627	1,512	9,091

Population data show only a slight increase in the region from 1860 to 1870 (see Tables 1, 2, and 3). Natchitoches Parish increased by only 1,544 people, Sabine by 611, and Rapides actually decreased by 7,345.

In many parts of the South and North, soldiers, who until the war had never seen the land beyond their county, found themselves restless and unable to settle back into homelife. In the South, of course, there was little to settle into. There was also a large population of slaves with new-found freedom. This, combined with the passing of the Homestead Act in 1862 (Morrison 1972:2:454), prompted a large migration westward to cheap, available land, beginning during the war's ebb and continuing throughout Reconstruction. Texas was one of the more attractive goals for this migration as it had not suffered significantly during the war and had recovered quickly. Thus, its population increased by 35 percent between 1860 and 1870. No doubt, some of these migrants passed through Vernon Parish (Morrison 1972:2:502).

Some migrants may have stayed in the region. Despite evidence from census data, west-central Louisiana was probably not as devastated as other parts of the South, in part because it was comparatively underdeveloped. Western Louisiana was probably an attractive region to Upland South post-war migrants, and many Texas-bound migrants, like their antebellum predecessors, probably continued no further than the Vernon Parish pinelands.

Most of those who did settle in the region were Louisianans who simply moved across the state. As noted earlier, the 1870 Rapides population was primarily Louisiana natives, as were the Natchitoches and Sabine populations. Of those Rapides Parish settlers born out of state, the largest contingent came from Mississippi or Alabama and made up 7 percent of the population. Surprisingly, 5 percent came from Virginia or West Virginia.

Thus, it is likely that Vernon Parish continued its slow growth with a small influx of new people trying to start a new life in a familiar landscape. Church reformation provides evidence of community redevelopment. New churches established at this time included the Castor Baptist Church in 1868 or 1869 (Vernon Missionary Baptist Association 1945; Wise 1971:63); in 1869, the Laurel Hill Baptist Church, three miles north of LaCamp (just north of the Main Fort on Route 121) (Wise 1971:68); and the Kisatchie Baptist Church in 1868 (Scoggins 1961:14; Vernon Missionary Baptist Association 1945). One school opened around 1867 near Simpson (Pine Hill) (Hadnot n.d.).

## SUMMARY

Settlement in the Vernon Parish region started relatively late in comparison with other parts of Louisiana—a result of both environmental and political events. But despite the challenges of its isolation and infertile soil, independent, tough-minded yeoman farmers found its pine forest landscape to their liking. This chapter's opening quote captures with clear-minded wisdom the bold spirit of those who settled in the western pinelands during the antebellum period.

Just prior to the Civil War, small communities were developing. Perhaps, had the war not occurred, the Sabine River might have proved to be the outlet to markets necessary for Vernon Parish development. The war put that scenario on hold. But it is possible that the war-weary soldiers of west-central Louisiana returned to find that their homes had not changed that much, and soon new settlers were arriving, spurred to the region by the devastation of their homes further east. Only six years after the war, there were enough people in the region to establish a new parish.





### POSTBELLUM VERNON PARISH, 1871–1897

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*The most magnificent stretch of unbroken pine forest on the continent is what may be truthfully said of Vernon Parish.*

— Cole 1892

#### THE LATE NINETEENTH-CENTURY LANDSCAPE

Catherine Cole—the pen name of Martha R. Field, a correspondent for the *New Orleans Daily Picayune*—was not alone in her favorable impression of Vernon Parish’s landscape in the years between the parish’s formation in 1871 and the railroad’s arrival in 1897. Others wrote glowingly of well-timbered and abundant forests, and of productive, well-adapted bottom and prairie lands (Cole 1892; Harris 1881:238–239). Even modern historians, describing an identical landscape just across the Sabine in east Texas, proclaimed the land “isolated, magnificent, and virgin” (Maxwell and Baker 1983:16). Relishing the west-central Vernon pineland were its scattered residents, described as “happy and contented,” “doing well,” in “excellent health,” “law abiding and hospitable,” and leading “simple, moral, thrifty lives” (Cole 1892; Harris 1881:238–239; see also Poole 1889).

Perhaps these sentiments were optimistic given Reconstruction’s tumultuous times (lasting, in Louisiana, until 1877), the national financial panics of 1873 and 1893, and droughts. Nevertheless, life in Vernon Parish may have been better than life in the rest of the state. Relatively isolated and remote, on the outskirts of main settlement and development areas, the parish had not been as thoroughly devastated by the Civil War as the rest of the state. Its people were not as affected by the demoralizing corruption of Louisiana’s Reconstruction. Without a substantial local African American population, race relations may not have been as raw and inflamed as they were in the cotton parishes along the Red and Mississippi Riv-

ers. Admittedly, just after the war, the region was still a haven for jayhawkers and vagabonds. But the scant historical documents available indicate that, by the time of its formation, Vernon Parish was a forward-looking, optimistic, agrarian community in a relatively peaceful pineland, thriving amidst abundant natural resources.

The most abundant of these resources was the pine forest, which was just beginning to be lumbered along the Sabine-Anacoco river system and along the Calcasieu River, Whiskey Chitto, and Bundick Creek drainages. During most of this period, lumbering was a lively cottage industry conducted by farmers and part-time lumbermen. The “cut-out and get-out” lumbering system was yet to come. Thus, the forest landscape in 1871 was much as it had been during the early part of the century.

*The long-leaf pine forest is mostly open, so that a wagon can frequently traverse it with little more difficulty than the open prairie. The shade of the pine being very light, grasses and other plants requiring sunshine flourish underneath them, thus affording an excellent pasture, which fact has made stock-breeding the earliest industry of this [pine hill] region. (Hilgard 1884:128–129)*

Across mile after mile, travelers and settlers found the postwar Vernon Parish forest covered with millions of towering pines reaching 100 to 150 feet in height, standing securely with as large as four- to five-foot-diameter trunks. The first limbs of these grand timbers were no less than fifty to sixty feet from the ground, creating a vast, canopied park (Maxwell and Baker 1983:5).

*Here is a pine forest in all its splendor. It would seem that one could mow the trees down like grain if one just had a scythe big enough.*

*During my second day's ride of thirty-five miles I measured haphazard along the roadside many of the pine trees, and the smallest girth I found was nine feet two inches. The average pine tree in Vernon then will average 3 feet in diameter. (Cole 1892)*

This seemingly unending pine forest running from the Red River uplands across the Sabine and deep into southeastern Texas was only rarely interrupted (Maxwell 1971:109). But one such break was the Anacoco Prairie, which had attracted the D'Artigeaus in the late eighteenth century and the Franklins during the antebellum period. During the postwar years this "island of lovely prairie about three miles long by one mile wide" (Cole 1892) attracted even more settlers. The top soils here were surprisingly fertile, black, and two feet deep, unlike the soils of the upland pine forest.

*The surface [of the Anacoco Prairie] is quite rolling, and presents within a small compass an extraordinary variety of soils, from the poorest-sandy pine hills to the richest upland prairie and prairie bottoms, all of which can sometimes be observed on a single hilltop slope. Hence farms are mostly small, but in many cases exceedingly productive, though thus far suffering from want of communication with the outside world. (Hilgard 1884:129)*

Other fertile soils were found along the Calcasieu's narrow bottomlands and in the Fort Polk area along the slopes and bottomlands of Whiskey Chitto and Bundick Creek (Harris 1881:238–239; Hilgard 1884:128). Fertile areas were sharply confined to the bottomlands, for in the uplands above the streams lay the unattractive hogwallow lands—a common epithet for any lands of "little account." In Vernon Parish, such lands consisted of infertile, sticky clay soils, lacking lime, excessively muddy, thus difficult to till in wet seasons, and

easily deteriorated by drought (Hilgard 1884:130; Lockett 1969:47 [1874]). These soils were depleted after only a few years. Cotton was susceptible to rust or blight, the taproots suffering from the poorly drained subsoil (Hilgard 1884:130). Despite the poor soil, interspersed grassy areas in the pine-covered uplands made stock raising a profitable venture here.

Notwithstanding the hogwallow lands, late nineteenth-century Vernon Parish was an attractive place to settle, especially for Southerners uprooted as a result of the Civil War and restless (Sutherland 1980). And there was plenty of room for everyone. Even as late as 1881, private land was "almost without a price, there being so much vacant public land well adapted to farming upon which immigrants can settle without money or price, free from all fear of being disturbed" (Harris 1881:239). No doubt, many heeding the call to "go to Texas" after the war stopped along the way and settled in Vernon Parish (Figure 19).

## THE FORMATION OF VERNON PARISH

According to Wise (1971:3) and Hadnot (in Sandel 1982:87), the northern border of Vernon Parish does not run straight west to the Sabine River because when the parish was formed in 1871, John R. Smart realized he could leave behind "three political enemies by the names of Lucius, Nash, and Presley in Sabine Parish" by having the boundary turn southwest about ten miles from the river. Whether or not this is true, almost all we know about the formation of Vernon Parish comes from folk tradition. The few facts backed by documentation all revolve around the Smart family, and it would appear that the citizens of Vernon Parish owe their political beginnings largely to this family. Indeed, it was John R. Smart who, while serving as a senator from Sabine Parish, introduced the bill creating Vernon Parish (Wise 1971:78).<sup>1</sup>

The parish was formed out of parts of Rapides, Sabine, and Natchitoches Parishes on March 30, 1871. Its boundaries were designated as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> Smart was on Sabine Parish's first Police Jury, which met for the first time on June 19, 1843 (Armstrong 1958:62).



Figure 19 — A good home for a poor man in Vernon Parish (courtesy Museum of West Louisiana).

*Commencing at the mouth of Bayou Toro, upon the Sabine River, thence up said Toro to the township line between three and four, (3 and 4) thence east on said township line to the road known as Bevils (now Hardins) and Natchitoches Road, thence along said road in a northward direction to the township line between four and five (4 and 5) north, thence east on said township line to the Devil Creek, thence down said creek to the range line between four and five (4 and 5) west, thence south on said range line to the parish line of Calcasieu, thence west on said parish line to the Sabine River, thence up the Sabine to the point beginning. (Louisiana Historical Records Survey 1939:86–87)*

Present-day Fort Polk's Main Fort lies entirely within Vernon Parish, while Peason Ridge straddles the tricorner where Vernon, Sabine and Natchitoches Parishes meet.

Section 6 of the act creating the parish specified that the parish seat would be on or near Bayou Castor in Section 23, T2N R7W. This was land owned by Dr. Edmund Ellison Smart, son of John R., who had his office there and operated a store with I. O. Winfree (Wise 1971:3–4). The first Vernon Parish Police Jury, which included Dr. Smart as treasurer and Winfree as clerk of court, held their meetings in Smart's office.<sup>2</sup> But soon Smart donated eighty acres of land for the parish seat and courthouse grounds. (The present day courthouse stands on this same site.) He named the town

<sup>2</sup> Although Edmund Smart is consistently referred to as Dr. Smart in historical documents pertaining to Vernon Parish (e.g., Louisiana Historical Records Survey 1941, Police Jury Minutes, March 1893:299–301 and Wise 1971:29, 78), the 1880 census lists Smart as a dry goods merchant, probably because he co-owned a store with I. O. Winfree. Meanwhile, Samuel J. Smart, another son of John Smart who was living in Leesville in 1880, is listed as a physician. The census taker might have erred—one more example of the difficulty in sorting out the history of Vernon Parish.

Leesville.<sup>3</sup> On August 14, 1871, the Police Jury opened sealed bids for the construction of Vernon Parish's first courthouse. John F. Smart—who apparently was not Edmund's brother, but was surely related—was awarded the contract for \$2,260 (Louisiana Historical Records Survey n.d.a). Wise (1971:56) stated that the building cost \$4,250. This two-story, 50-by-100-foot pine structure was used until 1897.

Edmund Smart may have also been responsible for naming the parish. There is no documentation as to how Vernon Parish got its name, but folklore provides four possible explanations. The first is that Joe Moore, the parish's first tax collector, suggested the name of his racehorse, Vernon (Louisiana Historical Records Survey n.d.a, n.d.b; Wise 1971:3) The second claims the parish was named for Washington's Mount Vernon (Harris 1881:238). The third is that it was named for a popular local teacher, a former British naval officer, as a compromise since all the members on the naming committee were submitting their own names. The fourth and most intriguing story recounts Smart, Winfree, and the other founders meeting at Smart and Winfree's store to discuss the matter over a barrel of liquid refreshment. No name came forth until the committee noticed a Black man walking by, leading a mule. Winfree convinced the committee to name the parish after the mule, which was named for Joe Moore's horse, Vernon (Wise 1971:3). It is impossible to know which, if any, of these stories is true. It seem likely, however, that Edmund Smart was involved in selecting a parish name.

Edmund Smart would become a state senator in 1886 and president of the Vernon Parish Police Jury in 1899 (Louisiana Historical Records Survey n.d.a, n.d.b; Wise 1971:10). He was also Police Jury treasurer in 1891 (Louisiana Historical Records Survey 1941:1:66–68). John R. Smart would also serve as a senator for Vernon Parish. Another Smart, John F., would become the proprietor of the *Vernon News* in 1902 (Wise 1971:24).

He may have been a son of, or the same John F. who built the courthouse. In any case, all indications are that the Smart clan was instrumental in the creation and early growth of Vernon Parish.

Besides Edmund Smart, the first parish officers were N. H. Bray, parish judge; J. I. Kirk, sheriff; J. W. Moore, tax collector; and J. C. Munday, recorder. The parish quickly formed a Police Jury with H. W. Scoggins, president; I. O. Winfree, clerk; and members C. D. Collins, James Talbot, Elijah Self, and Thomas H. J. Richardson (Louisiana Historical Records Survey n.d.a). Police juries are similar to county councils and date back to the state's organization around 1811. The jury raises and appropriates funds for parish improvements and administers the parish's affairs (O'Halloran, October 4, 1951). Members are elected by wards, which are parish subdivisions. Originally, Vernon Parish was organized into six wards. In 1928, a seventh ward was carved out of the fourth ward, and in 1938 the eighth ward was carved out of Ward Six (Wise 1971:5) (Figure 20).

Parish boundaries have changed slightly over the years. The most significant change was in 1906, when the southern boundary was moved northward one-half a township (Louisiana Historical Records Survey n.d.a). In 1910 and 1912, the line along Devil's Creek was changed to follow the section and quarter section lines, first along the Vernon-Rapides line, then along the Vernon-Natchitoches line (Williamson 1956:11). Finally, in 1920, because the old road was no longer in use, the line along Bevil's Road was changed to a line established by the road crossing township lines.

#### **POPULATION AND SETTLEMENT**

As established in Chapter 3, it is estimated that three to four thousand people had settled in the region that became Vernon Parish by 1871. From 1880 until 1890 the population grew only 14 percent (Table 10). But it practically doubled in the ten years between 1890 and 1900 when the population stood at 10,327—a growth of 75 percent.

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<sup>3</sup> The hamlet of Huddleston, just a few miles south of Leesville, was probably the largest community in the region at this time. It would seem logical for the parish seat to have been located at Huddleston. Instead a new town was established. This is one more indication of the Smart family's powerful position in the community.



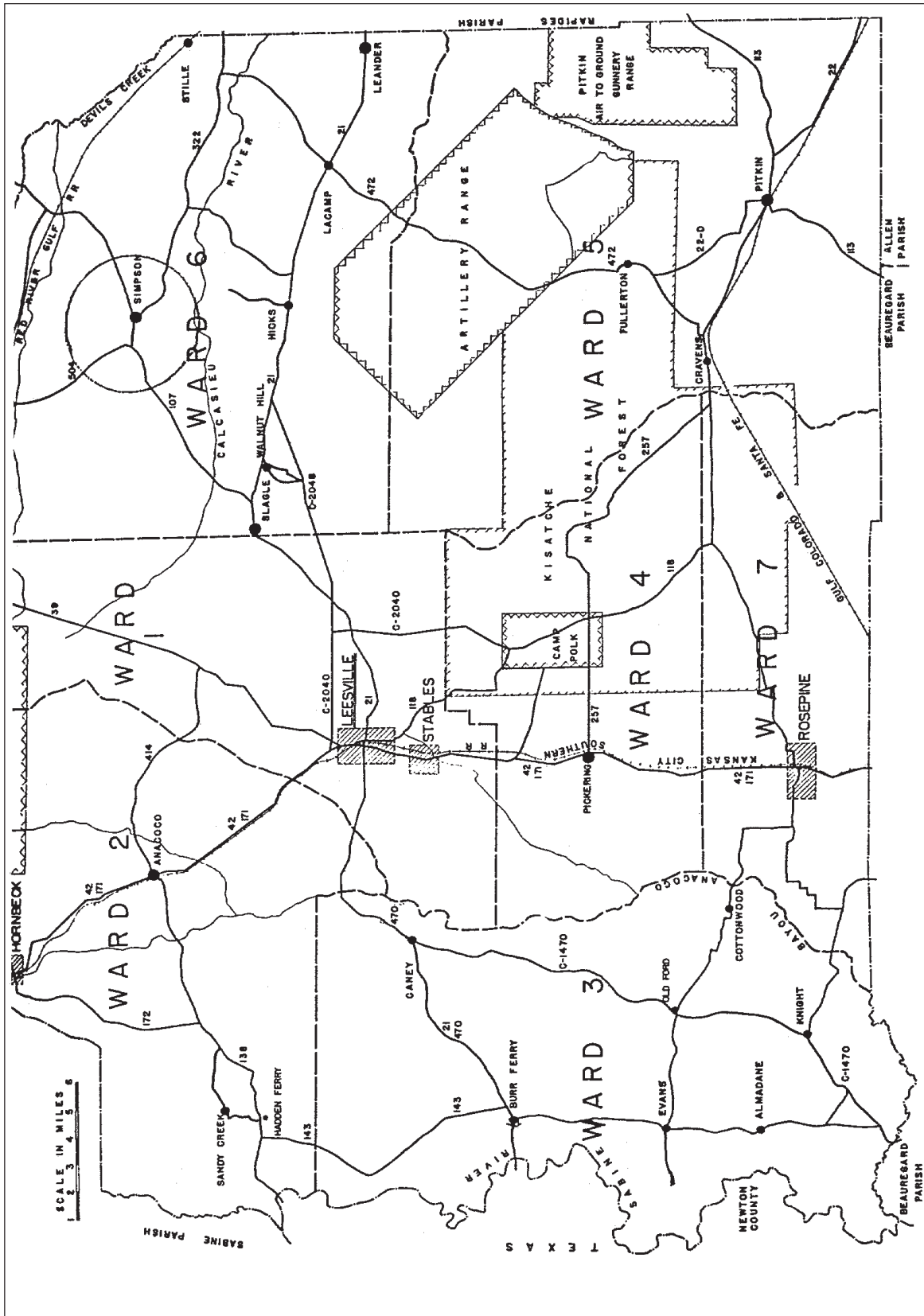


Figure 20 — Map of Vernon Parish wards, ca. 1928–1938 (from Lewis 1956:2).

Much of the growth in the 1890s was due to the railroad being built in 1897, its promise of development, and the arrival of industrial timber giants. But earlier growth was the result of Vernon Parish rising out of Reconstruction ashes and beginning a transformation from a self-sufficient, isolated, frontier community to a general, diversified, farming community, actively participating in the greater regional economy.

While not a direct indicator of the population growth between 1870 and 1897, the establishment of parish post offices supports other data indicating this steady growth. Between 1871 and 1879, only two new post offices were set up and two others reestablished at old hamlets. Thirteen post offices were established at new locations between 1880 and 1889, and eleven more from 1890 to 1897. But while the establishment dates in the 1880s are fairly spread out (from 1880 to 1889), the dates in the 1890s cluster. Five of the eleven post offices were opened in either 1891 or 1892. The other six were started in 1896 or 1897, right before and during the first railroad’s construction (Post Office Dept. 1973).

The 1890 census provides the first solid data concerning the sporadic settlement in the Fort Polk

region. In this census, the parish population is recorded by wards, numbered 1 through 6. While not a perfect fit, the Main Fort region is encompassed by Wards 4 and 5, with an insignificant fraction of the installation’s old artillery range in Ward 6 (see Figure 20). In 1890, Ward 4 had the lowest population of the six wards; Ward 5 ranked fourth. The population of both wards combined was only 1,648, or 28 percent of the parish’s total population. The fertile Anacoco River valley, Wards 2 and 3, accounted for 2,358 people or 40 percent of the population. Combined with the Calcasieu River area (Ward 6), these three wards accounted for 60 percent of the total parish population. Fort Polk’s hogwallow lands were largely avoided when subsistence farming was the dominant occupation. As the parish’s agrarian economy began to expand into diversified and general farming, these soils still were not attracting many folk.<sup>4</sup>

Looking ahead, the 1900 census figures (Table 11) strongly suggest that the railroad, and even the speculation in the 1890s about the railroad’s coming, had a significant and immediate effect on settlement. Taken in 1900, three years after the railroad’s arrival, the census indicates that a significant shift in the population occurred. Wards 3, 5, and 6 were some miles from the railroad. Wards 5 and 6 show only modest growth between 1890 and 1900, increasing by 211 and 12 people respectively. In those ten years, the population in Ward 3 actually decreased by 141. But where the railroad runs south through Wards 1, 2, and 4, there is a tremendous population increase. Population in Ward 2 grows by 822. In Ward 1, it nearly triples to 2,027 (mostly as a result of Leesville’s popula-

Table 10 — Vernon Parish population, 1880–1900.

<i>Year</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Total</i>
1880	4,783	377	0	5,160
1890	5,363	540	0	5,903
1900	9,048	1,279	0	10,327

Table 11 — Ward population, Vernon Parish 1890–1900.

<i>Year</i>	<i>Ward 1</i>	<i>Ward 2</i>	<i>Ward 3</i>	<i>Ward 4</i>	<i>Ward 5</i>	<i>Ward 6</i>
1890	737	1,059	1,299	714	934	1,160
1900	2,027 *	1,881	1,158	2,944	1,145	1,172

\* Includes Leesville’s populaton of 1,148.

<sup>4</sup> For the record, in comparing dates of death on tombstones at twenty-one cemeteries, there were sixty-eight people who died, were buried, and were provided with tombstones between 1872 and 1897.

tion growing to 1,148). Ward 4 more than quadruples its population to 2,944.

Of course not all of this growth was due to the railroad. In fact, there is no direct evidence that this population explosion occurred immediately after 1897 when the railroad was built. But the evidence strongly suggests a tie. Most importantly, plans for a railroad were being made as early as 1895, and no doubt the railroad was a popular topic long before that. Catherine Cole (Martha Field), for instance, mentions its upcoming effect on land values in her 1892 discussion of the parish. “In ten years from now [1902] that land will be along the line of a railroad, and every acre of it will be worth ten times its present price.” So even before the railroad was approved by a parish vote, people were already speculating on its potential for getting their agricultural products to market.

Despite the growth, throughout this period there was, as Harris had boasted in 1881, plenty of land available for all. A sense of just how much land was still available can be perceived through the census records. In 1880 there were only 732 farms spread across the 870,400 acres of Vernon Parish. Ten years later there were still only 841 farms.<sup>5</sup> Prime, fertile bottomland was still to be found, and the uplands must have been, for the most part, untouched.

According to the dates on the original government land surveys, most Fort Polk land was surveyed around 1881 to 1883, and the land in the Peason Ridge region around 1879.<sup>6</sup> Thus, it would appear that many of those who had settled in Vernon Parish during the antebellum period, and even in the 1870s and 1880s, simply took up residence as squatters, awaiting the opportunity to apply for legal title at a later date (Figure 21). Although settling on unsurveyed lands was not legal until after 1880 (Gates and Swenson 1968:394), this technicality was largely ignored. The Franklins, for example, first came to the Anacoco region in 1828

(see Chapter 3) and had been there ever since. Thomas Franklin, the son of Jonathan, obtained a legal deed to their 120-acre farm in 1876 from the Government Land Office (O’Halloran, January 10, 1952). Some waited even longer. Once surveyed, land was cheap and available from speculators.

*There are thousands of acres of land ready for homestead entry, and thousands more to be had at a cost an acre of a little more than the price of one tree. While I was in Leesville, the pretty pine-girt parish seat, two gentlemen, agents from Alexandria, were going through the country listing lands—that is locating lands that can be bought. In the neighborhood of Leesville they had listed 7,000 acres of this mighty forest at a uniform price of \$2.50 an acre. (Cole 1892)*

Though the government had passed a Homestead Act in 1862 and another in 1866 to assist Blacks and “loyal Whites” in obtaining land, few of either groups completed their land entries in Louisiana. These acts were mostly unsuccessful due to the backlog of unsurveyed lands, social and economic conditions of Reconstruction, and the closing of land offices (Oubre 1976). In fact, from 1871 to 1890, only 4,811 homestead entries were finalized in Louisiana (Gates and Swenson 1968:415). So, A. R. Dowden in the Kisatchie area could consider himself lucky since he had applied for and received 160 acres under the Homestead Act (Kadlecek and Bullard 1994:34).

Those who had settled in the area previously were predominantly white Anglo-Saxon, Upland South, Protestant, rural agrarian. The new arrivals between 1871 and 1897 were no different. A closer look at the first census of Vernon Parish in 1880 reveals that of 874 male heads of household, 330 were born in Louisiana. The rest were primarily from other southern states: Mississippi, 172; Ala-

<sup>5</sup> This acreage figure was taken from the Vernon Parish Planning Board’s 1949 publication. Thus, the actual number of acres in the late nineteenth century was much higher since the parish line was moved north at a later date.

<sup>6</sup> According to Pool (1992:7), the first survey of the Fort Polk region may have been taken as early as 1878, but he provides no source for this date.



Figure 21 — A homestead located within the Fort Polk Main Fort area, on Six Mile Creek (courtesy Museum of West Louisiana).

bama, 108; Georgia, 76; South Carolina, 38; Florida, 36; Texas, 34; Tennessee, 17; North Carolina, 16; Arkansas, 12; Virginia, 7; Kentucky, 2; and Missouri, 2. Unique places of birth included, one each from Ireland, Saxony, and Luxembourg; and five from England. Finally, a few were born in a scattering of northern states with Ohio having the largest native contingent at five. The nativity of the wives in these households were of similar representation with 332 from Louisiana, 163 from Mississippi, and 89 from Alabama (McManus 1989).

Other ethnic groups lived in the area, but in small numbers. The maximum African American population during this period was only 9 percent of the total population. This expanded to 12 percent after the railroad arrived and the lumber industry began attracting unemployed Blacks from other areas of Louisiana.

### ***The Redbones***

An important, albeit small group of people called the Redbones also lived in southeastern Vernon Parish. Davis's (1971:299) illustration of "cultural islands" in Louisiana indicates that the cultural hearth of the Redbones was centered around the intersection of the boundaries of Vernon, Rapides, and Allen Parishes. This area extended north to around Hinston, west and probably slightly into Fort Polk's eastern borders, and south to the Ten Mile region in modern Allen Parish.

In this region was a small branch of the Calcasieu River called Cherry Winche Creek. Located on the creek was the enclave called the Cherry Winche Country, which seems to have been the Redbones' heartland although there were other enclaves (Marler and McManus 1993:v). Again, Redbone history is so tightly intertwined with folklore, it is impossible to sort fact from fiction. Little



documentation exists. Readers can further refer to Marler (1994) and Marler and McManus (1993) to help make their own determination of veracity.

As stated earlier in Chapter 3, the Redbones are said to be a mixed breed of American Indian, Black, and Mediterranean peoples, who were among the first to settle in the Neutral Ground and fiercely defended the land from intruders:

*But their common denominator may be set down as that nucleus formed from the exiles of Los Adaes, the remnants of the Pirate Crews which infested the Sabine Coast, the strays from the dwindling Indian Tribes and escaped Negro and Apache slaves. This combination of blood produced a hybrid element of humanity whose cunning, treachery and downright malevolence have never been surpassed by any people in the history of the world. (Marler and McManus 1993:21)*

The Redbones were also said to be clannish, brave, proud, recognizing an equality among their own, and hostile to outsiders who might travel or settle within their homeland (Marler and McManus 1993:2). Being neither Black nor White, they were not accepted by either culture (Marler 1994:38). That there exists or existed an amalgam of non-Anglos in this region, there is little doubt. Kniffen, Gregory, and Stokes (1987) make brief mention of them in their research on Native Americans of Louisiana. But the Redbones' origins, as described by Marler and McManus, stretch plausibility. That Native Americans (Apache!), Mediterraneans (Portuguese!), Spanish, and Blacks could intermingle in the Neutral Ground and form a homogenous culture within a few generations seems incredulous. More probably, these people are a mix of Blacks and Native Americans (Attakapa). Whatever their origins, further scholarly research is needed to understand this extremely interesting ethnic group, especially as their identity rests almost entirely around the Westport fight (see this chapter).

#### **AGRICULTURE**

It was during the period between 1871 and 1897 that Vernon Parish's agrarian community began a

gradual transition from predominately subsistence farming to a mix of subsistence and generalized or diversified farming. The latter is defined here as farming in which a cash crop is produced for sale at a local or regional market. The number of general farms appears to have reached its peak during the late 1890s and early twentieth century, before logging became the prevalent occupation. Both subsistence and general farmers were either the sons and daughters of the first pioneers to enter this lawless land or restless White yeomen who came to Vernon Parish after the war seeking a new life and lifestyle in a setting similar to their woodland environment in the east.

*They raise all they consume: know nothing of luxuries beyond gorgeous cooking stoves; have dim ideas about life or property insurance outside of the towns; save their money in a stocking foot; go to camp meeting once a year; have a deer drive and a fishing bout whenever they can, and are happy and contented where you and I are sad and sour. (Cole 1892)*

Census data clearly supports the notion that during the late nineteenth century, Vernon Parish was home to the Upland South White, yeoman farmer, an owner-operator of independent mind and resources. Listed occupations in 1880, for instance, were overwhelmingly farming and house-keeping. Another large occupation category was laborer (as opposed to farm laborer), but one wonders how many of those declaring this occupation were actually also farm laborers. Interestingly, no one listed themselves as preacher, lawyer, inn or tavern keeper, or law enforcement officer. Obviously people fulfilled such functions, but more than likely they considered farming their primary occupation, which reveals the strong ties to agriculture at this time. The vast majority of women were housekeepers. Other occupations included fifteen merchants/clerks, ten millers or millworkers, four lumbermen, six schoolteachers, three physicians, four blacksmiths, five teamsters, a ferryman, a raftsmen, three mail riders, three midwives, a nurse, and a seamstress (McManus 1989).

Table 12 — Vernon Parish farms by size (in acres), 1880–1890.

<i>Year</i>	<i>&lt;3</i>	<i>3–9</i>	<i>10–19</i>	<i>20–49</i>	<i>50–99</i>	<i>100–499</i>	<i>500–999</i>	<i>1000+</i>	<i>Total Farms</i>
1880	0	32	160	348	116	76	0	0	732
1890	–	23	121	165	59	458	12	3	841

Table 13 — Vernon Parish farms by size and tenure, 1880–1890.

<i>Size (acres)</i>	<i>Owned</i>		<i>Rented</i>		<i>Shared</i>	
	<i>1880</i>	<i>1890</i>	<i>1880</i>	<i>1890</i>	<i>1880</i>	<i>1890</i>
<3	0	0	0	0	0	0
3–9	25	8	0	4	7	11
10–19	139	35	0	29	21	57
20–49	332	110	0	21	16	34
50–99	114	56	1	1	1	2
100–499	76	446	0	1	0	11
500–999	0	12	0	0	0	0
1000	0	3	0	0	0	0
<i>Total Farms</i>	686	670	1	56	45	115

Farm size is another strong indicator of the region’s subsistence and general farm mix. The average farm size in the state was 171 acres. The 732 farms spread across Vernon Parish’s landscape during the 1880s averaged only forty-eight acres, the lowest average in the state. The second lowest average was in Orleans Parish. At eighty-eight acres, the average farm size was still almost twice that in Vernon Parish. The census indicates there were no farms of 500 acres or larger, and 192 farms (26 percent) were less than 20 acres (Table 12).

Assuming farm size is related to the type of farming conducted,<sup>7</sup> it appears that a modest change to more diversified, generalized farming occurred during the next ten years. By 1890, the number of farms did not significantly increase—only by 15 percent to 841—but average farm size was 125 acres. Some 54 percent of the farms were between 100 and 499 acres, and there were even a few large holdings over 500 acres (Table 12).

Further supporting the independent owner-operator premise is the census data regarding land tenure (Table 13). In 1880, there were only forty-five farmers on shares in Vernon Parish and one renter. Almost 94 percent of Vernon Parish farmers were owners; only 6 percent were on shares; only 1 percent were renters. Statewide, only 65 percent of Louisiana farmers were owners; 21 percent were on shares; and 14 percent were renters. In 1890, there was a modest increase in tenancy across the state, share tenancy rising by 6 percent. Some 56 percent of the state’s farms were owned, 27 percent were sharecropped, and 17 percent were rented (Davis 1971:296). Vernon Parish sharecropper population rose by 8 percent to 14 percent. But the greatest increase, 7 percent, was in renters. Still, in Vernon Parish, 79 percent of its farms were owned.

Comparatively speaking, Vernon Parish farmers were an economically sound group. Further-

<sup>7</sup> The assumption here is that a small farm of twenty to fifty acres would be most likely a subsistence farm, the crop being devoted to supporting the family. A larger landholding of sixty or more acres and especially those of one hundred acres or more would more likely be producing a cash crop. Of course, much of these large landholdings may have been woodland, but generally the assumption should hold true (see Chapter 5).

more, some 10 percent of Vernon Parish sharecroppers were farming more than 100 acres in 1890. This arrangement would indicate that the sharecropper was economically better off than what might be imagined as the typical poor, landless cropper on full shares.

Other census data support the notion that Vernon Parish and west-central Louisiana had made strides in recovering from the war's destruction and Reconstruction. While there is no directly comparative data for the Vernon Parish region in 1870, data from Sabine, Natchitoches, and Rapides Parishes show real growth. In 1870 there were 5,910 horses, 4,043 mules, and 34,059 swine in these three parishes. During the same period, these parishes produced 567,845 bushels of corn, 27,154 bales of cotton, and 81,664 bushels of sweet potatoes. In 1880, this same area, now incorporating the parishes of Sabine, Rapides, Natchitoches, Red River, and Vernon, had 11,393 horses (93 percent increase), 4,105 mules (1.5 percent increase), and 92,407 swine (171 percent increase). This same census recorded 857,296 bushels of corn (51 percent increase), 48,797 bales of cotton (80 percent increase), and 107,717 bushels of sweet potatoes (32 percent increase), with Vernon Parish leading the way with some 32,538 bushels of sweet potatoes (30 percent increase).

For the most part, this growth continued in Vernon Parish for the next ten years (Table 14). Corn production increased by 43 percent, cotton, just slightly, by 15 percent, and sweet potatoes by 47

percent. The production of wool increased dramatically by some 83 percent. Cow peas and oats decreased. Livestock did not show as dramatic an increase during this period though (Table 15). Horses and mules actually decreased; milk and beef cattle increased by only 1,782, or 20 percent. Swine also decreased. Interestingly, 11,058 swine died in 1889 when the census was taken.

Pool (1992) provides a close-up of the “wealth” of the typical late-nineteenth-century subsistence and general farmer just south of Fort Polk. He lists the taxable value of twenty-two farmers on the 1895 tax list in the Providence community. Table 16 provides a breakdown for ten of these farms. The list includes J. C. Davis, who with some 760 acres of land would have been considered quite a wealthy man for the region.

It is important to note that the typical farmers noted in Table 16 had much of their wealth tied up in cattle and hogs. In the pine uplands, the infertile soils made farming difficult and chancy, but it was ideal grazing land. “For one must not think these pine forests are bare of grass. To the contrary, the sweet succulent grass is almost knee deep on the Vernon hills; the cattle to be seen are rolling in fat” (Cole 1892). So too, hogs were in “hog heaven” in the mast-filled pine forests. Both cattle and hogs roamed free, while crops were fenced in for protection from the animals. Traditional rural code of behavior dictated that animals could roam and graze on all open land regardless of ownership, as codified in Louisiana's free-range laws.

Table 14 — Selected crop production in Vernon Parish, 1880–1890.

<i>Year</i>	<i>Corn (bu)</i>	<i>Cotton (bales)</i>	<i>Sweet Potatoes (bu)</i>	<i>Wool (lbs)</i>	<i>Cow Peas (bu)</i>	<i>Oats (bu)</i>
1880	74,234	1,662	32,538	8,626	8,753	5,083
1890	105,995	1,903	47,684	15,751	951	4,181

Table 15 — Selected livestock in Vernon Parish, 1880–1890.

<i>Year</i>	<i>Horses</i>	<i>Mules</i>	<i>Oxen</i>	<i>Milch Cows</i>	<i>Cattle</i>	<i>Sheep</i>	<i>Swine</i>
1880	1,677	97	896	2,862	5,965	2,931	17,875
1890	1,550	92	1,217	3,004	7,605	7,045	12,362

Table 16 — Tax list for ten farms in the Providence Community, 1895 (Pool 1992:19).

<i>Name</i>	<i>Livestock/Value</i>	<i>Land Value</i>	<i>Other/Value</i>
J. R. Calcote	1 mare, 14 cattle, 10 hogs, 2 oxen/\$120	\$50	—
Charles Gunter	1 mare, 6 cattle/\$45	\$15	—
James White	1 mare, 8 cattle, 6 oxen/\$95	\$35	1 wagon/\$15
John Woodard	1 horse, 2 cattle/\$25	\$10	—
Gentry Johnson	1 mare, 20 hogs/\$30	\$20	—
Mrs. Elizabeth Gill	6 cattle, 2 oxen, 15 sheep/\$55	\$20	—
J. C. Davis	2 horses, 55 cattle, 15 hogs, 2 oxen, 360 sheep/\$800	\$1,000 (760 acres)	1 wagon/\$15
Joseph Austin	2 oxen/\$15	—	—
M. V. Johnson	10 horses, 6 cattle/\$40	\$25	—
William White	1 mare, 1 cattle, 2 oxen, 10 hogs/\$45	\$15	1 wagon/\$5

The open-range tradition caused many problems when cutover and abandoned timber land was bought as public land (see Chapter 5). Each farmer earmarked his hogs for identification; those found without an earmark could be otherwise claimed and marked (Wright 1942:113). Every year hogs were rounded up using either corn to attract them or cur dogs especially trained for such work (Kadlecek and Bullard 1994:199; Sandel 1982:25). During these roundups, hogs were earmarked, the males castrated, and some butchered.

The Report of Cotton Production for the southern states in the 1880 census gives more details of Vernon Parish farming practices. R.T. Wright, who owned a farm in Section 15, T3N R10W on the Anacoco Prairie—some of the parish’s richest farmland—reported to the census that each spring he generally tilled six to twelve inches deep using a bull tongue plow pulled by two mules or horses. Farmers rotated crops in the following order: cotton (two years), then corn (two years), followed by oats and sweet potatoes. The cotton reached eighteen to twenty-four inches by June, and in August the first bolls opened. Cotton was picked from September to December. In that area of Louisiana, 1,425 pounds of cotton made a 475- pound bale, which was shipped to Alexandria for \$2.

### ***Farming Challenges***

Despite a slight increase in farm productivity and abundant signs of population growth and rural development, it would be wrong to paint a utopian

landscape. The Vernon Parish countrymen were constantly challenged by the forces of nature. In 1896, the parish was threatened by smallpox. To oversee the threat, Dr. Smart was elected by the Police Jury to become the board of health’s executive officer (Louisiana Historical Records Survey 1941:1:297–301). Statewide, yellow fever ravaged the countryside from 1878 to 1880, and again in 1883, 1897, and 1899 (Davis 1971:324).

Severe frosts occurred in 1891, and a cold snap in 1892 ruined many crops (Daniel 1943:1071). Even as the railroad was bringing hope of economic prosperity, a “catastrophic drought” hit the northern parishes, including Vernon, in 1896–1897 (Hair 1969:272). With crops devastated, subsistence farmers were close to starvation. A Baton Rouge newspaper reported that thousands in Vernon and Sabine Parishes were without food and “almost naked” (Hair 1969:272). In January, M.N. Smart put forth a motion in a Police Jury meeting to appeal to the governor for aid to destitute parish farmers who had failed to make a crop. The motion was adopted (Louisiana Historical Records Survey 1941:1:389–391). Food was provided by the Louisiana State Relief Committee. In Sabine Parish, the railroad agreed to transport these provisions at no charge (Belisle 1912:121).

Vernon Parish farmers were not alone in their crises. The slow increase in crop production during these years did not produce a corresponding increase in wealth for the American farmer. Across the nation, prices declined steadily from 1870 to



1897 (Hicks 1961:55). In the South, a lack of capital created a crop lien system whereby merchants provided the farmer with needed goods in exchange for a lien on the next crop (Daniel 1943:1057; Hicks 1961:40). If that crop failed, the farmer became indebted to the merchant until the debt was fully repaid. A farmer under the lien system was tied to a particular merchant and to the merchant's close scrutiny. Although this system was more prevalent in the cotton-growing regions, some Vernon Parish farmers must also have been tied to this system, since the parish became a hotbed of Populist sentiment and the lien system was a Populist flashpoint (see later in this chapter).

### LUMBERING

Although Vernon Parish's halcyon days of industrial lumbering were a few years in the future, logging had begun in the parish's western portion during the antebellum period (Figure 22). It increased steadily during the 1880s. Timber near the Sabine and the Anacoco was cut out and rafted

downriver to the mills along Sabine's Texas bank near Orange (Maxwell and Baker 1983:53; Stokes 1959:87). In fact, logs were being floated down the Sabine from as far north as Hamilton, upstream of Vernon Parish (U.S. House of Representatives 1892:3). However, the lumber traffic floating down the lower Calcasieu surpassed the 1880s traffic on the Sabine River.

Around Lake Charles, a number of lumber mills were established at this time, processing a huge volume of Calcasieu logs. In 1876, the H. C. Drew Lumber Company began operating, and, in 1884, the Calcasieu Lumber Company started up. Calcasieu Lumber soon became the Bradley-Ramsey Lumber Company and provided the city's largest payroll for more than twenty years (Block 1996:42–43). Once, a Calcasieu company cut 148,000 board feet of lumber in eleven hours (Stokes 1959:86). Much of this timber came from the region below Vernon Parish, but Stokes (1959:86) indicates that the Whiskey Chitto and Bundick Creek were among the Calcasieu tribu-



Figure 22 — Early loggers relied on mules and slip-tongue carts to move logs to rivers and mills (courtesy Museum of West Louisiana).

taries used for rafting logs down to Lake Charles. These streams could only float logs during spring freshets. An 1881 government survey of the Calcasieu reported that above Phillips Bluff, the waters were “very rapid, shallow, [with] many timber obstructions...only suited for running saw-logs during short periods of flood” (U.S. House of Representatives 1881:2). Still, it is likely that in the 1880s, and even as early as the 1870s, Fort Polk timber was being cut and rafted to Lake Charles at a steady rate.

Along the Calcasieu, timber was cut all year and stored in the bayous until the spring floods. Then log rafts were constructed, like those on the Sabine (Kadlecek and Bullard 1994:77). Floater logs formed the cribs of these rafts; non-floating logs were used as cross pieces. The cribs were tied together with rope. Farmers cut their own timber and hauled the logs to the creeks and rivers with oxen. Part-time loggers then floated the logs downstream to the mouth of the Calcasieu and sold them to timber buyers. Controlling the logs was difficult and dangerous work; some escaped to float freely out into the gulf. On the Sabine, loggers made larger rafts, some with as many as ten or twelve logs and measuring thirty or forty feet long with a cook shack on top (Maxwell and Baker 1983:54).

It is difficult to determine exactly how many and what kind of mills were operating in Vernon Parish during this period. Kadlecek and Bullard (1994:77) write that, a number of water-powered sawmills began to operate in the Kisatchie hills region in the 1890s. Perhaps some old gristmills were converted to sawmills. Some mills, including Stephens Mill on Mill Creek five miles southwest of Leesville, Langton and Hugh Mills on Sandy Creek, and the Koonce Brothers Mill on Big Sandy Creek, may actually have been started at this time (Wise 1971:13). Within Fort Polk’s Main Fort, several mills were operating (again, with the above chronological caveat), including Golemon Mill, Weeks Mill, and Haymons Mill, all on Little Six Mile. Swain’s Mill is shown on the 1880s Government Land Office survey maps along Six Mile Creek within Fort Polk. But few if any of these mills are reflected in the U.S. Census, which

recorded only manufactories valued at \$500 or more. In Vernon Parish, only three manufactories are listed in 1890; this category included mills and other kinds of manufactories. Obviously, the northern lumber giants had not yet come to Louisiana, as the entire state had only 175 sawed-lumber establishments listed in this census. Reflecting the fact that the great cutover period in Vernon Parish was soon to begin, Calcasieu Parish had sixteen of these larger establishments, the lumber obviously coming from the Calcasieu’s tributaries. Between 1880 and 1890, 1,370,332 acres of Louisiana timberland were purchased in sections of 5,000 acres or larger by Northern individuals or companies, while only 261,932 acres were purchased by Southern individuals or groups (Gates and Swenson 1968:448). The lumber barons were buying and holding the lands for the future while still operating their northern mills (see Chapter 5).

Despite the early establishment of sawmills along the lower Sabine and Calcasieu Rivers, Vernon Parish’s vast timber resources were, for all practical purposes, untouched. Until the railroads were built into the timberlands, only the best timber near rivers and streams could be cut and sold downstream for profit. The sawmills established up to this point served mostly local needs and were just beginning to have a national impact. As Charles Mohr reported, “The pine region west of the Red River valley...includes the whole parish of Vernon. The northern portion of this belt is one vast primeval forest. The small inroads made by the scattered settlers and the few small saw-mills which supply a small local demand are too insignificant to be taken into account” (Mohr in Sargent 1884:538–539). There were millions of *Pinus palustris* (longleaf pine) still awaiting the saw in western Louisiana. Sargent estimated that in 1880 as much as 3,741,000,000 board feet of merchantable pine was available in Vernon Parish alone (Sargent 1884:537).

#### **THE TRANSPORTATION LANDSCAPE**

As the population increased, it would be expected that road traffic also increased. But contemporary regional maps do little to expand our knowledge of the transportation system beyond what was dis-

cussed in Chapter 3. Colton’s 1876 map (see Figure 13) and Lockett’s 1876 map (Figure 23) provide the most reliable information about the parish’s major road network during the late nineteenth century—or at least they seem to agree. Both maps show the east-west route running from Alexandria to Hineston, through modern-day Fort Polk to Huddleston, and on to Burr’s Ferry. Both maps indicate that, within the fort, a branch road splits off from this road and runs south to Davis Mill. This road disappears from maps around the turn of the century. Both maps also depict the main trail running north-south from Many to Davis Mill and passing through Sibley’s Mill and Huddleston. The railroad will follow this route very closely.

Other important trails included a route running from the parish’s northeast corner through Walnut Hill to Huddleston, and another little trail running from Huddleston south into Calcasieu Parish west of the Many to Davis Mill road. It is interesting to note how many of these nineteenth-century routes intersect at Huddleston. This road system is another indication that, before Leesville, Huddleston was the center of early west-central Louisiana traffic and, by extrapolation, probably its economic and political center as well. With the creation of Leesville, the political and economic center shifted, as did Vernon Parish’s transportation landscape.

There was no doubt that the thoroughfare between Leesville and Hineston was the main traveled road (Cole 1892). But this was an exception. Most of the other main roads were still little more than wagon ruts cut through the pine forest. Branching off at random intervals from these thoroughfares were smaller trails. These little trails, or “neighborhood” roads, appeared no different from the main thoroughfares, except that they would dead-end at little cabins and farms—utterly frustrating strangers. Cole [Field] relates her experience with the Vernon Parish’s transportation system in 1892:

*At the farmhouse I had been told to keep on the trail of the mail cart that passed down the day before. This was not easy to do on the carpet of dead pine needles, and Ned and I*

*often left the buggy at the fork of a road to search ahead...for some sign of a trail; broken pine needles where a country’s pony’s unshod hoof had been—fresh signs of manure—these were signs enough to send us on our way.*

*[Later] we pushed on, knowing now we were off course....Nothing was left of the road, save where here and there a white gash on a tree showed the way had been blazed by somebody. We crashed on over roots and scrub oaks that, bending, lashed the ponies flanks. (Cole 1892)*

The travelers eventually “scuffed hopefully into the dust of a main traveled road” and found their way to Leesville. Government Land Office survey maps of various townships and ranges during the early 1880s indicate that these neighborhood trails were fairly numerous across the landscape, even in the Fort Polk region (Figure 24).

From Cole’s description, it would appear that the road conditions in the 1890s had changed little since the time of the first pioneers, despite the road overseer system established when the region was tied to Rapides and Sabine Parishes. As mentioned, police juries assigned residents sections of road to maintain. From a review of the Vernon Parish Police Jury minutes, the jury spent considerable time assigning and reassigning road crews and voting on citizens’ requests for new roads and changes in the current road system. A typical late-nineteenth-century entry for the Fort Polk region reads, “Mr. Davis presented a petition from the 4th Ward asking for a change in the road leading from Petersburg [Huddleston] to Whiscachitto Creek near the residence of Mr. [?]. A. Davis, which was laid over till next meeting and the following reviewers appointed to review said change” (Louisiana Historical Records Survey 1941:1:42). It is possible that at least a part of this road exists as Louisiana Avenue leading into Fort Polk today.

Each road section was assigned a number when the Police Jury approved its construction. For instance, in 1912 road overseers were assigned to another little trail within Fort Polk as follows: “Leesville to Bull Branch—John Rus Smart; Bull Branch to A. James—Bill Cryer; A. James to Cen-



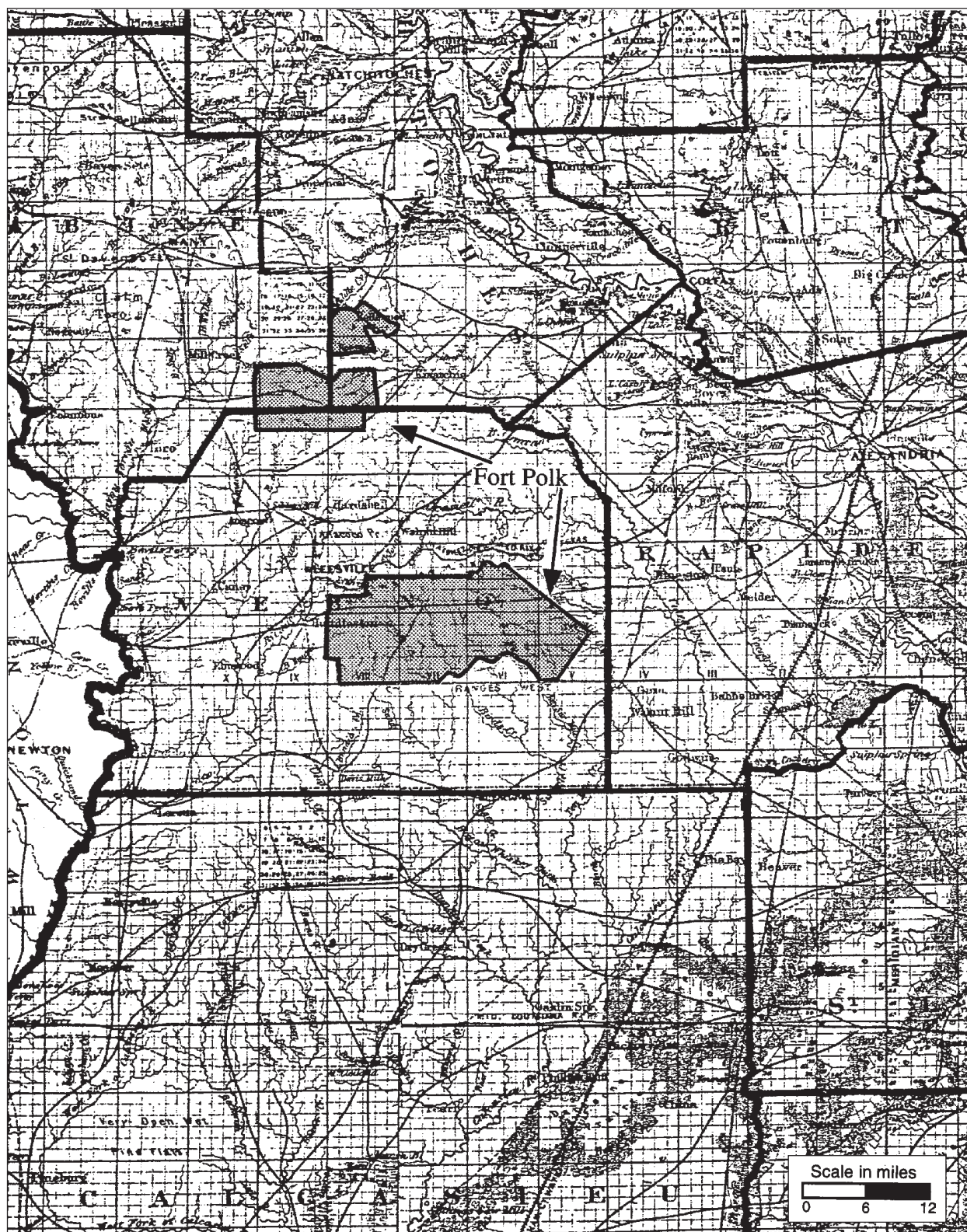


Figure 23 — S. H. Lockett's 1876 map of Louisiana, revised 1891 (on file, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge).



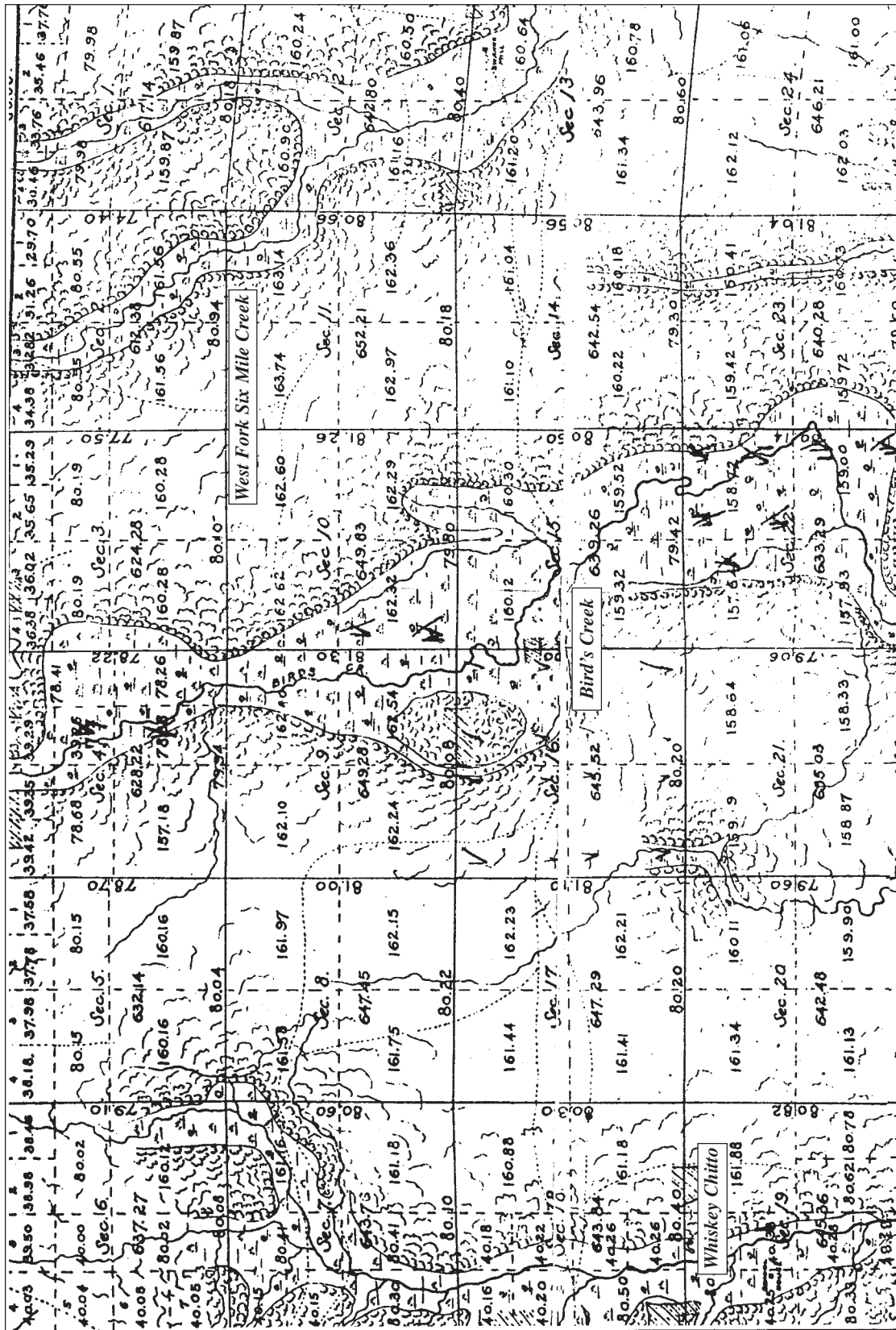


Figure 24 — North half of Government Land Office map of T1N R7W, 1882 (on file, Louisiana State Land Office, Baton Rouge).

ter Whiskey Chitto–J. T. Bates; Center Whiskey Chitto to Arnolds–S. A. Nolen; Arnolds to Parish line–Henry Davis” [punctuation revised] (Louisiana Historical Records Survey 1941:1:700).

In 1897 the Police Jury passed a road law enacting various means by which roads would be built and maintained (Figure 25). The law stated that all males between eighteen and fifty years of age, except ministers and a few others, were subject to work on the parish’s public roads. A list was made and the men on the list were to be given ten-days notice for road duty. This duty could not exceed twelve days per year. Fines were enacted for those who ignored the call. A standard road width of eighteen feet was set, fourteen of which were to be cleared of all obstructions. No stumps above six inches high were allowed within this fourteen-foot center. However, the overseer could ignore removing stumps and other obstructions if

there was ample room to go around these obstacles. Bridges and crossways over sloughs or low areas could be as narrow as twelve feet. A \$30 fine was enacted for obstructing roads (Louisiana Historical Records Survey 1941:1:4449–4453).

### ***The Railroad Vote***

A repetitive theme in west-central Louisiana history is the region’s isolation. This was exacerbated by the poor road condition and the Sabine River’s unreliability, which combined to stymie Vernon Parish’s industrial development. All this changed with the completion of the Kansas City, Shreveport, and Gulf (KCS & G) Railway, which ran north and south through the parish’s heartland. As has been proven and will be discussed further, the Vernon Parish settlement pattern was radically altered. Its total cultural and natural landscape, and its history, would change with this railroad. Ironi-



*Figure 25 — Work crews attempted to maintain early roads under difficult conditions (courtesy Museum of West Louisiana).*

cally, the decision to allow the railroad's entry passed by only four votes after at least one and perhaps two previous failures (Dalehite 1962:1; Louisiana Historical Records Survey 1941:1:303).

In fact, the railroad's construction may not have been as difficult as the struggle to get the west-central Louisiana population to agree to a property tax assessment to help pay for it. As early as 1890, Sabine Parish attempted to levy a five-mil property valuation for ten years for the KCS & G Railway (Belisle 1912:118). Two years later, on January 3, 1893, the Vernon Parish Police Jury received a petition from some one-third of its residents to impose a five-mil tax to support the Natchez, Alexandria, and Texas Railroad Company's building of an east-west railroad through the parish. A special election was to be held on February 9, 1893. The Sabine Parish initiative failed, and probably the Vernon Parish initiative also, because no further mention is made in the parish Police Jury records (Dalehite 1962:4; Louisiana Historical Records Survey 1941:1:150). The two parishes tried again in 1895, this time their mutual elections were scheduled to coincide and include an election in DeSoto Parish (Belisle 1912:120). Vernon's vote just barely passed 463 to 459, but Sabine's passed by a wide margin of 544 to 438. DeSoto's vote must have been positive, although the count is not known. The effect of this vote will be discussed in Chapter 5.

#### VILLAGES, HAMLETS, AND POST STOPS

The parish's growth is best indicated in the list of small communities that appeared across the Vernon Parish landscape during this period. Although the following places named cannot all be considered hamlets, they do identify population clusters dense enough to warrant, for instance, a post office and general store.

##### *Adaline*

The Adaline post office opened in 1891 with Wayne German as postmaster and was discontinued the following year. Mail was then sent to Anacoco (Post Office Dept. 1973). Not illustrated on any maps, Adaline's exact location is a mystery. It is assumed to be near Anacoco in Ward 2.

##### *Almadane*

The post office at Almadane was established in 1882 with Dan Knight as postmaster. John Knight took the position in 1886, and James M. Oakes in 1896 (Post Office Dept. 1973). This little hamlet in Ward 3 was southeast of Burr's Ferry (Figure 26). It survives into the twentieth century, although it never became a major village. Around 1892, its population was about sixty (Goodspeed Publishing 1892:206 [1975]).

##### *Alliance*

This little post office stop at Alliance was first established in 1892 with James Cryer as postmaster (Post Office Dept. 1973). Its exact location is unknown, but it was discontinued in 1899. The mail was directed to Rosepine, so it is assumed to have been somewhere in the south-central part of Vernon Parish in Ward 4 (modern Ward 7).

##### *Anacoco*

Anacoco thrived from 1871 to 1897. It was often depicted on contemporary maps, including the 1885 postal route map (Figure 26), probably because it was on the main route south from Many and an important stop along the way for travelers. Anacoco would benefit from the railroad in 1897. Anacoco postmasters during this period included James Kirk (Kirks Mill?) in 1875 and Emma Kirk in 1894 (Post Office Dept. 1973). The post office's name changed to Orange in 1899.

##### *Black (Black Cottage and Cottage)*

A post office was established just northwest of Leesville in 1873, but was discontinued in 1880 or 1888. Cavil Spray (?) was the postmaster (Post Office Dept. 1973). Postal records as well as maps are difficult to interpret, and it is not known if the hamlet was called Black, Black Cottage, or just Cottage. Gray's 1880 map (Figure 27) indicates Black Land with Cottage written below it. But the 1885 postal map (Figure 26) simply labels the same point as Cottage.

##### *Burr's Ferry (Burrs Ferry or Burr Ferry)*

The post office at Burr's Ferry (Figures 26 and 27) was reestablished in 1873 with John Liles as



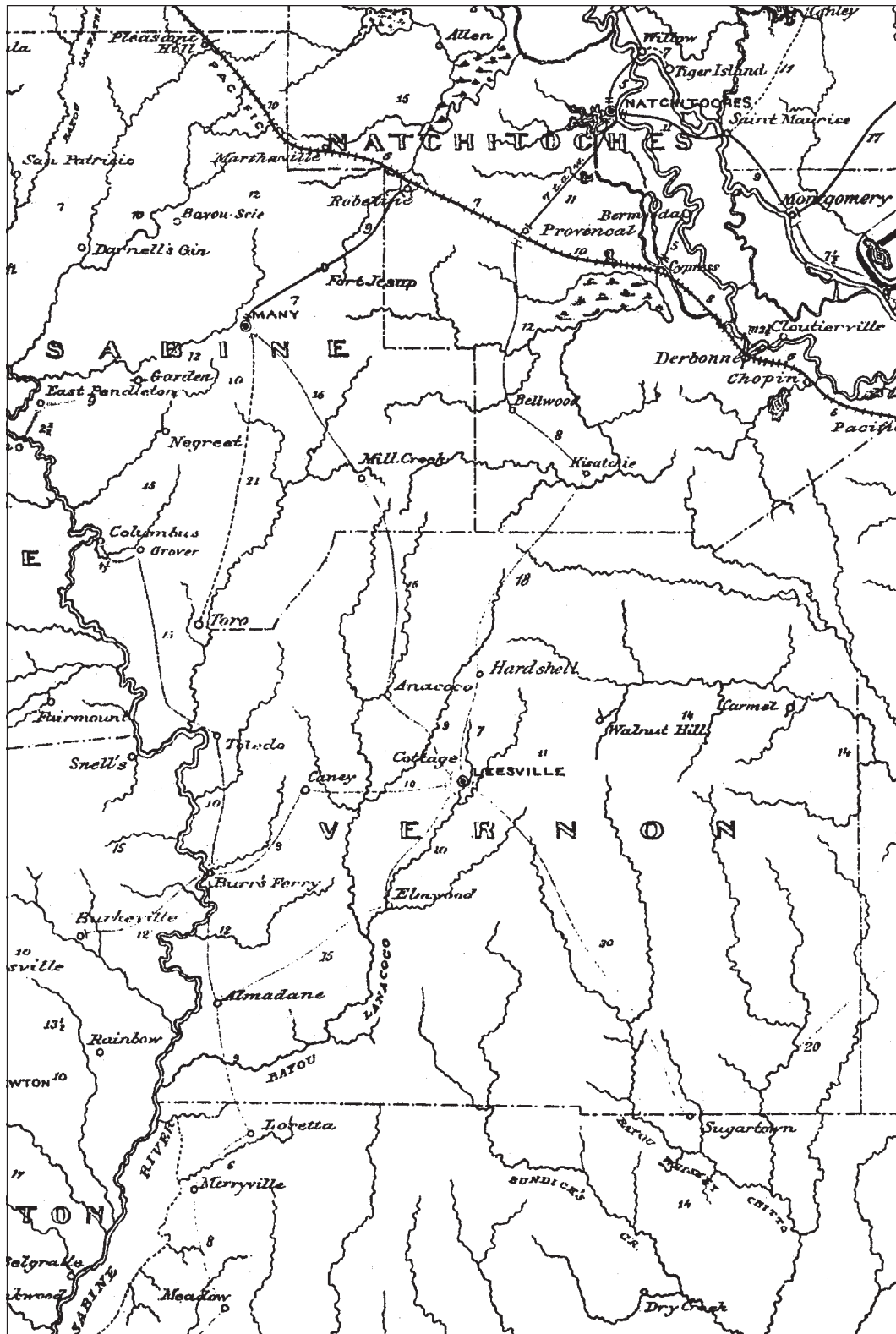


Figure 26 — Postal map of Louisiana, circa 1885 (on file, Cartographic Records, National Archives, College Park, Maryland).



the first postmaster after the war. Through this period, Charles Burr (1876), James Roebuck (1879), Thomas Wingate (1889), Jason Cavanaugh (1892), and Lafayette Jackson (1893) were all postmasters (Post Office Dept. 1973). The population of this important ferry crossing was fifty-five in 1892 (Goodspeed Publishing 1892:206 [1975]; Wise 1971:47). The importance of Burr’s Ferry to travelers is demonstrated in that it was almost always illustrated on both contemporary and later maps.

**Caney**

Caney is illustrated on several maps. A post office was established here in 1880, with Thomas Richardson as postmaster (Post Office Dept. 1973). Although located on the old road between Burr’s

Ferry and Leesville (Figure 26), it never developed beyond the post office-general store level. Nevertheless, it was a post office until 1914.

**Carmel**

The post office stop at Carmel functioned from 1881 until 1882 when the mails moved to Leesville. Aplin Chilly was postmaster (Post Office Dept. 1973). Carmel’s location is not clear. The 1885 postal map (Figure 26) shows a “Carmel” in the parish’s northeast corner along the Calcasieu River near Flactor Bayou, more than fifteen miles from Leesville. It seems doubtful that the mails would be moved to Leesville when the Walnut Hill post office, only a few miles away, was already open in 1882. So perhaps there was another Carmel somewhere near Leesville.

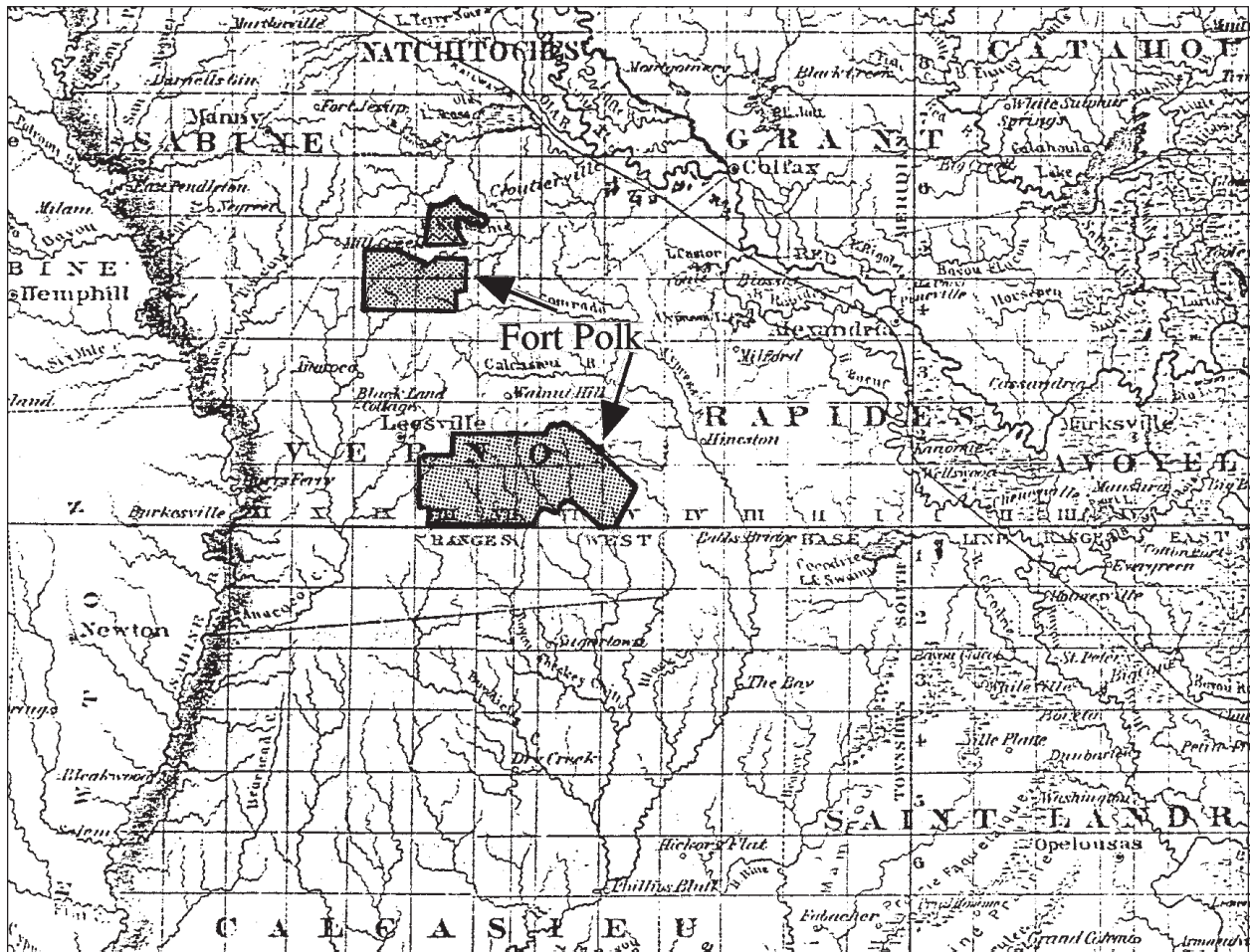


Figure 27 — Section from “Gray’s New Map of Louisiana,” 1880.

### ***Conrad***

A post office called Conrad was in existence from 1892 until 1898 with Napoleon Johnson and then John Hunt (1894) as postmasters (Post Office Dept. 1973). It is not illustrated on any contemporary maps and its location is a mystery. However, its mails were transferred to Slabtown when it closed, so it may have been in the parish's southeastern region.

### ***Cora***

Cora became a post office stop beginning in 1887 and grew throughout the postbellum period. The first postmaster was Michael Smith, the second Catherine Boyd (1895) (Post Office Dept. 1973). Contemporary maps do not illustrate this post office, but a 1913 map (see Chapter 6, Figure 37) indicates that it was located along the parish's eastern border, south of Hineston. The village was called Hueston, the post office Cora.

### ***Cottonwood***

Issac Midkiff became Cottonwood's first postmaster in 1891 and served throughout the postbellum period (Post Office Dept. 1973). Cottonwood was located in Ward 3, southwest of Leesville along Bayou Anacoco (see Figure 20).

### ***Davis Mills***

The post office at Davis Mills was established in 1888 with John Davis as the first postmaster. William Fletcher was the second in 1897, but one year later Davis Mills became part of Calcasieu Parish and later Beauregard Parish (Post Office Dept. 1973). This is interesting because, according to the Louisiana Historical Records Survey (n.d.a), the Vernon Parish line did not move until 1906. In a close examination of the road systems at this time, it appears that Davis Mills was at a crossroads between two major roads, the road from Many south to Lake Charles and the road west from Alexandria along the "beef road." Given the inaccuracy of contemporary maps, one might believe that Davis Mills developed into De Ridder at some point in time. However, on a map in Rosteet and Miguez (1994:439) the two hamlets are shown in separate locations.

### ***Dido***

Little is known about Dido, a small post office stop located in the very southeastern corner of the parish. The first post office was established there in 1886. John Weldon (1886) and then John Simmons (1889) were postmasters. Dido would become a lumber camp and railroad stop in later years.

### ***Elmwood***

Located southwest of Leesville on Bayou Castor, the little postal stop of Elmwood was illustrated on the postal map of 1885 (see Figure 26), as well as on other maps. The post office began in 1880 with N. Williams as postmaster (Post Office Dept. 1973). According to Wise (1971:48), Thed Craft operated a general store there with the post office. Thed Craft's name is not on the postal list, but there was a James Craft, postmaster, in 1902. The Elmwood Baptist church was established there in 1885.

### ***Hardshell***

Christopher Hunt was Hardshell's first postmaster in 1884. One year later he was succeeded by J. Brumfield (Post Office Dept. 1973). Hardshell was located about eight miles north of Leesville (see Figure 26).

### ***Herbert***

The post stop at Herbert was established in 1897 with John Lanner (?) as its postmaster. It was discontinued the following year when the mail was sent to Smithville. The little community may have survived, however, since a "Herbert" is labeled as a railroad stop in the very southeastern corner of the parish on a 1913 immigration map (see Chapter 6, Figure 37).

### ***Hicks***

The Hicks post office was opened in 1887 under James Hicks and later run by John Neuman (1887), Daniel Johnson (1888), and D. Roger Johnson (1892) (Post Office Dept. 1973). Located along the old Alexandria to Burr's Ferry road between Hineston and Walnut Hill (see Figure 20), Hicks remained a post stop throughout the postbellum period.

**Hornbeck**

Although a concentration of settlers had lived at Hornbeck since the 1830s (see Chapter 3), the village really began with the railroad's arrival in 1897. F. A. Hornbeck created a town plan and began selling lots when it was confirmed that the railroad would be passing through and creating a "railway division" or siding area where maintenance shops would be built (Wise 1971:43). Hornbeck's post office opened in 1897 with postmaster Walter Carey, who was succeeded that same year by D. B. Pate (Post Office Dept. 1973). Hornbeck was not illustrated on contemporary maps but is a thriving town in the parish's northwest corner today (see Figure 20).

**Leesville**

First and foremost among the new villages created during this period was Leesville (see Figure 26), named for Robert E. Lee (Lawrence 1961; O'Halloran, December 27, 1951). As stated earlier, the village was established with the legislation creating the parish, on land donated by Dr. Edmund Smart. Initially, only Smart's office and store were there. By 1880, seven families with twenty-five people lived at Leesville, including four Smart families (McManus 1989:164–165). In 1892, less than one hundred people were living in the town (Goodspeed Publishing Company 1892:206 [1975]; Wise 1971:29). The post office opened in 1873 with Issac Winfree as postmaster. Cora Bolgiano replaced Winfree in 1889, and Issac returned as postmaster in 1893 (Post Office Dept. 1973). Cole (1892) described Vernon Parish's largest village:

*Leesville, the parish seat, directly in the center of the parish, has a population of a couple hundred [compare Goodspeed reference above], several stores, a union church, two weekly newspapers and two hostleries for the convenience of the traveling public.*

With the founding of Leesville, Huddleston quickly disappeared. Illustrated on an 1870 map, Huddleston no longer appeared on maps after this date.

**Rosebud**

A post office called Rosebud was established in 1896 with Thomas Knight as postmaster (Post Office Dept. 1973). It was discontinued in 1899, and the mail was sent to Tilly. Neither post office is illustrated on contemporary maps, and their locations are uncertain.

**Rosepine**

Rosepine was established in 1896. Thomas Evans was granted 160 acres. He deeded forty acres to Wyatt Herrington, who subdivided the town into twenty blocks one year later (Cupit 1963:40, 1983:105; Wise 1971:52). Like Hornbeck and other villages, Rosepine was established with the railroad's anticipation in mind. It would become a boomtown only a few years later (see Figure 20).

**Sandy Creek**

The little hamlet of Sandy Creek lies in northwest Vernon Parish near Hadden Ferry, southwest of Hornbeck (see Figure 20). The Koonce and Langton families had been there for years. The Koonces built a sawmill in Sandy Creek. The post office was established in 1886 with Young Palmer as its first postmaster (Post Office Dept. 1973). It was discontinued in 1897, and the mail was sent to Anacoco.

**Simpson**

In September 1891, the Simpson post office was established in the center of Vernon Parish's northeastern quarter at a location formerly known to settlers as Pine Island (Post Office Dept. 1973). One story attributes the name change to the existence of another Pine Island in Louisiana (Hadnot n.d.). Lewis (1956:15) states that Simpson was the name of someone living in the area, although the post office was on land owned by Mrs. Tom Burns. Hadnot places the post office's location in the southwest quarter of Section 22, T4N R6W (Hadnot n.d.) (see Figure 20) and notes that he could not find any record of a Simpson living in the area. The first postmaster was William Jackson.

If not the Simpsons, certainly several people had settled here from at least 1860 (see Chapter 3), and the community continued to grow through



the late nineteenth century. The original settlement is actually about a mile west of modern Simpson, probably where State Route 465 turns northwest from State Route 8 (Lewis 1956:1). Hadnot (n.d.) states that there were as many as two hundred inhabitants at Simpson in the 1890s, but this figure seems high.

#### ***Slabtown (Pitkin)***

Wise (1971:50) states that Slabtown was the original village that is now called Pitkin (Figure 28). It was first settled in 1872 when a Mr. Millam constructed a water mill at the fork of Big Six Mile and Little Six Mile Creeks, just south of Fort Polk. The post office there was established in 1887 with James Roberts as the first postmaster (Post Office Dept. 1973). The hamlet is not shown on any maps of this period.

#### ***Smithville***

The Smithville post office was established in 1891 with Jeremiah Smith as postmaster (Post Office Dept. 1973). It is not found on any maps.

#### ***Tilly***

The Tilly post office was established in 1890 with Thomas Tilly as postmaster (Post Office Dept. 1973). (See earlier discussion of Rosebud.)

#### ***Toledo***

The Toledo post office was established in 1880 or 1888 with someone named Shehan as postmaster. John Foster took over in 1890 (Post Office Dept. 1973). Toledo is illustrated on the 1885 postal map (see Figure 26) where Toledo Bend is located today. It is possible that Toledo was yet another name for Bevil's Ferry or Hadden Ferry.



*Figure 28 — Some small hamlets grew into larger villages with substantial stores, like the Roberts General Merchandise store in Pitkin, formerly Slabtown (courtesy Museum of West Louisiana).*



**Walnut Hill**

Just north of the fort's main post, Walnut Hill (see Figure 26) continued to grow during the late 1800s. Postmasters included Jess Collins (1873), William Holton (1876), Samuel Sweat (1879), Sam Roberts (1880), Thomas Bedsole (1885), James Hagan (1891), John Roberts (1892), Jason Derrough (1892), and William H. Weeks (1897) (Post Office Dept. 1973). During the 1890s, this little village, with as many as seventy-five people, may have been second only to Leesville in population (Goodspeed Publishing Company 1892:206 [1975]).

**Whiskachitto**

William Davis was the postmaster at Whiskachitto, a little post stop established in 1889 and discontinued in 1892 (Post Office Dept. 1973). Whiskachitto was obviously on Whiskey Chitto Creek and may have been the only hamlet in Fort Polk prior to the railroad and lumber era. Six Mile (see Chapter 5) is the only other possible hamlet, but there is no evidence that it was established during the antebellum period.



Other little central places were scattered across the Vernon Parish landscape at this time. These probably represented clusters of families, rural communities, mills, or general stores, or were simply commonly recognized landscape features where people gathered. Among these were Kirks Mill, located in the parish's north central region near Anacoco along the road from Many to Leesville. Location names appearing in historic records that could not be found on maps include Drake's Fork, Smith's Mill, Sweat's Store, and Keel's Mill (Louisiana Historical Records Survey 1941:1:159–160). These locations, along with some hamlets mentioned above, were polling places for the 1893 parish vote concerning a tax for the Natchez, Alexandria, and Texas Railroad. Also, Marler (1994:160) mentions another post stop in Ward 6 dating to 1886 called "Gum." The post office records do not confirm this, however. Many maps also show Sibley's Mill along the north-south route from Many to Leesville. Although never a post

office, it obviously was an important stop along this road. Finally, sometime during this period or early in the next century, the place names (and it is assumed communities) of Laurel Hill, Six Mile, and Bundick Creek appear on the landscape. Other than their names, little more is known about these places during the nineteenth century, except that they were located within the Fort Polk area.

**SOCIAL-CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT****RELIGIOUS AND SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS**

Yet another indication of Vernon Parish's growth and transformation from an antebellum frontier backcountry to an established farming community was the fast growth of numerous social organizations after parish formation. As memberships increased, parish associations, branches, and chapters were organized.

**Baptist Organizations and Churches**

The Baptists formed the Vernon Association in 1871. N. H. Bray, who was previously with the Sabine Association, became moderator (Paxton 1888:424). He also served as moderator of the Castor, Smyrna, and Comrade churches in 1872, 1873, and 1874, respectively (Vernon Missionary Baptist Association 1945). Bray, having lived in the parish since the 1840s, was also active in parish politics and served as a judge. He died in Leesville in 1875, but the Vernon Parish Association continued to thrive. In 1890, around twenty churches, some even outside the parish, were members of the association.

Baptist churches established earlier continued to thrive, including Anacoco, Mount Olive, Castor, Kisatchie, Gravel Hill, and Laurel Hill. Many others sprang up throughout the parish during the postbellum period, including: Big Hammock, near Anacoco, in 1883; two Mount Moriahs, one in 1877 near Anacoco and the other in 1880 near Leander; and Flactor in 1891 at Hineston (Vernon Missionary Baptist Association 1910:22, 1945). Wise (1971:69) states that Pine Hill Baptist Church formed around this time at the home of Bill Kay, located fifteen miles west of Leesville. However,

the association places the formation date a bit later, in 1902 (Vernon Missionary Baptist Association 1945).

From this point in time to the present, church histories are more difficult to sort out. Church names like Mt. Moriah and Oak Grove were used repeatedly, and congregations built new churches in different locations. Furthermore, sources often give different dates of establishment.

Five miles northeast of Rosepine, Louisiana, and just south of the Kisatchie National Forest, the unincorporated community of Providence had its beginnings in the formation of Providence Baptist Church (Pool 1992:1). Members defined the community as five square miles of land bounded by Pine Branch of Little Clear Creek on the west and by Bundick Creek on the east and north (Pool 1992:1). The Providence congregation held together from 1872 until around 1885, when it seems to have disappeared from the Calcasieu Association records (Pool 1992:8). It does not appear to have been part of the Vernon Association either. But twenty years later it would be reorganized in the Peason Ridge area of Fort Polk.

Meanwhile, the Kisatchie Baptist Church continued to grow; by 1887, it had some fifty-seven members (Kadlecek and Bullard 1994:176). By 1890, the Southern Baptists had a total of thirteen churches in the parish, serving 585 members. There were also four Old-Two-Seed-In-The-Spirit Baptist churches—described in the 1890 census as very conservative and strongly Calvinistic—with fifty-five members.

### ***Other Churches***

There were eight Methodist churches with 401 members. Holly Grove is the best known. John Franklin and probably his namesake son served off and on as church pastor from 1865 to 1886 (Wise 1971:68). Also, according to Wise (1971:88), R. H. Owen formed a Church of God, which served for several years as the only place of worship in the Simpson area. However, there is no record of this church in the census. In all, there were twenty-five churches in the parish with 1,039 active members in 1890. This represents 18 percent of the parish population.

### ***Freemason Lodges***

Freemason organization was yet another example of Vernon Parish's redevelopment after Reconstruction. At Walnut Hill, the N. H. Bray Lodge No. 208 was chartered on February 15, 1871, just a month before the parish was formed (Dalehite 1963:1). The Anacoco Lodge No. 147 was restored on May 14, 1885, with members meeting at the Hardshell post office. On February 15, 1893, Freemasons in Leesville formed Lodge No. 240.

### ***Schools***

Public schools were very slowly being reestablished after the Civil War. In 1877, the state reorganized its board of education in an attempt to improve the condition of public education (Davis 1971:306). At that time, less than 20 percent of the state's educable White children were attending schools, and rural schools were described as "deplorable" and "dismal" (Davis 1971:306; Robertson 1952:1). Although some progress was made during this period, public education had a long way to go. In 1898, there were only 1,535 schools for Whites and 741 for Blacks statewide. Yearly, these were open, on average, 5.5 months (for Whites) and 4.72 months (for Blacks). Some 84,453 Whites and 48,137 Blacks attended that year (Fay 1898:108–109). The average school day lasted six hours.

Progress in Vernon Parish schools was as slow as in the rest of the state's schools. With parish formation, the Police Jury took responsibility for organizing the parish's schools. But initial interest may have been only cursory. Wise (1971:49) states that M. H. Stanley became school board treasurer on April 29, 1871. J. E. Ryan took over on June 6, 1873, and Charles K. Oakes became the school board's secretary-treasurer on August 3, 1874. But the first mention of parish-level funding does not appear in Police Jury minutes until much later. On March 27, 1890, the Police Jury voted on a one-and-a-half-mil tax for parish public schools. Even though the motion was made and seconded, the entire jury voted against the tax. But, after citizens expressed further support, a tax was eventually assessed on July 11, 1891. The following year, \$1,500 was raised (Wise 1971:5).

Cupit names nine school board members between 1871 and 1876: R.A. Brown, Philip Koonce, J. M. Word, P. M. Cavanaugh, James Phillips, C. K. Oakes, E. E. Smart, W. C. Cain, and C. D. Collins. But then he writes that the first board meeting was held on May 8, 1876 (Cupit 1963:49). Koonce was elected president of the board, and Professor E. B.

Wadell was selected as the first school teacher for Burr's Ferry. At a meeting on May 20, the board selected teachers for thirty-seven schools in the parish (Table 17). Table 17 is especially interesting in that it provides the first hard evidence of named communities in the Fort Polk Main Fort area: Bundick Creek, Laurel Hill, Six Mile, Brushy

Table 17 — Vernon Parish teachers and schools, 1876 (Cupit 1963:50–51).

<i>Location</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Salary \$</i>
Burr Ferry	E. B. Wadell	331/3 *
Castor Church	J. Cavanaugh	30/month
Big Creek	James Duff	331/3
Leesville	Mrs. Smart	331/3
Walnut Hill	M. N. Grey	25/month
Laurel Hill	John Koonce	25/month
Knight Neighborhood	W. J. Knight	25/month
Beech Grove	W. K. Self	25/month
Shiloh	T. J. Neuman	30/month
Davis Neighborhood	J. W. Davis	30/month
Union	G. W. Self	25/month
O. K. School	J. K. Foster	331/3
Smith Neighborhood	A. L. Smith	30/month
China Grove	Rev. Franklin	25/month
Good Hope	James Self	25/month
Pine Island	S. Gessett	20/month
Union Hill	Cullen Brown	25/month
Whiskey Chitto	A. Smith	25/month
Silver Creek	W. Bechcam	25/month
Brushy Creek	T. S. Franklin	25/month
Edgefield	Miss Self	331/3
Conrad	B. O. Owen	25/month
Huddleston	Miss Cole	30/month
Melton Chapel	R. P. Walker	25/month
Midkiff	A. L. Pugh	25/month
At or near Tom Butlers	Tom Word	331/3
Six Mile	W. M. Cain	25/month
Pine Grove	Walter Self	18/month
Elizabeth Chapel	Miss E. D. McAlpin	25/month
Cryer	M. Cavanaugh	25/month
Providence	V. Johnson	25/month
Pleasant Grove	Payton Mathis	18/month
Holly Grove	W. Winchester	331/3
Mt. Olive	T. Franklin	25/month
Weeks Neighborhood	Miss Hills [?]	20/month
LaCaze Neighborhood	Miss L. Coutch	20/month
Bundicks Creek	Julius Dewe	25/month

\* *It is not known what "\$331/3" means; it could be a typo or mean a 3-month salary of \$331 per year.*

Creek, Huddleston, and Whiskey Chitto. Attendance in the rural areas was poor and sporadic. The majority of the teachers taught only from one to three months of the year. Miss Lulu Grandy, for instance, received \$30 a month at the Pine Island school (Simpson) in 1893 and taught a nine-month session. But in 1898 in the same area, Joshua Peavy taught only a one-and-a-half-month term during the year (Wise 1971:8). Cole (1892) described the school system as “fairly good,” but one must remember she was comparing it to others in the state. Overall, Louisiana schools were far behind much of the nation.

The earliest superintendent of education for the parish was Oakes; his term lasted from 1888 to 1896 (Wise 1971:19). All this information would imply that at first the Police Jury handled school matters within the jury itself, with a board and president. In the 1890s, the educational system may have become more independent. A superintendent oversaw the school system, but would still answer to the Police Jury.

Although schools would improve slowly over the years, it was an uphill battle. Attendance improved also, and by 1899 there were as many as seventy-two schools for White and seven for Blacks in the parish (Wise 1971:11).

### **POLITICS AND CONFLICTS**

Politics were an important part of this rural community, and Vernon Parish’s populace took their politics seriously. Traditionally, rural White farmers of the postbellum South were loyal Democrats. But through the 1880s, the rural White northern Louisiana parishes were submitting protest votes for Republican and Independent candidates as the Democratic party failed to support farm interests. For instance, Louisiana Democrats would not endorse the “subtreasury plan,” which, if passed, would have provided low-cost federal farm loans allowing farmers to warehouse crops until prices rose—thus breaking the debt cycle of farmers caught in the lien system. Other issues arose, including a controversial state lottery system.

The people thought their Democratic congressmen were doing nothing about Northern banker Jay Gould who was buying up homestead land all

through the northern parishes, including large tracts in Vernon and Natchitoches Parishes. Gould was, in fact, the largest landowner in Vernon Parish at the time and quite unpopular locally (Hair 1969:112). Eventually, Vernon Parish sent representatives to Natchitoches for the 1890 convention. Along with representatives from Sabine and Winn Parishes, they selected the Farmers-Union-Independent candidate Thomas J. Guice for the Fourth District congressional race (Hicks 1961:207). Though Guice did not win, the die was cast. In 1891, Vernon Parish Democrats renounced their party allegiance and joined the new People’s Party. During the governor’s race in 1892, these Populists ran Robert L. Tannehill. Although Tannehill brought up the rear in the state election with only 9,804 votes, he won Catahoula, Grant, Winn, and Vernon Parishes (Daniel 1943:1082; Hair 1969:225).

The Populist movement continued to grow until 1896 when it began a gradual decline in popularity. Throughout this period, Vernon Parish was a Populist stronghold. *The People’s Friend*, a Populist newspaper, was published in Leesville from 1888 until around 1897 (Wise 1971:24). In 1892, Vernon Parish sent People’s Party representative John Franklin to the state legislature (Hair 1969:226). In 1896, People’s Party candidate Lee McAlpin of Vernon Parish ran in the Fourth District but was defeated (Daniel 1943:1109). The full story of the People’s Party and the Populist movement in Vernon Parish is yet to be written, but it is clear that Vernon Parish farmers were strong supporters of this agrarian reform movement. Later, some of these same people and their sons would become intensely involved with labor reform movements in the timber industry (see Chapter 5).

As far as is known, the Populist movement did not incur the violent episodes that later occurred when lumber mill owners and laborers clashed over wages and working conditions. But this does not mean that the region was always peaceful. Although civil law and order was established at the local level with parish formation, residents of this isolated pioneer community still often preferred to settle differences directly, as they had with the Rawhide Fight. The Vernon Parish



forefathers had to establish and defend their claim in a violent and perilous country only a few years before, and many still alive had marched off to a war of unparalleled brutality. In the immediate postwar years, Vernon Parish was still a dangerous frontier. It is no wonder that feuding and fighting were still common through the turn of the century. As famous as the 1851 Rawhide Fight was to the citizens of antebellum Vernon Parish, the Westport Fight of the late nineteenth century was just as noteworthy.<sup>8</sup>

### *The Westport Fight*

According to Marler, the Westport Fight was the inevitable result of fiercely independent Redbones resenting the continuing intrusion of Whites into their homeland. As more and more Whites moved into the region, friction increased until an incident triggered violence. Before it was over, many triggers had been squeezed.

Webster Crawford relates a long, complex story in which some names are fictitious and others are real. Just prior to the Westport Fight, the Redbones had planned to ambush a number of settlers, but the potential victims failed to pass through the ambush site. The actual fight began over the disputed results of a horserace between Redbone Henry Perkins and a White settler named Buck Davis (Crawford 1935; Hadnot n.d.; Marler 1994; Marler and McManus 1993).

On Christmas Eve 1881, Gordon Musgrove and Buck Davis were discussing the race results at the Hatch General Store in Westport (owned by Joe Moore, Dr. Hamilton, and a person named Hatch). Some Redbones had gathered outside the store to celebrate the holidays. Marion Perkins, Henry's brother, overheard Musgrove state that if he had run the race and won it, as did Davis, he would have taken the money or whipped Henry.

Marion, defending the family honor, offered Musgrove the chance then and there, and they began fighting. As Musgrove was getting the worst of it, John Watson, an Anglo, stepped in and kicked Marion Perkins off Musgrove. The short version of subsequent events is that Marion was taken upstairs while the Whites decided what to do next, for the other Redbones had disappeared and more trouble was imminent. Dr. Hamilton was called to look over Musgrove's wounds. After a while, Tom Perkins, Marion and Henry's father, arrived at the store to free Marion. Dr. Hamilton offered to release Marion if Tom would leave immediately so no more trouble would come to pass. But Tom Perkins had had enough of what he thought were continuing injustices by the White settlers. He refused the terms and left without his son. He soon rallied a number of Redbone men gathering in the woods outside the store. Guns popped, the Whites retired inside the store, barricaded it, and waited. A siege began and continued through the day, with Redbones dodging from tree to tree shooting into the house, while the besieged Whites fired back. Good marksmen, the Whites wounded or killed many of the Redbones and eventually scattered the rest, as the siege came to a slow end. Marion meanwhile had escaped.

The face-to-face fighting ended with this siege, but a long "burnout" period followed as the Redbones resorted to ambushing and raiding White settlers for months afterwards. John Watson was mysteriously murdered. The Hatch store and other farms owned by Whites were burned. There is much more to the story, which is repeated almost verbatim by Hadnot (n.d.), Marler (1994), and Marler and McManus (1993). Readers will find the colorful details of these accounts interesting and can attempt, perhaps, to sort out the "fact" from the fiction for themselves.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Marler (1994:111) locates Westport at the present-day intersection of highways 113 and 462 in Vernon Parish, however, according to twentieth-century Louisiana maps, Westport was in the very southwest corner of Rapides Parish near the Vernon-Rapides Parish line. Regardless, the incident at Westport was an important event for the residents of both parishes.

<sup>9</sup> Interestingly, a handwritten note in the margins of the manuscript in the Hadnot Collection states, "Indictment #718 G. Musgrove, 916 M. Perkins, fight 1881, tried April 1882." Thus, actual legal records pertain to this story, which local historians may wish to pursue (see also Marler and McManus 1993:55 and the original typed document by Crawford 1935).

### ***Feuds and Vigilanteism***

Although the Westport Fight was the longest feud to run in Vernon Parish, it certainly was not the only one. A May 8, 1889 article in the *Louisiana Democrat* (in Hadnot n.d.) gives insight into the sometimes tense atmosphere as Vernon Parish settlers struggled to tame a wild country. The article tells of W. D. Lyles, a Texan who settled in Leesville several years before 1889. His main means of support was stealing cattle and horses in Texas and running them across the Sabine River into Vernon Parish to sell. Lyles, “expecting to be confronted by Texas vigilantes or law officers...always went armed with a Winchester rifle, a six-shooter, and a belt filled with cartridges.” A man of murderous disposition, he terrorized law-abiding residents, who soon grew impatient with Lyles. One day while crossing a bridge, Lyles’s “career was briefly terminated by his body being filled with eighteen buckshot.”

Thus began a feud, with D. E. Sorrelle, editor of the Populist newspaper *The People’s Friend*, accusing leading Leesville citizen Dr. E. E. Smart and others of the murder. Meanwhile the older, established newspaper, the *Vernon News*, took Smart’s side. A war of words raged while the Leesville’s populace chose sides. Some of Lyles’s brothers showed up in Leesville after the murder, but left town when they realized the local rowdies were unfriendly to their cause. The article does not report the resolution of the feud, it only speculates on when open war would erupt.

These stories tend to paint nineteenth-century Vernon Parish residents as a rather lawless, frontier crowd. Surely many other interesting tales could and should be recorded. On the other hand, feuds and vigilante justice in west-central Louisiana at this time may be more legendary than factual. For instance, between 1882 and 1890, not one of the 952 recorded lynchings in Louisiana took place in Vernon Parish (Hines 1992). The first recorded lynching in Vernon Parish was that of a White man in 1909. Additionally, parish incarceration rates stood at only 11.9 per 1,000 persons

during this period (Hines 1992:292). The exact balance between legal justice and vigilante justice in late-nineteenth century west-central Louisiana is yet another story waiting to be told.

### **SUMMARY**

From its formation until 1897, Vernon Parish slowly metamorphosed from a backcountry frontier to a rural agrarian farm community. Poor roads kept the parish seasonally isolated from the rest of the state. But local markets, centering around Leesville, were growing. People were establishing rural communities and community services. Reconstruction had ended, and peace and order were taking hold. But as early as the late 1880s, the seeds of a radically different transformation were being sown. Men were buying large tracts of land from the government on speculation, and the region just southeast of Leesville was being bought up with abandon.

A few people were already living on what was one day to become an army installation. Some owned the land, but most were squatters. Little data can be directly tied to the area or the people. No churches can be confirmed, although several are on the fringes, especially along the old Alexandria to Leesville road and south of the Main Fort.<sup>10</sup> No major villages can be confirmed. The names Six Mile, Whiskachitto (Whiskey Chitto), Laurel Hill, and perhaps Bundick Creek began appearing in some documents of the period, and people in the area probably began to identify with these locations. Only Whiskey Chitto had a post office and was perhaps large enough to be considered a hamlet. Cemeteries, census data (Wards 4 and 5), and Government Land Office maps (see Chapter 5) show trails and intermittent house sites. This was about the extent settlement would ever reach. Within a few years, the talk heard in Leesville on market day would come true. A railroad would be built to the east, bringing men with money, axes, and steam engines to carry away the pines.

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<sup>10</sup> A Baptist church called Laurel Hill was founded as early as 1869. Wise places its present location at LaCamp, but Laurel Hill is also a Fort Polk place name.

# TIMBER, TRAINS, AND A LANDSCAPE TRANSFORMED, 1898–1940

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*Among the States, Louisiana is peculiarly rich in forest resources. In the production of lumber she ranks second, and in the quantity of standing timber is surpassed only by the Pacific Coast States and Idaho. Yet, should the present rate of cutting be maintained, the virgin stands of cypress, pine, and hardwoods must entirely disappear within 30 years.*

— Foster 1912:5<sup>1</sup>

### A LANDSCAPE TRANSFORMED

Although Louisiana's forests did not entirely disappear, it took less than thirty years before J. H. Foster's prediction came true in Vernon Parish. Even as the railroad tracks were laid, lumber mills, big and small, sprouted overnight along the main line. From this trunk line, branch lines quickly ran far into the forest interior to reach the trees and still other mills. From the turn of the century until the late 1920s, Vernon Parish forests echoed with the sounds of chopping axes, shouting men, crashing trees, braying mules, and snorting steam engines. Out-of-state strangers—Blacks, Mexicans, and Italians included—joined local farmers and their sons to work in the deep woods and at the new sawmills. Across the transforming Vernon Parish landscape, the people and culture of this isolated community were awakened to a wider world economy and, for some, unprecedented prosperity.

During the peak lumber days, some of the larger mills employed an average of four hundred men and supported lumber towns and camps with populations often in the thousands. But just as suddenly as they came, the great lumber days ended—much sooner than Foster predicted. Less than fifteen years after opening, the first lumber companies had cut all they could, closed their mills, abandoned their denuded forest land, and moved west.

By 1933, sixteen of the large mills built in Vernon and Beauregard Parishes stood abandoned (Cruikshank 1939:25; Stokes 1957:255). It was a time of “cut out and get out” for those who had purchased prime timberland a few years earlier. Few besides Foster, thought about the future.

The amount of lumber that was available and removed from Louisiana during this short period is beyond comprehension. In his 1880 study of Southern timber, Charles Mohr estimated that the state had some 5.9 million acres of longleaf forests (Burns 1979:198). The Bureau of Corporations reported in 1913 that Louisiana contained some 120 billion board feet of lumber (1913:132). Foster (1912:20) reported that as much as 34.1 billion board feet of standing timber existed south of the Red River, an area of some 2.6 million acres that included Vernon Parish. How much was harvested? Winters estimated that 120 billion board feet of lumber were produced between 1880 and 1937 (Winters et al. 1943:1), a number that interestingly matches the Bureau of Corporations' 1913 estimate of available lumber.

Amazingly, even after this exploitation, some 41 billion board feet still remained! But not much of this was within Fort Polk. Fullerton Mill, located just south of the installation, had cut most of those trees, producing at its peak 120 million board feet of lumber per year (Burns 1979:202) and some 2.25 billion board feet over its lifetime

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<sup>1</sup> Foster, the assistant state forester for Louisiana, later became Texas's first state forester (Maxwell and Baker 1983:170).

(Fowler 1967:4). The effect of this harvest on the Vernon Parish and Fort Polk landscape was devastating. A 1943 Department of Agriculture publication noted that only 3 percent of Louisiana's longleaf pine forest supported uncut old growth forest, with an additional 5 percent partially cut (Winters et al. 1943:11). Surprisingly, most of this virgin forest was found in Vernon and Rapides Parishes. But the rest of the pine forest was either sawlog-size second growth (11 percent), undersized second growth (39 percent), or seriously damaged open lands (42 percent) (Winters et al. 1943:11).

Beyond the landscape, the effect on the economy and people was equally severe. With the lumber industry's rise, people prospered from employment and corporate taxation. But the economy's sharp rise had an equally sharp fall when mills closed and companies left. The value of Vernon Parish land dropped from \$40 million to \$6 million as the timber was cut, and 70 percent of the land was cut over (Vernon Parish Planning Board 1949:8). From becoming one of the richest parishes in the state in the 1920s, Vernon became one of the poorest in the 1930s (Brown et al. 1935:1).

When the lumber barons and laborers migrated west at the beginning of the 1930s, the locals were left to return to their former agrarian lifestyle. The timing could not have been worse as the nation was entering a long economic depression. Much of the land had lost its only value—its timber. Looking to unburden themselves, the lumber companies sold their land to the federal government. Fort Polk's infertile, upland, hogwallow lands were among the now totally barren acres. In a national effort, partially to create jobs, the government began to restore the forests through the U.S. Forest Service and the Civilian Conservation Corps. The new employer, the U.S. Government, found a new use for these lands—forestry and, beginning in the 1940s, a training ground for our national defense.

How had much of Vernon Parish and all of the Fort Polk landscape been so quickly and utterly transformed?

#### **BUYING UP THE LAND**

Long before the first railroad spike was driven in Vernon Parish, the Northern lumber barons and

land speculators bought up the cheap, available government land there. As early as 1877, Henry J. Lutchter and G. Bedell Moore, founders of the great Lutchter and Moore Lumber Company, toured east Texas in search of timber. They never entered Louisiana during their tour, but they purchased thousands of acres on both sides of the Sabine, including 60,000 acres in southwest Vernon and northern Calcasieu (Beauregard) Parishes (Anonymous n.d.b; Maxwell and Baker 1983:22–23). The lumber from these holdings was transported to Lutchter and Moore's mill in Orange, Texas.

By 1900 much of the government land in west central Louisiana was held by relatively few speculators and lumber tycoons. The Wright-Blodgett Lumber Company of Illinois, for instance, came to Louisiana around 1890 and bought close to a quarter million acres in Vernon, Allen, Calcasieu, Rapides, and Sabine Parishes. At one time, it was the largest tract holder within present-day Fort Polk, owning some 180,000 acres between Six Mile and Whiskey Chitto Creek. The name Wright-Blodgett never became synonymous with lumbering in Vernon Parish, as did Pickering Lumber and Gulf Lumber, because it sold its land to these firms early on at a fabulous profit (Block 1996:143).

In fact, Wright-Blodgett had already sold most of its holdings by 1913 when the Department of Commerce and Labor issued its report (Bureau of Corporations 1913:134) on land purchases and speculation in the region. The area studied extended north-south from Natchitoches to Lake Charles and was bounded, generally, by the Red River (around Alexandria) on the east and the Sabine River on the west. All of Vernon Parish lay at the heart of this area, which spread some sixty-five to eighty-five miles east-west and one hundred miles north-south.

The report found that sixty-five individuals and partnerships in the study area had purchased 1,000 acres or more from the government land office, totaling 1,021,000 acres at \$1.25 per acre. Three of the sixty-five purchased more than 100,000 acres each: Nathan Bradley, 111,240 acres; Lutchter and Moore, 110,080 acres; and Franklin Head, 104,800 acres. Another eleven bought between 20,000 and 60,000 acres (Bureau



of Corporations 1913:148). In this latter group were well-known northern industrialists, such as Jay Gould who owned vast acreage in western Louisiana and, at one time, was the leading individual landowner in Vernon Parish with some 26,880 acres.

The study plotted the land ownership of sixty-two owners with more than 60 million board feet of timber each. Fourteen of the sixty-two companies owned 1.4 million acres, or two-thirds of the plotted land, producing 21.8 billion feet of lumber (Bureau of Corporations 1913:139). Four of these companies—the lumber giants Long-Bell Lumber Company, Calcasieu Pine Company-Southland Lumber Company, Chicago Lumber and Coal Company Interests, and Lutcher and Moore Interests—owned half of the 1.4 million acres. Lutcher and Moore's land alone could supply 12.3 billion board feet of lumber. The other ten companies were: Central Coal and Coke Company Interests (76,390, acres); Industrial Lumber Company (58,320 acres); W. R. Pickering Company (47,880 acres); Hackley and Hume Company (37,160 acres, of which 24,200 were sold to Central Coal and Coke); Jay Gould estate (29,880 acres); Grant Land and Lumber Company (10,080 acres); Kirby Lumber Company Interests (7,920 acres; Kirby also owned large tracts in Texas); and three others (5,160 acres).

Curiously, Gulf Lumber, a major company in the area operated by S. H. Fullerton, is not among the fourteen landholders in the study. The answer to this mystery lies in the complex industrial conglomerates of the time, rivaling those of today. Not only was much of the land in the ownership of a few companies, many of the fourteen companies had close ties to each other. For example, S. H. Fullerton organized the Chicago Lumber and Coal Company, probably to hold the 54,960 acres of land reported in the 1913 study in trust while it

was being cut over by his Gulf Lumber mills (Bureau of Corporations 1913, table 43). This acreage accounts for about half of the 106,000 acres owned by Gulf Lumber (Burns 1970:2; Fowler 1967:3). Another large landowner, Central Coal and Coke, is reported to have held 76,390 acres (plus the subsequent purchase of 24,200 acres from the Hackley and Hume Company). Chicago Lumber and Coal, and Central Coal and Coke had a common director (Fullerton?) who was also a stockholder in Frost-Johnson Lumber Company. Two other directors of Chicago Lumber and Coal were stockholders in the Pacific giant Weyerhaeuser. Furthermore, in reviewing company ownership,<sup>2</sup> one sees names repeated. While land was held by several connected companies or individuals at any one time, interests rapidly changed, and so did titleholders, who were often kin.

Present-day Fort Polk was dead center within these holdings. In reviewing study maps, it is obvious that much of Fort Polk was owned by one or more of these timber corporations. Cantley and Kern's study (1984:59–62) of landownership in 1910 indicates that S. H. Fullerton's Gulf Lumber Company and Nona Mills owned 80 percent of one township. It is known that Fullerton, who built a mill and mill town of unprecedented size just south of Fort Polk, purchased 106,000 acres of Vernon Parish pineland in 1906 from one or more speculators for around \$6 million, or \$60 an acre (Burns 1970:2; Fowler 1967:3). Fowler (1967:3) states that Fullerton bought a Wright-Blodgett track in Vernon Parish. He may have paid \$56.60 an acre (Block 1996:143). To put this in context, timber rights in Vernon Parish sold for \$7 an acre in 1899 and \$40 an acre by 1904. So, Wright-Blodgett and other early speculators made a fortune selling their holdings to the lumber companies.

Other large Vernon Parish companies included the W. R. Pickering Company with some 47,880

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<sup>2</sup> The original owners of the Chicago Lumber and Coal tract were: N. K. Fairbanks (34,500 acres); Franklin Head (6,400 acres); Charles H. Hackley (8,280 acres); Robert H. Nason (5,560 acres); E. Crofton Fox (160 acres); and John Caldwell (200 acres). The original owners of the Central Coal and Coke property were: Nathan Bradley (120 acres); Uhl, Johnson, and Robinson (14,480 acres); T. W. Harvey and N. K. Fairbanks (26,120 acres); Robinson and Lacey (12,760 acres); John L. Woods (5,560 acres); Henry Lamport (480 acres); Robert Nason (120 acres); Thomas Birkett and William McPherson Jr. (14,630 acres); William Robinson (1,080 acres); E. Crofton Fox (40 acres); and Fred Alway (1,000 acres) (Bureau of Corporations 1913, table 43).

acres. Pickering had also bought sections of the Wright-Blodgett tract, paying around \$35 an acre (Block 1996:5–12). Nona Mills owned 11,680 acres. And, still operating at the time of the government study, Lucher and Moore Interests owned 120,800 acres in the parish along with Central Coal and Coke (Bureau of Corporations 1913, table 43).

In summary, by the time the railroad was built, the power and wealth of Vernon Parish had been concentrated among a few interests. By 1915, these interests had become even fewer in number.

### **THE LUMBER INDUSTRY IN VERNON PARISH**

By 1900, only three short years after the Kansas City Southern Railroad began operating, many of the larger lumber mills were up and running. By 1910 they were thriving. Suddenly, a formerly agrarian Vernon Parish had become a leading national industrial hub, with much of the focus on the pinelands that would in a few decades become Fort Polk. Along the tracks south of Leesville, mills and towns were built rapidly and efficiently. Towns like Leesville, Stables, Pickering, Neame, Rosepine, and, continuing south into soon to be Beauregard Parish, De Ridder, Bon Ami, and Carson were all either new or greatly expanded villages with a busyness that must have astounded those surviving pioneers of the mid-nineteenth century.

Indeed, within ten years, the contrast between pre-railroad Vernon Parish and industrial Vernon Parish was remarkable even by the standards of today's fast-paced world. Anyone traveling U.S. Route 171 south of Leesville today, would be astonishing to learn that the reforested pineland was once the center of a national industry. While the complex mill history is beyond the scope of this

work (see Block 1996 for a more detailed history of regional sawmills), the following gives a summary of the mills operating in Vernon Parish and the region between 1895 and 1939. Chapter 6 further discusses the towns that were built by the mills to house their workers and some of the social amenities provided.

### **THE MILLS**

#### *Nona Mills*

One of Leesville's earliest mills was Nona Mills. Established around 1899, it had a great impact on Leesville's growth (Hadnot in Wise 1971:13). Nona's directors included John N. Gilbert, C. L. Wallis, F. L. Carrol, G. R. Ferguson, and G. W. Carrol.<sup>3</sup> With a daily capacity of 100,000 board feet, Nona Mills had a planing mill, machine shop, blacksmith shop, turpentine plant, and facilities for the workers. Nona contributed some \$10,000 to \$20,000 in annual payroll to its 300 workers, which found its way into the local economy. (Block 1996:180–184) (Figure 29). The mill operated a general store—the largest in town in 1905—and a drug store and hired a doctor. The company built a waterworks system to prevent widespread fires, and an electric plant to keep the mills operating twenty-four hours a day—all up and running by 1900 (Wise 1971:29). The company also contributed to a number of local projects for the community's benefit.

#### *Pickering Company Mills*

The W. R. Pickering Company<sup>4</sup> built a mill at Pickering, just six miles down the road from Leesville. Typical of most Vernon Parish lumber companies, the Pickering headquarters were out of state, in Kansas City. (A connection to the Fullertons, big operators in Kansas City, is pos-

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<sup>3</sup> The original purchasers of Nona Mill's land were: N. K. Fairbanks (1,360 acres); Augustus C. Brown (2,480 acres at \$2.50 per acre); Henry Lamport (960 acres); George Pack and John Woods (6,360 acres); and Henry Beer (520 acres at \$2.50 per acre) (Bureau of Corporations 1913). Nona Mills also operated in Nona and Beaumont, Texas. Block (1996:180) states that Nona's books still survive at the Lamar University Library, awaiting a historian's touch.

<sup>4</sup> The Pickering landholding was originally purchased by Franklin Head (17,360 acres), N. K. Fairbanks (19,920 acres), Charles Hackley (4,960 acres), Fairbanks and Harvey (40 acres), George W. Gay (4,880 acres), Henry King (560 acres), John Caldwell (80 acres), and George Pack and John Woods (80 acres) (Bureau of Corporations 1913, table 43).



Figure 29 — Mill crew, possibly at Nona Mills (courtesy Museum of West Louisiana).

sible.) In Louisiana, Pickering purchased 130,847 acres in Sabine and Vernon Parishes, much of which was within the Fort Polk area and had been purchased from Wright-Blodgett (Block 1996:5). Pickering also owned more than 100,000 acres in Texas, as well as holdings in Missouri, Arkansas, and Oklahoma (Maxwell and Baker 1983:162, 199). The Pickering Company had a reputation both in Texas and western Louisiana for its detrimental “cut out and get out” business practices. Block (1996:15–16) considered the company among the worst with this regard.

The mill at Pickering was rated at 150,000 board feet daily, but around 1904 it was rated at as much as 200,000 feet per day (Block 1996:6). It could cut boards as long as thirty-six feet. Like other mills, it had a dry kiln, in this case a steam dry kiln. The mill employed around 500 workers. It closed on February 25, 1926 (Wise 1971:48).

Pickering operated a mill at Cravens, about three miles south of Fort Polk, and yet another at a little stop at Barham, Louisiana, north of Leesville between Anacoco and Hornbeck (Wise 1971:13). The Cravens mill cut 200,000 board feet daily. Its two-story building housed two double-band saw heads and a separate lath mill with a daily capacity of 40,000 feet. Its annual output was about 50 million board feet (Block 1996:13). The smaller mill at Barham cut 65,000 feet of lumber and 20,000 feet of flooring (Block 1996:3,11).

While the Cravens and Pickering mills fed from the forests around Fort Polk, the Barham mill in northern Vernon Parish fed from the trees in south Sabine Parish around Toro, Louisiana.

***Neame Mills (Central Coal and Coke Company)***

The Central Coal and Coke Company came to Vernon Parish immediately following the railroad’s

arrival. In 1898, the company built both a mill and a town, which was located about three miles south of Pickering along U.S. Route 171. First called Taylor and then Keith (after a principal owner of the company, Charles S. Keith), the town was finally called Neame, apparently for financial backer Joe Neame (Wise 1971:49). Although Central Coal and Coke was known locally as the Delta Land and Timber Company, its brand, the *4 C Co.*, was stamped on wood products and nationally recognized (Wise 1971:49).

The Neame mill cut 200,000 board feet daily (Block 1996:107). It had two single-cutting band saws, a 52-inch gang saw, and an assortment of edgers, trimmers, cutoff saws, slasher and drag saws—all keeping five hundred employees busy. The planing mill housed rip saws and a flooring machine (Block 1996:107). The Neame mill burned in 1925. Central Coal and Coke continued its operations down the road in Carson (McCain n.d.; Wise 1971:49). Although the Longbell Lumber Company built a piling operation at Neame in 1925, after the mill fire, the town waned. Neame's last mill was a small one built by C. N. Lockwood.

As noted earlier, the Central Coal and Coke Company and Fullerton's operations were connected. Both had headquarters in Kansas City, Missouri. One of the larger operations in Texas with 120,000 acres (Maxwell and Baker 1983:157), Central Coal and Coke owned another 128,000 acres in Louisiana (Allen 1961:17), as well as holdings in Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Missouri. The company's mill in Ratcliff, Texas, built in 1902, had a capacity of 300,000 board feet a day. In 1918, the Texas branch closed. It was among the first of the large operations to close in east Texas. An *American Lumberman* advertisement (1923a:13) indicated that Central Coal and Coke had branch offices in Chicago, Indianapolis, Houston and Dallas. At this time, their mills included those at Neame and Carson in Louisiana and at Conroe, Texas.

### ***Lutcher and Moore's Operations***

While there was an obvious concentration of large mills along the railroad, there were other industrial giants beyond the Kansas City Southern's main route thorough central Vernon Parish. One of these was the Lutcher and Moore Company. Although it did not build a mill within Vernon Parish, it operated a lumber camp in the southwest part of the parish and played a significant role in the parish's lumber history.

Henry Lutcher and G. Bedell Moore came to the south Texas coast from Williamsport, Pennsylvania. After a tour of Texas, they decided to relocate to Orange, Texas. Their double circular saw and gang saw operation there had an 80,000 to 100,000 feet per day capacity (Maxwell and Baker 1983:31) and was the first of the large sawmills in east Texas.

Lutcher and Moore expanded into Louisiana in the late 1870s, initially purchasing some 60,000 acres and eventually owning 120,800 acres in the western part of the state.<sup>5</sup> Coming relatively early to the state, they were the first to make large-scale use of the Sabine to cut logs in Vernon Parish and float them downstream from Niblett's Bluff in Beauregard Parish, a practice that continued as late as 1910 (Allen 1961:26). They also purchased logs from farmers. At Orange, they built a boom across the river to channel the logs to storage areas. Taking advantage of their port on the gulf, they expanded the business, exporting lumber to Caribbean and Mexican markets (Maxwell and Baker 1983:32–33). Lutcher and Moore's industries continued for fifty years.

### ***The Fullerton Enterprises***

Just as the history of the Lutcher and Moore Company cannot be separated from that of the city of Orange, Texas, so too the histories of Fort Polk and Fullerton Mill are intertwined. The story of Fullerton Mill and the town of Fullerton naturally begins with Samuel Holmes Fullerton. An immi-

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<sup>5</sup> Most of this land (108,560 acres) was bought from the government land office at \$1.25 per acre. However, the rest of the land was acquired from some familiar names, such as John Woods (9,400 acres), Pack and Woods (2,640 acres), and Harvey and Fairbanks (40 acres). Other parcels were purchased from Charles Comstock (80 acres), Seaman Culver (40 acres), and Miller and Ayers (40 acres) (Bureau of Corporations 1913, table 43).



grant from Ireland (or Scotland), Fullerton worked his way “up the ladder” from a laborer in Atchison, Kansas, to a multimillionaire (*American Lumberman* 1922:73; Burns 1970:2, 1979:200). Fullerton and his brother organized several lumber yards along the Santa Fe and Rock Island Railroads.<sup>6</sup> Fullerton organized and owned several lumber and coal companies, railroads, and banks. At one time, early in his career, he “had a string of seventy retail yards in Oklahoma and Kansas” (Fowler 1967:3). He also owned either a mill or timberland in Mississippi, and his brother Robert, president of the Chicago Lumber and Coal Company, was an influential lumberman in that state (Hickman 1962:154, 204).

Samuel organized the Chicago Lumber Company, which soon became the Chicago Lumber and Coal Company. A subsidiary of this company, the Chicago Lumber and Coal Company of Texas, was formed by L. J. Boykin, who had previously worked for Nona mills at Leesville (*American Lumberman* 1923b:46). In 1920, Fullerton bought out the Texas subsidiary and reorganized it as the Boykin Lumber Company. L. J. Boykin served as general manager. Boykin Lumber Company handled the sale of lumber produced by the Fullerton mill (Burns 1970:2).

In 1906, Fullerton organized the Gulf Lumber Company, which became the largest company in the Fort Polk area. The company’s facility at Stables, just outside modern Leesville, was actually two mills. One cut 75,000 board feet a day, the other 60,000 feet. The complex had a four-room dry kiln and a planer (Block 1996:70–72). According to Fowler (1967:4), the mills at Stables operated until 1910. Block (1996:72), however, states that the “facility” burned in 1913 and again in 1916. The mill town of Stables was sold to the New Llano people in 1917 (see Chapter 6).

Fullerton invested some \$3.5 million in building a mill and mill town in southeast Vernon Parish, in the heart of the best, thickest pineland in Louisiana (Burns 1970:2). The mill at the new town of Fullerton began operations in 1907. By 1927, when it finally closed, it was the largest pine sawmill west of the Mississippi (Burns 1970:1). Stories that have become part of the area’s oral history relate that Fullerton planned a “50-year run” but left after twenty as a result of stepped-up operations (Cantley and Kern 1984:269). Regardless of Fullerton’s original plans, the production record of the mill staggers the imagination. It had an annual capacity of 120 million board feet (Burns 1979:199) and could produce as much as 350,000 board feet in a ten-hour shift. In a record one-day shipment, thirty-five cars with 789,000 board feet of lumber were sent down the tracks (Burns 1979:202). Fowler (1967:4–6) estimates that, in its lifetime, the mill cut 2.25 billion board feet, consuming 4.2 million trees.

Fullerton’s mill payroll, nearly \$1 million a year, was distributed to some 650 employees supporting 3,000 people. During World War I, the mill employed 2,000 people, with the town of Fullerton housing some 5,000 (Burns 1979:202). There were two sawmills at Fullerton, one of which could cut giant logs 24 by 24 inches and up to 90 feet in length (Burns 1970:3). The mills had five double-cutting band saws and were fully electric, run by the 500 and 1,000 kilowatt generators that powered the town. Fullerton had a lath mill and a planing mill. The laborers also collected turpentine for processing at a distillery in Rustville, just south of Fullerton. The lumber was processed in twelve dry kilns. A huge, overhead, “go-devil” monorail lifted and transported the lumber around the yard.

Once ready for shipment, the lumber was loaded on railroad cars and transported out of Ful-

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<sup>6</sup> All ten of the Fullerton brothers were prominent lumbermen, as were many of their sons. Sorting out who was who and who owned what is a historian’s nightmare. Furthermore, Samuel Fullerton’s sons, like the sons of other lumbermen, carried on the business under various subsidiaries. For instance, Robert Fullerton (son) was the secretary of the Chicago Lumber and Coal Company. S. Fullerton and another son, S. B., purchased the Bradley Lumber Company of Warren, Arkansas. Note that Nathan Bradley owned a large chunk of land in west Louisiana that was sold to Long-Bell. W. H. Fullerton, son of Samuel’s brother W. H., at one time worked for Long-Bell. Besides the Gulf Lumber Company at Fullerton, Louisiana, the family owned the Fullerton Lumber Company of Minneapolis, Minnesota (*American Lumberman* 1922:73).

lerton along the company's own Gulf and Sabine River Railroad. Although only ten miles long, this railroad connected to the Santa Fe, Lake Charles, and Northern Lines, providing passengers two daily runs to Lake Charles (Burns 1979:3). The railroad company also operated Shay steam engines that hauled the logs along tram lines from the forests to the mills.

Fullerton, an experimenter, created an alcohol distillery five stories high to produce drinkable alcohol from sawdust and other lumber waste products. Prohibition severely handicapped this venture, as the alcohol had to be guarded and special arrangements made for shipping (Burns 1979:202). The alcohol plant closed early; Fullerton Mill stayed open until 1927.

#### ***Vernon Parish Lumber Company***

As the southern Vernon Parish woods disappeared, the parish's northern part soon saw the arrival of lumbermen and mills. At Fort Polk's Peason Ridge training area, J. H. Kurth Jr. built a mill and mill town around 1919, naming it Kurthwood (McDaniel 1983:4).

Kurth was the son of German immigrant Joseph Kurth, who had built a lumber fortune in east Texas. His sons branched out as the Fullerton's had done. Joseph (J. H.) Jr. first moved to Rapides Parish where he operated the Pawnee Land and Lumber Company until 1919. On moving to Vernon Parish, he bought 3,000 acres of Jay Gould's estate near the Calcasieu (McDaniel 1983:4). Transporting part of the Pawnee Lumber Company's old mill town to this land, he built Kurthwood and opened the Vernon Parish Lumber Company.

The mill had two 14-inch single cutting band saws, and a "bull edger" (McDaniel 1983:5). It also had drying kilns and a planing mill. In the forests, Kurth used a Clyde four-line rehaul skidder and a 65-ton Shay steam engine. The Kurth Mill

boasted a 300,000 board feet per day capacity. Like Fullerton, Kurthwood was full of modern conveniences (to be discussed later in this chapter). The Vernon Parish Lumber Company closed in 1929.

#### ***Long-Bell Company***

Among the large influential logging interests, we cannot forget Long-Bell, yet another Kansas City company. The principal owners were Robert Long and Victor Bell (Maxwell and Baker 1983:93). This company owned around 600,000 acres in Arkansas, Louisiana, Texas, and on the Pacific Coast. Of the fourteen western-Louisiana landowners named in the government study (Bureau of Corporations 1913, table 43), Long-Bell owned the largest tract, with its 203,600 acres in Louisiana.

There is scant information about Long-Bell's Vernon Parish activities. It had a piling yard in Pickering and its main Louisiana mill was in Lake Charles with subsidiaries at De Ridder (Hudson River Lumber Company) and Bon Ami (King-Ryder Lumber Company) (Block 1996:25; Fowler 1967:4). No doubt these mills cut lumber from the forests of Vernon Parish.

Long-Bell is also famous for its promotion and sale of cutover lands. It formed the Long-Bell Land Corporation and sold some 300,000 acres to Northern farmers and recently arrived European immigrants. To promote these lands, Long-Bell set up a model farm near De Ridder (Maxwell and Baker 1983:196). It is possible that this farm may have been Granniss Plantation located near Pickering.<sup>7</sup>

#### ***Other Lumber Companies and Mills***

Obviously, the industrial giants just mentioned overshadowed almost all other Vernon Parish logging interests at the time. However, several smaller, locally owned and operated companies also thrived during this period or were formed shortly after the large companies cut and run. Throughout western Louisiana, small lumber companies employed, and

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<sup>7</sup> The promotional brochure for Granniss Plantation stated that Pineland Manufacturing Company, which produced the brochure, owned the property. Although there is no direct link between Pineland and Long-Bell, Pineland's headquarters was also in Kansas City and Long-Bell had a piling yard in Pickering. Given the tendency for large corporations to have many subsidiaries, a link seems plausible (Pineland Manufacturing Company n.d.). Incidentally, the brochure text strongly implies a 1908 publication date, although no specific date is given. This "plantation" is further discussed in this chapter in the section regarding lumber towns.

continue to employ, a significant number of people. Little is known about most of these companies other than their names and locations, but they played an important role in the transformation of the Vernon Parish landscape.

Hadnot (in Wise 1971:13) reports the following mills. The Hawthorne Mill, built by a man of the same name, was located just northwest of Leesville along the railroad track.<sup>8</sup> The Hymer Lumber Company, five miles north of Leesville, operated from 1900 to 1910. An enterprise known as Pate and Everett operated from 1900 to 1905 near Hornbeck. Powell Brothers and Sanders operated at Anacoco from 1905 to 1907, with W. H. Powell as president. This company owned about 30,000 acres in the region, and their single circular saw mill cut 30,000 board feet a day (Block 1996:199). This operation was preceded by a small mill called Holton Lumber, which opened around 1901 and closed when a boiler exploded (Block 1996:198–199). The Roberts Lumber Company, which was established in Pitkin and then moved to Pinewood north of Rosepine, operated from 1910 to the early 1920s. Just outside the Fort Polk gates, the small mill Lockwood and Ross operated at Cooper on the banks of Bayou Zourie from around 1900 to 1907. Hadnot (in Wise 1971:48) states that Rosepine had several small mills, including Arbuthnot and McClain built after World War I. Meanwhile, McCain (n.d.) places C. N. Lockwood's mill at Neame. Yet another small mill called the Stone Lumber Company operated north of Leesville. Hadnot (in Wise 1971:13) also reports that a Tillman Mill closed around 1917 or 1918. Its location may have been somewhere along the Pitkin-Leesville road. After World War I, two small mills operated at Alco, a mill town just southeast of Kurthwood. One was the Alexandria Lumber Company, which, according to Hadnot (in Wise 1971:13), later became one of the Crowell-Spencer Lumber Company's holdings.

McDaniel (1983:4) adds to this list of mills and mill towns. He includes the White Gandlin Lumber Company at Slagle, which opened around 1920 with lands purchased from the Gould estate at \$9.20 an acre.<sup>9</sup> This mill operated until around 1930. McDaniel (1983:19) also reports that a man named J. W. Post from Detroit, Michigan, owned a section of land in the Peason Ridge area and financed a mill there around 1921. When the mill owner had financial trouble, Post took over the mill to protect his own investment and then sold it to John Harvey Anderson. Anderson began the Anderson Lumber Company and cut the wood on Post's land. Once the timber was depleted there, the company moved to Hornbeck until 1923, then to Anacoco in 1924, staying until 1929 when the Depression closed the mill. But Anderson and Post were not yet finished in the area. In 1930, they moved to Kurthwood and opened the Anderson-Post Hardwood Lumber Company, buying the old mill in the village. In a depressed economy, they were happily welcomed to the neighborhood. The mill survived the Depression and World War II.

But there were even more mills than reported by Hadnot and McDaniel. A short historical sketch of Vernon Parish, drafted by the Louisiana Historical Records Survey (n.d.a), notes that there was another mill at Orange (or Anacoco), Louisiana, called the Orange Lumber Company. It could be the Anderson Lumber Company, Powell Brothers, or the Holton Company under a different name. This sketch also mentions that Meridian Lumber Company operated at Alco, Louisiana, but does not mention the Alexandria or Crowell-Spencer Companies. Kadlecik and Bullard (1994:79) state that Crowell-Spencer logged the land south of the Kisatchie area near Hutton, Louisiana. The Meridian Company logged the Kisatchie region.

Scoggins (1961:18) mentions two lumber companies in the Kisatchie region,—the Southern Lumber Company, arriving as early as 1901,

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<sup>8</sup> Block (1996:208) writes that W. T. Strange owned a 100,000-foot-capacity mill at Hawthorn (spelled without an “e”). Although Block does not mention the mill's name, it is possibly Hawthorn(e) Mill. The rail stop is certainly the same.

<sup>9</sup> An immigration brochure incorrectly calls this mill the “White Grand Lumber Company” (Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Immigration 1928:187).

and Louisiana Long-Leaf, opening in 1904. Louisiana Long-Leaf's mill was located at Fisher in Sabine Parish and was a massive operation on the order of the mills at Pickering and Stables. Most of the Louisiana Long-Leaf holdings were north of Vernon Parish (Block 1996:49–52).

Stokes notes additional mill towns in the same region and provides some general dates of operation. His map indicates there was a mill town called Peason in Sabine Parish, which was active from around 1916 to 1936, and one at Gandy in Sabine Parish, active from around 1916 to 1941. Yet another at Luddington, just south of the Vernon Parish line between Rosepine and De Ridder, operated between 1901 and 1931 (Stokes 1957:252).

The Peason Mill was owned and operated by Peavy and Wilson (Kadlecek and Bullard 1994:78). Scoggins (1961:19) dates the Peason Mill to 1918. Block (1996:207) indicates that this mill, which cut timber in Fort Polk's Peason Ridge Training Area, was a massive operation with a daily capacity of 200,000 board feet. Anderson Jasper Peavy and various associates, like Wilson, had mills at Kinder and Wynfield, Louisiana, as well as two in Texas and one in Florida.

### ***Mill Production and Employment***

Even though Vernon Parish's forests had suffered greatly and the lumber barons had largely abandoned the area after the 1920s, it is clear from the number of small mills noted herein<sup>10</sup> that the lumber industry still maintained a strong presence in the region throughout the Depression. A map in a 1939 publication on forest resources shows nine mills operating in Vernon Parish, three in or near Leesville, two in north central Vernon Parish near Kurthwood, three in the parish's northeast corner along state route 107, and another in the southeast corner (Cruikshank 1939:27). Three of these mills (one a hardwood plant) were producing 40,000

board feet per ten-hour day; five were producing up to 10,000 board feet per ten-hour day. In addition, there was a cooperage plant and a turpentine still. Although the overall region had been heavily cut, the study area, running from Calcasieu Parish north to Sabine Parish and as far east as La Salle Parish (5.7 million acres), was still 79 percent forested (Cruikshank 1939:1). Furthermore, 32 percent of the forest land was still owned by large industries and 11 percent by large investors. Twenty-seven percent was in the hands of "unclassified industrial and investment owners" and thus probably represented small land holdings (Cruikshank 1939:5).

It is difficult to conceptualize the immense amount of lumber produced at Vernon Parish's ubiquitous mills, large and small, from 1897 until 1940, or fully comprehend the impact this industry had on the parish. Indisputably, the Vernon Parish pinelands provided the nation with literally billions of board feet of pine during this period, and the industry provided unheard-of employment and development opportunities for a formerly rural, scattered population. While accurate statistics of production in Vernon Parish alone are unavailable, some additional (admittedly random) facts might shed light on the industry's tremendous impact on not only the parish but also the entire United States.

In looking at the parish's output, it has been previously noted that the Fullerton mill alone produced 2.25 billion board feet in its lifetime. In a 1912 publication, a map depicting the location of eighty-two Louisiana pine mills that produced more than ten million board feet a year shows six mills in Vernon Parish (Foster 1912:12). This same publication states that Vernon Parish had the "best longleaf pine timber in the State" (Foster 1912:11). Census figures indicate that, in 1909, an average of 46,072 people were employed each month in Louisiana's 702 lumber establishments—a 202.3

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<sup>10</sup> It is possible that some mills identified herein may have been one and the same, but operating under different names at different times. It is difficult sorting out owner names, company names, and subsidiary names. Mills often consolidated, changed ownership, or closed and opened at other locations during the period from 1898 to 1940. So too, as repeatedly noted, historical sources are inconsistent. The important points are that, during this period, many small mills operated in and around Vernon Parish besides those run by the lumber giants and many continued to operate, or even opened, during the Depression, providing a source of income to the local population. The Vernon Parish Planning Board's 1949 publication indicates that forty mills operated in the parish at this time.



percent increase from 1899. Thirty-seven “Manufactories” operated in Vernon Parish in 1919 and eighteen in 1929, many of which must have been lumber mills. Another source, the Vernon Parish Planning Board (1949:8), records eleven mills operating in Vernon Parish in 1920. Balance this information with the fact that Louisiana led the nation in the production of yellow pine from at least 1904 until 1919, and it becomes clear that Vernon Parish lumber found its way into a significant number of American houses in the early twentieth century. Despite the loss of mills at the end of the 1920s, Vernon Parish’s contribution continued. A circa 1945 publication by the Vernon Parish Chamber of Commerce claims that Vernon Parish led the state in timber production every year from 1930 to 1938, except for 1931 (Leesville–Vernon Parish Chamber of Commerce 1945:32).

#### **HARVESTING THE TREES**

Since the lumber industry had such a great impact on Vernon Parish and the hogwallow lands of Fort Polk, it seems fitting to delve deeper into the process whereby the pineland’s tall trees became America’s twentieth-century homes and offices.

Prior to the arrival of Samuel Fullerton and other industrialists, much of the timber had been culled near the banks of the parish’s major tributaries—the Sabine, Anacoco, and Calcasieu, and, within Fort Polk, the Whiskey Chitto, Six Mile, Birds, and Bundick Creeks, and Bayou Zourie. This cutting was selective. The best trees were considered to be those easily transported by mule or oxen to the creeks, where they were floated downstream to the mills at Orange and Lake Charles. The men cut the trees with axes and used the saw to section the trunks (Maxwell and Baker 1983:53). Work was seasonal; trees were cut in the winter and floated downstream in the spring.

As the vacant land was bought and sold and the mills moved in, the method of harvesting trees changed to clear-cutting. This process was much more intensive, less selective, year-round, and very thorough. Almost all trees were cut. The work force also was transformed from local farmers and part-time loggers to full-time employees recruited largely from skilled, migrant lumbermen who pre-

viously had worked in the North or other parts of the South.

Once the land was purchased, the first step in the harvesting process was for the surveyor (called a timber spotter or marker) to mark or check the company’s land into tracts for cutting. The spotter would locate a government land survey section corner and, with compass and ax, walk the section, blazing the trees along the way. A Gulf Lumber Company surveyor, for instance, would take 36-inch strides so as to walk off the section corners one mile square in 440 steps, each quarter section marked as he proceeded (Richardson 1983:192). Then he or an assistant would walk along each quarter section line, blazing the trees and marking off sixteen quarter sections. In later times, a foreman, called “Bull of the Woods,” might use paint to mark off the sections (Maxwell and Baker 1983:55).

The men who felled the trees worked in teams and were called “flatheads” (Figure 30). Using double-bit axes and cross-cut saws, they cut and prepared the trees for transport. Each tree was notched on the side it was supposed to fall. Then two men used the cross-cut saw to drop the tree. Wedges were driven into the tree as they cut deeper to keep the saw clear and guide the fall. The men naturally prided themselves on being able to drop a tree exactly where they planned.

Sawing was backbreaking. The boss wanted trees cut as close to the ground as possible. Flatheads, of course, preferred to work at a higher, more comfortable stance, which left a taller stump. A rule of thumb was that the stump could be no higher than the tree’s diameter (Maxwell and Baker 1983:55). The men carried whiskey or soda bottles filled with kerosene or turpentine to clean pine resin off the saws (Walker 1991:111). All the lumberman’s tasks were dangerous. While felling trees was the most obvious hazard, flatheads had to contend with such dangers as pit vipers, which thrived in the southern woods. Infection and blood poisoning from cuts and scrapes were also common. For his labor, the average worker received \$0.75 to \$1.50 a day (Cook and Watson 1985:125).

Once the tree was on the ground, the job of “bucking” began. One man would cut the limbs



Figure 30 — Saw crew, White Grandin Lumber Company (courtesy Museum of West Louisiana).

and knots from the tree while the other would measure the trunk or “bole” into useful sections. The men carried a long measuring stick for this purpose. The length was determined by the mill’s needs for that day. Generally, trees were cut into sixteen-, twenty-, or thirty-two-foot lengths, plus a few extra inches for trimming. An end section of variable length remained (Brown 1923:35–36; Maxwell and Baker 1983:56–57). Each team distinctively marked the logs they cut in order to be credited for their work by the “scaler” (Richardson 1983:195).

The next task was to get the logs to the mill. The early practice of using mules or oxen to drag logs to a mill or to a stream for floating to a mill was quickly replaced by the use of temporary tram railways, sometimes called “mudlines.” These lines, originating at the big mills, cut deep into the forest. Today their berms are still seen in Vernon Parish. Rails are occasionally seen, but they were

usually picked up and reused as the line was moved elsewhere.

Stokes (1957:259–260) describes the patterns of these tramlines in western Louisiana, including Vernon Parish. They generally followed local topography, avoiding low ground, in a dendritic pattern spreading away from a main line running to the mill. As the timber was cut in one area, the main lines had to be extended, and a surveyor was employed to mark the line. Laying and relaying the lines was another backbreaking job. As the line extended deeper into the woods, the men, in teams of ten, would be tasked to lay 198 feet of rail a day or “six rails up and six rails down” (Walker 1991:104). Though the rails were taken up to use at other locations, the ties were often left behind.

Logs were transported from the woods to the rails using several methods: animal power alone, animals and high-wheeled (up to eight feet high) carts, or steam engines. The men and the machines



Figure 31 — Skidder, logging crews, and a Shay steam engine, Luddington Lumber Company (courtesy Museum of West Louisiana).

were called “skidders,” the action performed by both, “skidding.” In the early days and in smaller mills, high-wheeled carts, with the logs held by chains under the wheels, were driven by skilled teamsters who were “almost always blacks” (Walker 1991:110).

At Fullerton and at other large mills, the “skidder” was also the name of a self-propelled steam engine with a heavy boom. A crane cable was dragged, usually by a Black youth with a mule, from the steam engine out beyond the tracks to the logs. Tongs on the cable’s end were clamped down on a log, which was then dragged to the train by steam power (Richardson 1983:193). Once the logs were positioned beside the train cars, another crane, called a “loader,” stacked and chained the

logs for shipment to the mill pond. Loading and positioning the logs under skidding carts and loading the logs on the train were extremely dangerous jobs. A shift in the load, a slip of a log, or brief inattention could mean a quickly trapped or crushed leg (Maxwell and Baker 1983:58).

One of the best steam engines used in the forest was the Shay engine (Figure 31). Named after its inventor Ephraim Shay, it was patented in 1881 by the Lima Machine Company, based in Lima, Ohio. The company’s famous ten-ton model could pull forty-five carloads and cost \$3,000 in 1882 (Walker 1991:106).<sup>11</sup> The Shays were famous because they “made ten times as much noise as ordinary locomotives, pulled the load of ten of them, and went one-tenth as fast” (Walker 1991:106–

<sup>11</sup> The author cannot resist mentioning that his grandfather and other relatives worked at the Lima Machine Shop for most of their adult lives, building these Shays and other famous steam engines of the early twentieth century.



107). In other words, they were perfect for hauling logs. Many of Fullerton's eighteen steam engines were fueled with pine knots (Richardson 1983:194). Running the rails may not have been as physically grueling as cutting and loading lumber, but the engineer's days were long—transporting crews into the woods before daybreak, loading the lumber, getting both back to the mill or camp at night, and unloading the lumber at the mill.

As the lumber was cut, the trams went deeper and deeper into the woods away from the mill site. To save time, the men remained in the woods living in temporary lumber camps. Living conditions were much different in camps than in comfortable homes at the mill towns.

“Permanent camps” were generally the best, constructed to last as long as there was timber within reasonable reach. Wheel camps rated about the same. These consisted of train cars converted into cabins for the men. The cabins could be unloaded next to the rails and picked up again to be moved to the next site—an early version of the mobile home. The worst were the “portable camps.” Here the men were housed in poorly constructed shacks or, more often, tents. The whole little village could be quickly loaded and transported to the next site (Allen 1961:37; Walker 1991:116–117). A cookhouse and a company store were provided in these camps, but little else. Water was hauled in, or a well was dug. Doctors and druggists were also provided, but life was rustic and the men were confined to the camp day in and day out.

### **PROCESSING THE LUMBER**

When the train arrived at the mill, the logs were unloaded to await the saw. All the large mills had mill ponds where the logs were stored before being cut into lumber. Mill ponds offered numerous advantages over stacking the logs in the open. Unloading was easier into a mill pond than onto a lay-down yard. The logs could be moved about much easier. Dragging the logs through the forest got them muddy and a soak in the mill pond allowed some dirt to wash off, saving wear to the sawblades. Finally, most of a floating log is underwater, thus keeping insects from attacking the wood (Maxwell and Baker 1983:73).

From the mill pond, the logs were floated to the mill by a boatman. Using a long pole, he guided the logs to a “jack ladder,” which had lugs or teeth that grabbed the logs and dragged them up into the mill and onto the log deck (Maxwell and Baker 1983:74; Richardson 1983:196).

At this point men and machinery began working at a furious pace. The noise of saws and other machinery drowned out all other sounds, so men used hand signals to communicate. A scaler measured the logs, rough cut them into the lengths needed, and shunted them to the band saws for cutting into lumber as the sawyer directed. At Fullerton, the logs landed on a car that was pushed back and forth past the saw as slabs of lumber were sawed off with each pass. The slabs, now the right thickness, were transported by conveyor to other saws that cut them into the right width and final length (Figure 32). One of these was the edger, which cut the bark off the slabs. Another was called the trimmer (Brown 1923:48).

The rough lumber went past a grader. The grader's job was akin to that of a modern air traffic controller. His attention could not wander for a second, for the rough lumber came at him quickly to be sorted, judged for ultimate commercial use, or reclaimed (Richardson 1983:196). As Maxwell and Baker (1983:77) quipped, the man worked in “silent desperation.” But working in the noisy, dangerous mill did bring much better wages. A skilled saw filer could earn as much as \$10 a day because his job was so critical to the whole process (Cook and Watson 1985:125).

Rough cut lumber was then transported to the planing mill where it was smoothed and finished and/or cut into specialized pieces, such as wainscoting, flooring, or tongue-and-groove sections. Other pieces went directly to the kilns to be dried and stacked. The green lumber was incredibly heavy with water and sap. High-quality lumber was dried slowly by stacking so that the lumber had plenty of air space between each piece. Quick drying using a steam kiln was another process, but this produced inferior grade wood (Richardson 1983:195).

At Fullerton Mill, cut lumber was transported by the “go-devil.” This high monorail, with its cab



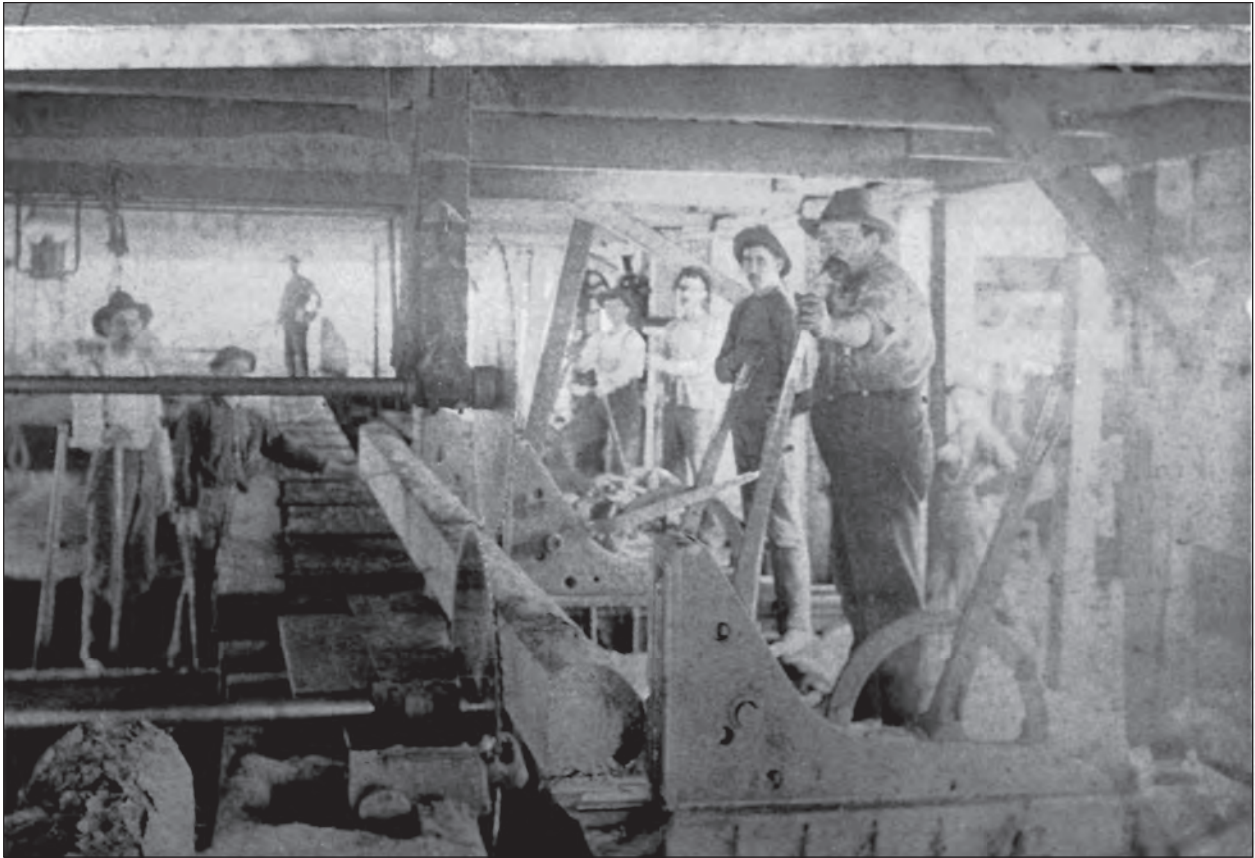


Figure 32 — Inside a lumber mill at the saws (courtesy Museum of West Louisiana).

positioned under the rails, had a huge claw system that picked up the lumber and carried it to its proper drying or storage area (Richardson 1983:195). When all the steps of the process were completed, the lumber was carried away by railroad to be sold by subsidiaries of the parent company.

Producing specialized lumber required additional steps. Fullerton, for instance, produced huge timbers, 24 by 24 inches by 70 feet (Burns 1979:205). This giant mill had five double-cutting band saws in its complement of machinery. Kurthwood Mill had fourteen single-cutting band saws and an edger. It specialized in three- and four-inch heart-and-sap rift flooring (McDaniel 1983:5).

Working in the mill was as dangerous as working in the woods, with the additional problem of constant, ear-shattering noise from machinery and saws. Within each mill were numerous special, better-paying jobs—sawyers, planers, graders, saw filers (Figure 33), and pit men, for example. Saws

wore out quickly. Head saws, the first saws used in the process, were sometimes changed twice a day. The mills filled with waste lumber and sawdust that had to be either converted into chips for fuel or stored and given away to the local population for fuel. As mentioned, Fullerton successfully converted this waste lumber (chips) and sawdust into alcohol until Prohibition made it more trouble than the effort was worth (Burns 1970:3–4).

#### NAVAL STORES

Lumber was (and is) far and away the primary resource extracted from the pinelands of Vernon Parish and west-central Louisiana. However, a small naval stores industry also thrived in the parish. All over the Vernon Parish landscape but especially in the Fort Polk region, the remains of this industry are found in the form of broken clay Herty turpentine cups that are almost as ubiquitous as pine trees. Actually, the term naval stores

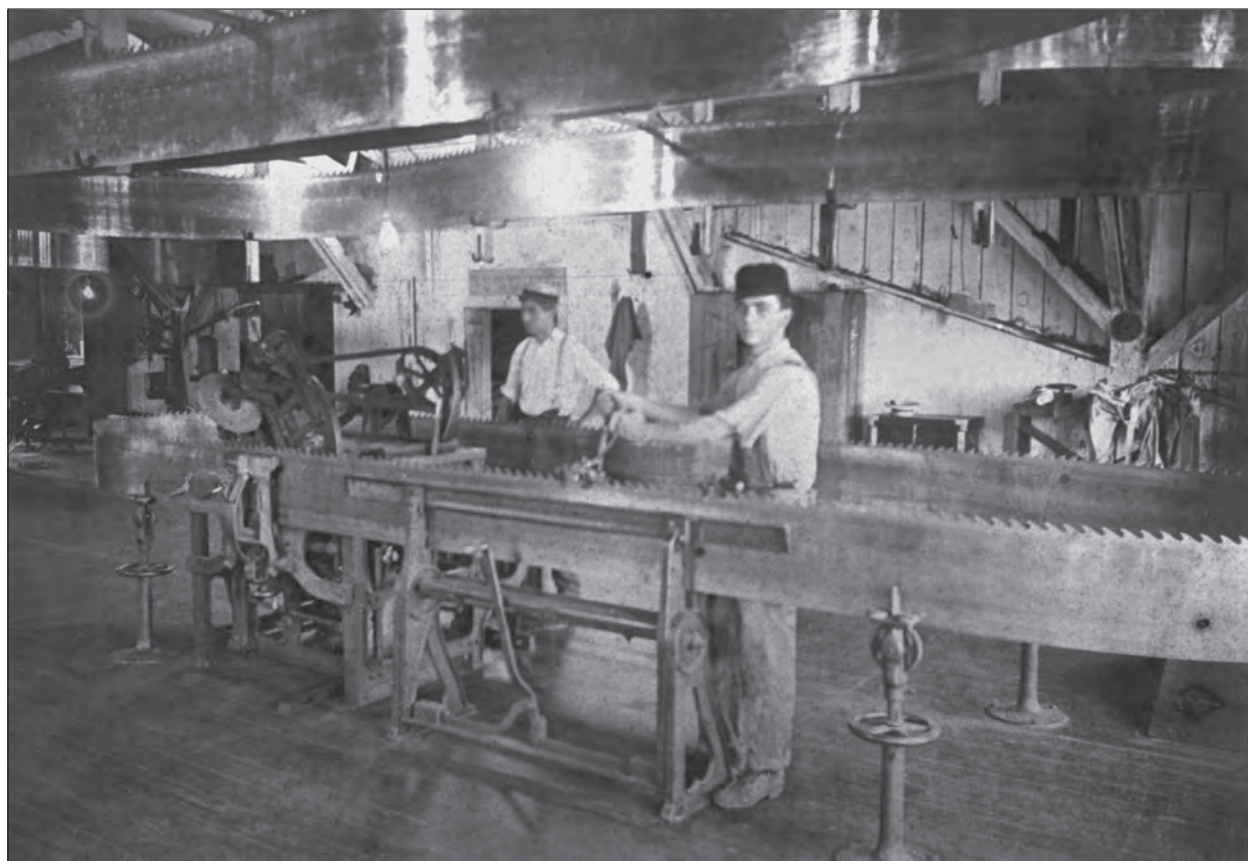


Figure 33 — Blade sharpening, possibly at Nona Mills (courtesy Museum of West Louisiana).

refers to a number of related processes in which the gum (oleoresin) of primarily longleaf yellow pine (*Pinus palustris*) and some slash pine (*Pinus elliottii*) is extracted and processed into turpentine, rosin, tar, and pitch (Bond 1987; Brown 1919:167–187; Perry 1947; Robinson 1988; Sharrer 1981:241–270; Williams 1989:83–90). Early in colonial history, naval stores also referred to the timber used in building wooden ships, which was amply provided for by the North American forests (Williams 1989:83). But in time, the term came to be associated more with liquid forms of extracted pine gum, especially turpentine and rosin.

From early colonial times through the nineteenth century, the naval stores industry moved from the northeast part of America, to North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida, then across the southern states as the Atlantic pines were exhausted. During the antebellum period, the heart of the naval stores industry was North Carolina.

After the war, during the 1870s, North Carolina again led the nation in production (Gamble 1921a:23). Beginning around the twentieth century, Georgia and Florida surpassed North Carolina and maintained the lead (Brown 1919:168; Gamble 1921b:78). Although colonial Louisiana had a naval stores industry (Holmes 1968), it was centered in the Florida parishes and insignificant in comparison to North Carolina's industry.

Louisiana's peak turpentine days spanned from 1910 to 1925. In 1905, Louisiana, Texas, and Mississippi, combined, only accounted for 11 percent of the total U.S. production of naval stores. By 1918–1919, Texas and Louisiana produced 31 percent (Gamble 1921b:79). Louisiana's production alone was as follows: 1905, 0.8 percent; 1908, 4.6 percent; 1910, 2.8 percent; 1914, 8.3 percent; and, 1918–1919, 15.5 percent (Gamble 1921b:81).

Some turpentine production in the first decade of the twentieth century came from stumps left

behind on the cut-over lands of southern parishes in western Louisiana (Foster 1912:11). In fact, the turpentine industry's survival into the late 1940s was due to the industry's use of stumps found on cut-over lands, including those in Vernon and Natchitoches Parishes. In 1937, for instance, there were only four wood-distillation plants in Louisiana, but four-fifths of their raw materials came from stumpwood (Winters et al. 1943:26). Locally the naval stores industry got a boost around 1946 when Crosby Chemicals built a distillery in De Ridder, just south of Vernon Parish, for extracting turpentine from stumpwood. It had a capacity of 750 tons of stumps per day, producing 450 drums of rosin and 8,000 gallons of turpentine oils—all by clearing and processing stumps from cut-over lands (Price 1949:10–12).

Western Louisiana never became a major region of naval store production compared to the pinelands of Florida or North Carolina for several reasons. The first factor was the area's isolation until the twentieth century. There was also an early belief among naval store producers that western (Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas) timber was unsuited to turpentine (Speh 1921:109). Still another reason was the widely held belief that turpentine made the timber unfit for lumber. While this traditional belief began to be challenged around the 1890s, it died hard (Brown 1919:165). In fact, there was some truth to the belief. Prior to the cup method of turpentine, the trees did suffer outer damage from chipping and were weakened by insect attacks. In any event, lumbermen were reluctant to chance damaging their crop with turpentine.

Initially, the lumber barons were not enthusiastic about the naval stores industry because turpentine kept the trees from being cut, and this did not mesh with their cut-and-run business practices. Generally, lumbermen everywhere looked upon naval stores largely as a nuisance (Speh 1921:111). The lumberman's attitude slowly changed with the invention of the cup method of turpentine extraction. Once convinced, the big companies like Litcher & Moore, Great Southern, Industrial Lumber, and Gulf Lumber ran their own naval store departments, with turpentine ex-

traction running a few years ahead of cutting (Speh 1921:111). Many other timber owners sold turpentine rights to naval store companies before selling or cutting the timber, especially in times of tight money (Foster 1912:31). In the west-central Louisiana region, the naval store companies would usually come in one to three years before the cutting began (Hartman 1922:68).

It is doubtful that turpentine, tar, or pitch were extracted on an industrial level in Vernon Parish much before the turn of the twentieth century. One source states that the first naval store company was Naval Stores of New Orleans, which moved into Vernon Parish around 1915 (Williams 1976:3), establishing camps at Hutton, Hornbeck, Slagle, and Old Groves Field. Fullerton's distillery was located at Rustville, just south of town. Fullerton's own Otis Richardson (1983:199) stated that where he worked, "The trees all showed the turpentine face." This explains why turpentine cups are found all around Fort Polk. The Fullerton operation at Rustville included "two 25 barrel kettles distilling 15 barrels of spirits a day, leaving 45 barrels of rosin. The idea is to keep three years ahead of the sawyer as it has been proven that it does not injure the pine for lumber to bleed the trees three years" (from a newspaper article in Block 1996:157). The Rustville operation employed as many as 225 men, most of whom were Black. In fact, turpentine in western Louisiana was primarily done by Black laborers living in temporary camps.

Turpentine was also conducted in the Kisatchie region after the railroad was built to Kurthwood (Kadlecek and Bullard 1994:81). Another still operated between Alco and Hutton around 1937 (Juneau 1937:1). In the Kisatchie region, sap was distilled in small camps; then the turpentine was shipped out by rail. One of only four stills operating in Louisiana in 1937 was at Leesville (Winters et al. 1943:27). It was most likely using stumpwood. Another still operating around 1938 and 1939 was in the northeast corner of Vernon Parish along State Route 107 (Cruikshank 1939:27). At that time, a forest survey study estimated that there was some 1.4 million acres of stumpwood available for the naval store industry



in the west-central Louisiana region spread out over an area of 5.7 million acres from Calcasieu Parish north to Sabine Parish and east to La Salle Parish (Cruikshank 1939:20).

### ***The Turpentine Process***

Since much if not all of the Fort Polk woods was tapped first for turpentine, additional detail about the process seems appropriate. Turpentine is the extraction of gum from pine. Gum occurs naturally in the pine's outer layers and protects the tissues from injury (Sharrer 1981:243). When cut, the tree bleeds gum.

The technology for controlled tree bleeding and gum collection remained essentially unchanged from colonial times to the turn of the twentieth century. Beginning around November, farmers in the eastern states would lay out their "orchard" in "crops" and "drifts," dividing the forest into manageable sizes, especially if labor crews were to be used (Brown 1919:169–170). In Vernon Parish, the company surveyor probably did this in a manner similar to sectioning-off trees for cutting. Then the trees would be "boxed," which meant cutting a cavity into the tree with a broad ax near the base (a foot or less above the roots). The gum or resin would bleed into the boxes. In 1907, Fullerton Mills controlled some 10,000 boxes divided into between 50 and 75 crops (Block 1996:157).

While sources note a wide range of sizes and depths, boxes generally measured from three to twelve inches wide, five to seven inches deep into the tree, and twelve inches high, depending on tree size (Brown 1919:170; Pridgen 1921:101; Sharrer 1981:243). The box would then be cornered by cutting a triangular-shaped chip above the corners to guide the gum into the box cavity. An expert could box a tree in ten minutes and was expected to do 75 to 100 trees in a day at a large operation (Perry 1947:22). This kind of deep boxing using an ax was what exposed the tree to insects and disease, making its later use as lumber questionable. However, turpented trees could be cut for making pitch or tar rather than for lumber—often the fate of such trees on the eastern seaboard.

In the spring, when the gum began to run and the boxes filled up, the gum was collected using a

"dipper" to pour it into wooden buckets and then into barrels. The barrels were then shipped to the distillery. After the first dip, the laborer would "chip" off the bark above the box in an inverted chevron shape, re-exposing the tree's cambium layer and thus renewing the wound. The best depth for this was considered to be about one-half inch deep (Brown 1919:172). During the early nineteenth century, a special tool, called a hack, began to be used for this task (Forney 1985:280). Chipping was repeated once a week from around March to October.

At the season's end, or when the gum thickened on the face, it was scraped into a scrape box, which produced an inferior product but was still valued. The number of chippings averaged thirty-two a year and would continue up the tree, reaching perhaps seven to eight feet above the ground (Brown 1919:172). At that height, a "puller" would be used to chip new grooves. A new box would be dipped five or six times a season (Brown says up to eight), but older boxes might only yield four dips (Brown 1919:172; Perry 1947:28).

Thus turpentine was a year-round occupation, for between the last dipping in October and the beginning of the new season in November, the forests had to be managed to prevent forest fires. The ground around the trees was raked of debris, and then a controlled burn was completed to improve animal grazing, reduce fire danger, and keep down the brush (Brown 1919:173). Trees could be worked six to eight years and then backboxed for a similar period. Thus, an orchard might be productive for as many as twelve to fourteen years (Perry 1947:4, 36). It is doubtful that any Vernon Parish pines were tapped for this duration.

### ***The Cup-and-Gutter System***

At the turn of the twentieth century, an important innovation reduced the damage to trees. It allowed the live trees to be exploited for gum more efficiently and then cut for lumber. The success of this new "cup-and-gutter" system (Figure 34) brought turpentine to Vernon Parish on an industrial level.

While traveling in France, Dr. Charles Herty noticed that the French system of turpentine col-





Figure 34 — Turpentine cup-and-gutter system (courtesy Museum of West Louisiana).

lecting consisted of cutting shallow chips into the tree and attaching metal gutters, which channeled the gum into clay cups. This eliminated the need to cut a deep cavity into the tree. Also, the gutter and cup could be moved up the tree's face, reducing the amount of inferior scrape. After experimenting with this system in the United States, Herty eventually convinced the industry of its merits, changing the way gum was collected (Veitch and Grotlisch 1921:135).<sup>12</sup> Herty in partnership with C. L. Krager, formed the Herty Turpentine Cup Company to manufacture the clay cups. The name Herty is now associated with the "flower pots" strewn over much of Florida, Georgia, and Louisiana (Smith and Rogers 1979:42).

The Herty cup was quickly adopted by the naval stores industry and, by 1904, was in extensive use. By 1908, half the turpentine operations

in Louisiana and Texas were using the cup-and-gutter system (Ostrum and Dorman 1945:3). Galvanized metal cups were invented around 1914, reducing the market for Herty cups, but the clay pots were manufactured and used as late as 1942 when the company dissolved (Forney 1985:277). One reason the Herty cups maintained their huge market share was that the metal cups would rust and stain, degrading the gum (Dunwody 1921:132). Herty cups did have one weakness though, they broke. Frost was one culprit. Another problem was that the clay flower pots hanging on the sides of trees became an irresistible temptation to most deep-woods sharpshooting hunters (Ostrum and Dorman 1945:3). Anyone who has walked in the Fort Polk woods knows that Fullerton used both clay and metal cups (Richardson 1983:199).

<sup>12</sup> Actually, Herty was not the first to attempt this system. A. Pudigon tried a version of it at Moncks Corner, South Carolina, in 1869. J. C. Schuler of West Lake, Louisiana, was partially successful with a version of the French method in 1895. But it was Herty who convinced a conservative industry of the system's merits (Dunwody 1921:127). Brown (1919:174) mentions that W. W. Ashe also tried the French system in America in 1894.

### ***The Distilleries***

Raw gum was processed into two products, spirits of turpentine and rosin. “Turpentine is distilled from the gum. Rosin is the product left behind after distillation” (Robinson 1988:4). Once the gum was collected into barrels in the forest, the barrels were transported to a distillery. On Fullerton land, pots were emptied into a “tank on wheels, which was pulled through the woods—there were no roads—by an old horse” (Richardson 1983:199). Fullerton’s distillery was at Rustville, but many companies simply set up temporary distilleries and labor camps in the woods. Transporting the processed turpentine in barrels was no more difficult than the gum.

At the distillery or on-site still, the gum was dumped into the still, water was added, and the still was slowly heated for about two to two and a half hours to melt the gum. As the temperature rose so did the steam, up through a worm or condensing coil. The water (steam) separated from the spirits of turpentine and the turpentine was collected in separate barrels. The water, being heavier, settled to the bottom of the first container and the turpentine could be moved to a second (Brown 1919:180; Robinson 1988:4–5). Debris that had collected in the gum while in the boxes was then skimmed off. What was left in the still was residue or rosin, which often, up to the 1890s, was simply removed and dumped (Gamble 1921c:37). By the time the industry had moved into western Louisiana, rail transport made residue collection profitable. Some gum stuck to the barrels and this was steamed out, added to scrape, and distilled the same way as the gum. Stills were made of iron until around 1834 when copper stills were invented, improving the spirit’s quality and reducing waste rosin (Brown 1919:178).

The average distillery’s layout included (1) a still house, an open shed containing the still and worm; (2) a storage shed for storing turpentine; (3) a cooperage for making rosin barrels; and (4) a rosin screen and rosin barrel platform (Brown 1919:179). Large plants, like those seen at Rustville, had housing for laborers, a blacksmith forge, and stables for the mules (Sharrer 1981:258). However, smaller field operations were probably more

prevalent in Vernon Parish. Archaeological site 16VN1221, within Fort Polk, is a good example. This site was the processing point for turpentine collected in the surrounding woods for the Four L Company. Associated with the still and located some four miles to its west was a camp for the company’s Black workers. The stills and outbuildings for this camp, like many at this time, were portable, brought to the site via a tramline (Thomas et al. 1993:138). The site consisted of remains of the distillery, a dam and pond, burned resin, tramlines, a barrel hoop concentration (cooperage), and domestic sites or camps. Thomas adds that some long-term sites might include a church or store and a cemetery (Thomas et al. 1993:189). However, this seems unlikely within Fort Polk because the turpentine companies were in the area only a short time and the camps were portable.

### ***Tar Kilns***

Tar and pitch could also be made from the pine trees. Tar and pitch are made from deadwood, which is heated so as to extract the last gum from otherwise unusable wood, such as stumps or fallen limbs, collected in the pinewoods. In North Carolina, for instance, a woodsman could run a turpentine operation and tar operation at the same time, boxing the live pines and collecting wood debris to make tar and pitch.

The tar extraction process began by constructing a kiln. Kilns were no more than “piles of pine wood which were heated by smoldering fires covered with earth” (Robinson 1988:5). In making a kiln, one simply cleared the area around the site, prepared a central collecting point, and created a channel leading away from this point. Wood was then stacked at an angle around the collecting point and burned. Once the wood was burning well, it was covered with earth to smother the fire but not put it out. As the wood smoldered slowly, the gum dripped down the channel into the collecting point (Robinson 1988:8).

Tar kilns, once lit, had to be watched constantly. A large twenty-five cord pile, for example, would burn slowly for up to two weeks or more. Often the kilns were located on a slope. Cutting the channel or trench into the slope made it easier

to collect the tar as it oozed downslope (Olmstead 1968:347). The product, full of sand, dirt, and other impurities, was tar. Boiling this mixture thickened it into pitch. Pitch was often made next to the kiln in a clay-lined hole (Robinson 1988:8).

Although tar and pitch production was not an industry in Louisiana, a few kilns might have been constructed in Vernon Parish for local use. There may even have been some tar kilns at Fort Polk, although no direct evidence of this was found in researching this book. Tar and pitch production may have occurred on a local, cottage level prior to the twentieth century. Operated easily by farmers with little land and little expertise, kilns were “dispersed throughout the forests” (Williams 1989:88), or “far out in the country” (Gamble 1921d:42). The scarcity of kilns is probably related to the fact that when pitch was in greatest demand, during the colonial and antebellum periods, the Vernon Parish region was far removed from any market. By the twentieth century, when the industry was turning to large-scale operations, lumbermen in Vernon Parish had left little to burn, and stumps were used to produce turpentine and rosin rather than tar. Nonetheless, there is a remote possibility that evidence of tar production might be found at still sites—a logical place since distilleries were processing and distribution centers.

## REPLANTING THE FOREST

The speed with which the land was cut over between the late 1890s and 1929 was partially due to the fact that investors and industrialists were heavily bonded. To meet interest payments on their land and mills, they increased cutting and production despite current market rates. This created a lumber glut, which decreased profits, which led to the need to again increase production, thus completing a dangerous cycle (Foster 1912:24). A business depression in 1907 further complicated the situation. Then, World War I increased the demand for lumber. None of these events slowed production until the late 1920s, when Foster’s prediction of disappearing forests (see this chapter’s opening quote) was close to fulfillment.

## *Protective Measures*

While the lumber barons were rapidly depleting the forests, and folks experienced a boon in material wealth, a few others worried about the future. As early as 1904, the Louisiana legislature passed an act creating a department of forestry for “the preservation of forests of this state, and the suppression and prevention of forest fires; to provide for the reforestation of denuded forest land, and for the proper instruction relative to forestry in the public schools” (Kerr 1958:3). Although this legislation had no immediate impact, it set the stage for future action.

In 1908, Louisiana passed another act creating a state conservation commission. The chairman Henry E. Hardtner became known as the “Father of Forestry in the South” (Kerr 1958:2). A successful industrialist who established the Urania Lumber Company in 1898 (Burns 1982:11; Kerr 1958:3), he was one of a few turn-of-the-century lumbermen who foresaw the pine landscape’s bleak future. He became quite interested in the possibility that forests could be regenerated, and experimented on his own lands. His fame in speaking on reforestation eventually led to an invitation to President Theodore Roosevelt’s 1908 Conference of Governors on conservation. From that time forward, he worked for conservation in Louisiana.

The conservation commission’s work resulted in another act in 1910, which provided for contracts between the state and landowners whereby denuded land could be reforested (Figure 35). Hardtner signed the first contract on 28,000 acres of his own land. The position of State Forester was also established that year. Two years later, the commission was given full authority over all forestry matters, an arrangement that lasted until 1944 (Kerr 1958:6).

The development of forestry in Louisiana was slow in the initial period with little funding appropriated prior to the 1920s. A chair of forestry was established at Louisiana State University (LSU) as early as 1911, but no course was offered until ten years later (Kerr 1958:3). Eventually, R. D. Forbes was appointed the first state forester. Commission members included J. G. Lee, professor of forestry at LSU, and important lumbermen





Figure 35 — A landscape transformed. A 1937 view of Forest Service land from the Whiskey Chitto lookout (courtesy Museum of West Louisiana).

from such companies as the Calcasieu Lumber Company and the Tremont Lumber Company. Most important, \$12,000 was provided from a state severance tax for Forbes to operate the program (Kerr 1958:9). Through the 1920s, the concept of reforestation grew in the minds of some industrialists and state legislators. The Great Southern Lumber Company, for instance, signed a reforestation contract in 1922 (Kerr 1958:10). By 1929, Great Southern, Industrial Lumber, Brown Paper Mill, Krause-Managan, and Long-Bell had their own nurseries for reforestation (Kerr 1958:25). In 1925, a department of forestry was funded at LSU. Land was purchased for state forests, which by 1928 covered 5,870 acres (Kerr 1958:20). It was a small beginning, but another four million acres were under a protection agreement with the state.

Eventually, a new, but related wood industry helped stem the tide of the impending disaster that

would overcome the pinelands during the Depression. In 1923, state forester V. H. Sonderegger traveled to New England to meet with paper companies. Louisiana pulpwood proved excellent for making paper. Slowly, paper mills replaced the lumber mills in Louisiana. Quick-growing pulpwood provided a fast economic return for tree farmers. As a result, paper mills became critical to the state's reforestation effort (Kerr 1958:13).

During the early 1930s, Sonderegger returned as state forester, appointed by Huey Long. His political ties to Long eventually forced him to resign from the Society of American Foresters (Kerr 1958:25). Although Long was not known for being a friend of forestry, and Sonderegger's method of operation was in keeping with the party line, forestry in Louisiana still progressed. Among the successes was the creation of a National Forest, a large part of which was in Vernon Parish.



### ***The Kisatchie National Forest***

Creation of the Kisatchie National Forest, with some 84,825 acres<sup>13</sup> now used by Fort Polk for training, was a long and complex process that began in the 1920s and continued through the 1930s. According to Burns (1982:18), the story really begins with a local Kisatchie schoolteacher named Caroline Dormon. Her indefatigable efforts in protecting the pineland are legendary. First, she led the movement to keep the Kisatchie Wold virgin timber from being cut. She failed, but without pause continued her efforts to have it reforested. Recognition of her work led to a 1924 state act authorizing the state to cooperate with the federal government and allow it to purchase cut-over lands with the permission of local police juries (Burns 1982:20; Kisatchie National Forest n.d.). In this same year, the U.S. Congress passed the Clarke-McNary Act allowing the purchase of cut-over lands for forests beyond the headwaters of navigable streams. With the state act passed, the state and federal governments worked together to create a national forest in west-central Louisiana.

Dormon was also a pioneer in creating a preservation philosophy among foresters. In the early years, the main goal of reforestation was to regenerate forests for further production. In fact, the Forest Service sold and still sells timber rights and products. At that time, 25 percent of the proceeds went to the states to spend on public schools and roads in the parishes where the forests were situated (Hardin 1939:416). Dormon and others preached reforestation with the goal of preserving forests for their natural beauty and recreation.

Although Congress can pass acts, funding authorization is usually required for action to be taken, and this might not come for some time after an act's passage. Funding to purchase Kisatchie National Forest's first acres was not authorized until 1928 (Burns 1982:21). The land had to be found, legally titled, and purchased. This responsibility was left to Charles A. Plymale. Plymale came to Alexandria, Louisiana, on September 24, 1928, and immediately began the process of cre-

ating purchasing units. These units were "gross boundaries" within which the government could seek suitable land (Burns 1982:24). Not all the land within the boundaries was (nor is it today) owned by the government, but at least 50 percent has to be owned by the government to be a National Forest. The Forest Service at first purchased, and now trades, lands within its boundaries with the goal of complete ownership. On average, the nation paid about \$3 an acre for the purchase of the Kisatchie National Forest (Richardson 1960).

Interestingly, the original purchase unit planned for Vernon Parish may not have been located where it is now. The first three purchase units were to include Catahoula in Grant and Rapides Parishes, Kisatchie in Natchitoches Parish, and Vernon in Vernon Parish (Hardin 1939:413). However, either the Vernon Parish Police Jury objected to the forest, as stated by Burns (1982:25–26), or the lands could not be purchased at a reasonable price, as stated by Hardin (1939:413). In either case, the Vernon District was eliminated. Hardin noted that the new planned location was changed to an area where the Forest Service was given assurances that the sales could be accomplished when more funds were available. Purchase of the new Vernon Unit did not begin until 1933 (Hardin 1939:414; Vernon Parish Planning Board 1949:20). Purchasing continued through the 1930s. By 1939, the Kisatchie National Forest owned 80,412 acres of the 110,766 acres within the Vernon Division boundaries (Hardin 1939:414).

### **CIVILIAN CONSERVATION CORPS**

The Depression hit the lumber industry as hard as many other industries throughout the country. Many people lost their land to taxes, or cut their trees to raise money. Lumber mill production dipped to 567 million board feet, the lowest it had been since 1889 (Kerr 1958:26). However, as a result of President Franklin Roosevelt's attempts to put the country to work, forestry and forests grew nationwide. In other words, while the Forest Service was able to acquire and create the National

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<sup>13</sup> This figure is based on the Special Use Permit between Fort Polk and the U.S. Forest Service. Another 13,300 acres are in Natchitoches Parish.

Forests, the goal of reforestation was accomplished through a combination of Forest Service leadership and the hard work of young men who joined the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC).

The first action taken under Roosevelt's New Deal was the creation of the CCC in March 1933. This youth-oriented work program took thousands of men aged 18 to 25 off the streets and put them into the nation's forests where they constructed roads, bridges, and firebreaks; planted trees; and controlled mosquitoes, among other tasks. By 1941, when World War II suddenly created thousands of new jobs, the CCC had employed some 2.7 million men (Hofstadter et al. 1967:723).

Louisiana acted quickly to benefit from the CCC. State Forester Sonderegger was in Washington by April 1933, and by July the first camps were established in the state (Burns 1982:51; Kerr 1958:27). Over the course of the CCC's existence in Louisiana, as many as fifty-three camps were opened, and the youths constructed 3,000 bridges, 2,000 miles of telephone lines, 3,000 miles of truck trails, 3,000 miles of fire breaks, and 18 fire towers (Kerr 1958:27). They also improved highways, built recreational and picnic areas, created Valentine Lake, fought forest fires, and raised 220 miles of fencing, enclosing 80,000 acres of pinelands (Hardin 1939:415). Burns (1982:52, 61) adds that the CCC built levees, constructed state parks, surveyed the forest and state waterfowl, and helped construct air and army bases, including Camp Polk.

Apart from military service during World War II, the CCC was probably the most influential experience of a generation of young American men. The unmarried men were chosen by the Department of Labor based on family need, but the camps were run by the U.S. Army in quasi-military fashion. The army supplied the men with "clothing, housing, food, equipment, transportation, medical care, educational programs, recreation, and discipline" (Burns 1982:51). The young men made \$30 a month for their eight-hour days, of which \$25 was sent to their families. Blacks and Whites had separate camps. Work was laborious, but one goal of the CCC was to provide a healthful atmosphere, and most alumni speak of their experience with happy memories.

The Kisatchie National Forest had eight camps numbered F-1 through F-8. Camp F-4 was located fifteen miles southeast of Leesville in the heart of the Vernon District, and F-2 was to its north, near Provencal in Natchitoches Parish (Burns 1982:61). The Leesville camp was established in 1933 and remained open through the 1941–1942 enrollment period. In 1937, the CCC Official Annual indicates that camp F-4, comprising the 5405th Company, was under the direction of First Lieutenant Henry H. West. The camp had a large recreation hall, first-aid building, and hot and cold water. On Sunday nights, movies were shown to the young men and local residents who were guests. According to the unit history, the unit originated in Georgia, and it spoke of the Georgia boys fitting well into the Leesville–De Ridder neighborhood (CCC 1937:107). Most of the original crew left the corps over the years though, and a glance at the roster indicates that by 1937, at least, the majority of enrollees were from Louisiana. Of these, most were from Leesville or De Ridder.

The history of the 5405th indicates that the company made a great contribution to the forest and the local community. By 1937, with the Winnfield camp's assistance, some nine million trees had been planted. Wise (1971:12) indicates that the CCC reforested 31,000 acres in Vernon Parish. Much of the work must have been done by the 5405th. The company built 150 miles of firebreaks, put up 65 miles of telephone lines, 40 miles of "high service roads" including bridges, and fenced in 16,000 acres (CCC 1937:108). According to the Vernon Parish Planning Board (1949:20), the CCC's contribution in Vernon Parish included "three towers, 61 miles of telephone lines, 127 miles of firebreaks, 46 miles of roads, and 105 miles of plantation fences. A total of 42,080 acres were fenced, and 22,280 acres were planted." This tremendous accomplishment is even more notable when one recognizes that the 5405th's chief job—the one that took up most of their time to the point of morale problems—was fire suppression.

#### **FOREST FIRES**

No history of Vernon Parish or discussion of Louisiana forestry can be complete without reference

to the forest fire problem. Fire control was and continues to be one of the U.S. Forest Service's prime responsibilities, and in Vernon Parish it was a big job. Fires in the upland pinelands were recorded every year, according to Foster (1912:25), and probably had occurred since the first forests formed in this region some 4,000 years ago.<sup>14</sup> In prehistoric times, American Indians set fires if they did not occur naturally from thunderstorms. These fires cleared the old growth and allowed young tender plant shoots to spring up each year, increasing deer fodder. This practice was perpetuated by the first pineland pioneers. The spring "green-up" burn became a tradition in the old South—especially in the west-central pinelands. Stockmen and shepherders annually set fires to increase pasturage and to spur new growth (Hartman 1922:64), but farmers also set fires believing they would rid the land of ticks and snakes. Fires increased when the railroads came, with locomotives sending sparks into the dry timber lands.

The problem became acute for the Forest Service when this practice was continued on cut-over lands. Once the land was cut, the poor pineland soils (especially in Vernon Parish and the hog-wallow lands around Fort Polk) could support little agriculture. Like many out-of-work lumbermen in west-central Louisiana, the farmers turned to raising cattle and sheep. Since there was no law against open-range grazing—another pioneer tradition—stockmen believed that the Forest Service lands were theirs for graze, and this included the need for spring burns. But the practice killed young seedlings and damaged trees up to twenty years old. Relations between the stockmen and the Forest Service became tense, practically to the point of an ongoing guerrilla war. Relations did not improve when the Forest Service, with the CCC's help, fenced in the land against cattle, sheep, and pigs.<sup>15</sup> Some fires were set by disgruntled people

fenced out of Forest Service land, or as revenge against the government (Burns 1982:83).

Vernon Parish was at the heart of the Forest Service's battle against natural and man-made fires, and even today the parish is known as "Burnin' Vernon" (Burns 1982:33). A report of fires in 1927 in the Forest Service's Vernon Parish Protection Area provides a glimpse of the problem during the early twentieth century. A report map plots the general locations of fires in the protected area, which included all of southeast Vernon Parish—Fort Polk, from Slagle south to Rosepine, and from west of Leesville east to Six Mile. In this area of 175,466 acres, some two hundred fires were recorded, averaging fifty-one acres in size (Louisiana Department of Conservation 1928:51). A comment in the map caption notes that without a fire-fighting organization caring for it, "practically all of the area would have burned" (Louisiana Department of Conservation 1928:51). Certainly, the distribution of fires, spread across the entire landscape with a cluster of fires just east of Pickering, indicates that the entire area would have been affected. The fire problem in Vernon Parish and in other National Forests in the South became so irksome to the Forest Service that around 1940 they hired a psychologist to study the motives of piney-woods arsonists. Dr. John F. Shea concluded that many of them simply craved excitement in "an environment otherwise barren of emotional outlets" (quoted in Kerr 1958:28).

To put it all into perspective, the Forest Service eventually recognized in 1943 that controlled burning was beneficial, having experimented with it as early as 1915 (Burns 1982:88). Henry Hardtner, for instance, was a proponent of prescribed burning (Walker 1991:282). But the results of this and other experiments were not officially accepted by the Forest Service for some time since any reversal in the general philosophy that all fires were

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<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, Hartman (1922:64) states that "serious forest fires" were rare because there was very little undergrowth. Foster (1912:25) does indicate that forest fires in the "alluvial region" were rare, and this may be the distinction.

<sup>15</sup> Hogs were perhaps a bigger problem than cattle. Cattle preferred the hardwood bottoms in winter. Hogs, feral and domestic, were less particular, roaming the pinelands during all seasons, eating pine seed, routing through the mud, and tearing up pine seedlings (Foster 1912:27).

bad might encourage the uncontrolled burning practices of the locals. Sonderegger was especially ardent in his objections to prescribed burning and once debated the issue in the press with a Yale forestry professor who was an equally ardent and vocal proponent (Walker 1991:183).

Beginning in the late 1930s and 1940s, the effort to reduce man-made forest fires and to replant the forest began to pay off. Uncontrolled burning was reduced. Help came from private entrepreneurs, who began to see the benefits of replanting. For example, the Merchant and Farmers Bank and Trust Company in Leesville purchased a mechanical planter in 1937. Through the county agent's office, the planter was loaned to farmers who wanted to cultivate cut-over areas (Stevens 1963:10). Interest grew to the point that some two hundred Vernon Parish farmers attended an Agricultural Extension Forestry Tour in 1948.

## **SUMMARY**

Even as the west-central frontier parish of Vernon began to develop into a modern farming community, land speculators and timber barons were amassing vast tracts of its pine landscape. Just at the time when settlers could claim legitimate government sanctioned landownership, the unclaimed land was bought by outside corporate interests.

This was especially true in the Fort Polk region. Rapidly the land changed hands again and again, and then, as if overnight, mills sprang up and the cutting began. For a brief period in its history, Vernon Parish was the center of one of the largest industries in the United States. Then as quickly as they arrived, the timber barons left, and the pine trees were gone. The U.S government arrived to reforest the barren landscape, and a new era began.





# A COMMUNITY TRANSFORMED, 1898–1940

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*The degree of intelligence, morality, and the progressive spirit of the inhabitants is excelled by no other people in the State, and which is the more conspicuous when it is remembered that but a few years ago this vast domain was a terra incognita wrapped in the undisturbed splendor of the primeval forest.*

— *The Vernon News*, May 1, 1900

Besides transforming the natural Vernon Parish landscape, the lumber industry radically altered the cultural landscape as well. The parish's preindustrial agrarian settlement pattern shifted from rivers to railroads and later to highways. Indeed the entire settlement system was made over. The population's ethnic mix and size shifted with the industry's fortunes. The political and social landscape changed also. There was little about Vernon Parish that was not affected in some way.

### POPULATION AND SETTLEMENT

Vernon Parish's population growth and decline between 1898 and 1940 was directly related to the rise and fall of the large lumber companies (Table 18). The population almost doubled between 1890 and 1900 (a 75 percent increase), with most of the growth occurring in the latter years after the Kansas City Southern (KCS) Railway and the timber giants established operations. This growth continued with a 98 percent increase between 1900 and 1920. But in 1930, after the large mills had cut the timber and left, the census shows that the population was essentially the same as in 1920. In fact, it had decreased by 446 people. Although specific data are not available, one can reasonably assume that the population continued to rise during the early 1920s and fell during the latter half of that decade. This gradual downtrend continued through the thirties. The 1940 census recorded 905 less people in the parish than in 1930.

It would seem that many who came to the parish to work in the lumber industry in the early twentieth century, or their offspring, stayed in the parish when the industry left. But this trend is not entirely clear, for population concentrations shifted radically both when the lumber giants arrived and when they left. If the 1900s and 1930s populations comprised the same people or their relatives, they at least stayed within the parish. Likely, they moved to Vernon Parish's northern half where new, often smaller, lumber mills were operating.

Most of the Black population, however, definitely came and left with the large lumber companies. Blacks made up only a small minority of Vernon Parish's population prior to 1897. But by 1900, the Black population had more than doubled. By 1910, it had nearly tripled since 1900. By 1920, the count grew to 5,103—representing 25 percent of the population compared to 9 percent representation in 1890. In the 1920s, the Black population reached its peak. One assumes that the employment opportunities with the lumber companies attracted Blacks to the area, but that they could be expected to move on. Indeed, it appears that most did. The Black population declined to only 2,420 just before World War II. While this figure still represented 47 percent of the peak period population, it represented only 13 percent of the general population—a figure in keeping with nineteenth-century Black population percentages. This population trend also reflects the historical migration of southern Blacks to northern urban regions during the early twentieth century.

Table 18 — Vernon Parish population, 1890–1940.

<i>Year</i>	<i>State</i>	<i>Vernon Parish</i>		<i>White</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>Other</i>
1890	1,118,587	Ward 1	737			
		Ward 2	1,059			
		Ward 3	1,299			
		Ward 4	714			
		Ward 5	934			
		Ward 6	1,160			
		<b>Totals</b>	<b>5,903</b>	<b>5,363</b>	<b>540</b>	—
1900	1,381,625	Ward 1*	2,027			
		Ward 2	1,881			
		Ward 3	1,158			
		Ward 4	2,944			
		Ward 5	1,145			
		Ward 6	1,172			
		<b>Totals</b>	<b>10,327</b>	<b>9,048</b>	<b>1,279</b>	—
1910	1,656,388	Ward 1**	4,374			
		Ward 2	2,564			
		Ward 3	1,292			
		Ward 4	3,342			
		Ward 5***	4,676			
		Ward 6	1,136			
		<b>Totals</b>	<b>17,384</b>	<b>13,667</b>	<b>3,716</b>	<b>1</b>
1920	1,798,509	<b>Totals</b>	<b>20,493</b>	<b>15,390</b>	<b>5,103</b>	—
1930	2,101,593	Ward 1	5,474	4,133	1,335	
		Ward 2	3,578	3,064	484	
		Ward 3	1,675	1,443	232	
		Ward 4	2,467	2,313	154	
		Ward 5	2,392	2,345	42	
		Ward 6	4,461	3,085	1,313	
		<b>Totals</b>	<b>20,047</b>	<b>16,383</b>	<b>3,560</b>	<b>104</b>
1940	2,363,880	Ward 1	5,297	4,153	1,144	
		Ward 2	3,074	2,908	166	
		Ward 3	1,644	1,423	221	
		Ward 4	1,143	1,095	48	
		Ward 5	2,558	2,558	—	
		Ward 6	2,721	1,945	776	
		Ward 7	1,547	1,484	63	
		Ward 8	1,158	1,156	2	
		<b>Totals</b>	<b>19,142</b>	<b>16,722</b>	<b>2,420</b>	—

\* Including Leesville — 1,148

\*\* Including Leesville — 2,043

\*\*\* Including Fullerton — 1,238

Again, the nineteenth-century Vernon Parish population was predominately white, Protestant, Anglo-Saxon. This trend did not change in the twentieth century. While Blacks reached 25 percent of the population in 1920, they were virtually the only minority population (save the Redbones in the parish's southeastern corner) between 1900 and 1940. A number of Mexicans labored in the lumber industry during its peak years (Richardson 1983:199), but they become "invisible" in the ten-year gap between census counts. Non-White, non-Black population in the twentieth century was practically nonexistent. Furthermore, the people of Vernon were thoroughly native-born Americans. In 1910, the foreign-born population was just 1.7 percent; in 1920, 1.3 percent; in 1930, 0.04 percent; and in 1940, less than a hundredth of a percent.

Ward population figures (Table 18) provide a rough idea of changing settlement patterns during the first half of the twentieth century. It has been established that Vernon Parish's nineteenth-century population was concentrated (if this word can be used) along the fertile Anacoco region in western Vernon Parish and along the Calcasieu in the northeastern section. The Fort Polk area was lightly settled. When the railroad was built, settlement concentrations shifted to the railroad line running through Wards 2 and 4, with the southern tip of Ward 1 (Leesville) as the center of population. Population concentrations continued to shift dramatically across the twentieth-century Vernon Parish landscape as the lumber companies arrived, cut-over the land, and then pulled out.

With the lumber companies up and running in 1910, the greatest population concentration was in Leesville and in Ward 5—the region encompassing Fort Polk. In 1910, Leesville accounted for 12 percent and Fullerton, 7 percent of the parish population. Wards 1 and 5 together (including the two towns) comprised 52 percent of the parish population. Ward 4, adjacent to both, accounted for another 19 percent. In other words, 71 percent of Vernon Parish's population lived in the three wards in which the lumber giants operated mills. In fact, Ward 5 quadrupled in population between 1900 and 1910. When Fullerton Mill closed, Ward 5 experienced a 49 percent drop in population; only

Ward 3 had a smaller population in 1930. Ward 4 also lost population after 1920, decreasing by 26 percent in 1930. Meanwhile, in 1930, centers again shifted, this time to Ward 6. This is direct evidence that the lumber activity in Vernon Parish had shifted to the Kisatchie region. Leesville continued to have the greatest concentration of people, a trend that would continue to the present.

Despite some lumber companies having camps in southwestern Ward 3, this ward had seen its greatest population growth during the late nineteenth century. Between 1900 and 1940, the ward never grew more than by a few hundred people every ten years. Ward 2, in keeping with the lumber companies' northern drift, saw some growth in 1930, and a decline in 1940 proportional to the rest of the parish.

Those Blacks who remained during the 1930s were heavily concentrated in Wards 1 (Leesville), 2, and 6. These areas still offered employment in the mills and particularly in the turpentine camps. Few Blacks resided in the parish's rural western agricultural regions during the Depression. An interesting statistic is that there were only 43 Blacks in Ward 5 in 1930 and none in 1940. This ward, which includes more than half of Fort Polk, never had more than a handful of Blacks living there throughout its history, except for the brief years when lumbering and turpentine was at its peak.

Travelers passing through in the late nineteenth century were generally lavish in their praise of Vernon Parish's country folk, Black and White. This opinion continued during the twentieth century. The people themselves were proud of their progress in becoming a modern community. *The Vernon News* published a special edition in 1900, praising all aspects of the parish, including its people (see this chapter's opening quote). An advertisement in the same edition attempted to attract settlers by noting, "If you are looking for a progressive country cast your eye on Vernon Parish" (*The Vernon News*, May 1, 1900). Although Leesville's urban population looked forward to a progressive future, Otis Richardson, accompanying a railroad surveyor into Fort Polk's piney woods, complimented the rural population on maintaining their traditional lifeways:

*The survey pushed rapidly into the back-country. We were now among the true Louisiana folk—the inhabitants—who received us as neighbors. Everyone, down to the dogs and babies, knew who we were and what we were doing. At each little farm in the clearings, we stopped to have a chat and sample the goobers, sugar cane, or pecans. I enjoyed the simple luxury of being accepted as one of them. I was among the folk who, a half-century earlier, had kept Robert E. Lee's desperate effort going for four long years. (Richardson 1983:194)*

### **POPULATION AND SETTLEMENT IN FORT POLK**

As has been established, the Fort Polk region was only lightly settled during the nineteenth century, and this pattern continued through the twentieth. Although Ward 5 had the largest ward population in 1910 (and probably 1920), settlement was concentrated heavily at Fullerton and along the railroad that ran from Fullerton to the Kansas City Southern's main line, just south of modern Fort Polk. Within Fort Polk's boundaries, population remained scattered and sparse.

Cantley and Kern's (1984:54–64) examination of landownership and demography within Fort Polk provides valuable insights into the local settlement pattern. Cantley and Kern focused their attention on the settlement of one township—T1N R7W—which today is in the heart of Fort Polk (Figure 36). Specifically, they compared the 1910 tax assessor's plats of land ownership in the township to the 1910 census.

As noted previously, more than 80 percent of township land was under the ownership of the Gulf Lumber Company and Nona Mills, with an additional 7 percent owned by other corporations. The corporations also owned the timber rights to twenty-two private parcels. Only forty-nine parcels were owned by private citizens, and these averaged only fifty-five acres. It is not known if the parcels owned by the corporations had been previously owned by private citizens, but the 1913

Bureau of Corporations study strongly implies that, prior to the twentieth century, most land in this region had been purchased by timber speculators and lumber corporations as first-time purchases from the government. In other words, the sparse settlement seen in 1910 almost certainly reflects the true density of population and settlement in the late nineteenth century, prior to the arrival of the Gulf Lumber Company, Nona Mills, and other companies.

Although there were forty-nine privately-owned parcels, private landownership does not correspond directly to actual population levels for several reasons: (1) some individuals owned multiple parcels; (2) some parcels were not settled by their owners; (3) some parcels were rented; and, (4) some corporation parcels and many government parcels were occupied by squatters whose holdings do not appear on plat maps (nor are they likely to show up on the census). But, recognizing some relationship between private ownership and actual occupation, how many people lived in the township?

In trying to answer this question, Cantley and Kern examined tax plat maps and the U.S. Census for township T1N R7W. They found seventy-two possible households, of which only twenty could be confirmed as landowners. Twenty-two households were renters, although some of these may not have been renting in the township, but rather living adjacent to it. Thirty landholding households were assumed to be in neighboring townships since they were not in the tax assessment (Cantley and Kern 1984:59). The twenty confirmed landowners provided a rough estimate of the number of farms in the township, not counting squatters who may or may not have been counted in the census.<sup>1</sup>

Cantley and Kern (1984:59) also looked at the demography of the seventy-two households. There was a total of 380 inhabitants, or an average of five people per household. By making some assumptions, one can get a rough idea of population density in the township in 1910. The twenty house-

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<sup>1</sup> There is good reason to believe that at least a few squatters were living within Fort Polk as late as the 1930s. Juneau (1937) reports that, during the Depression, timber companies in the Kurthwood area charged squatters \$0.50 to \$1 to settle on their cut-over lands. The nominal charge prevented squatters from gaining landownership rights.



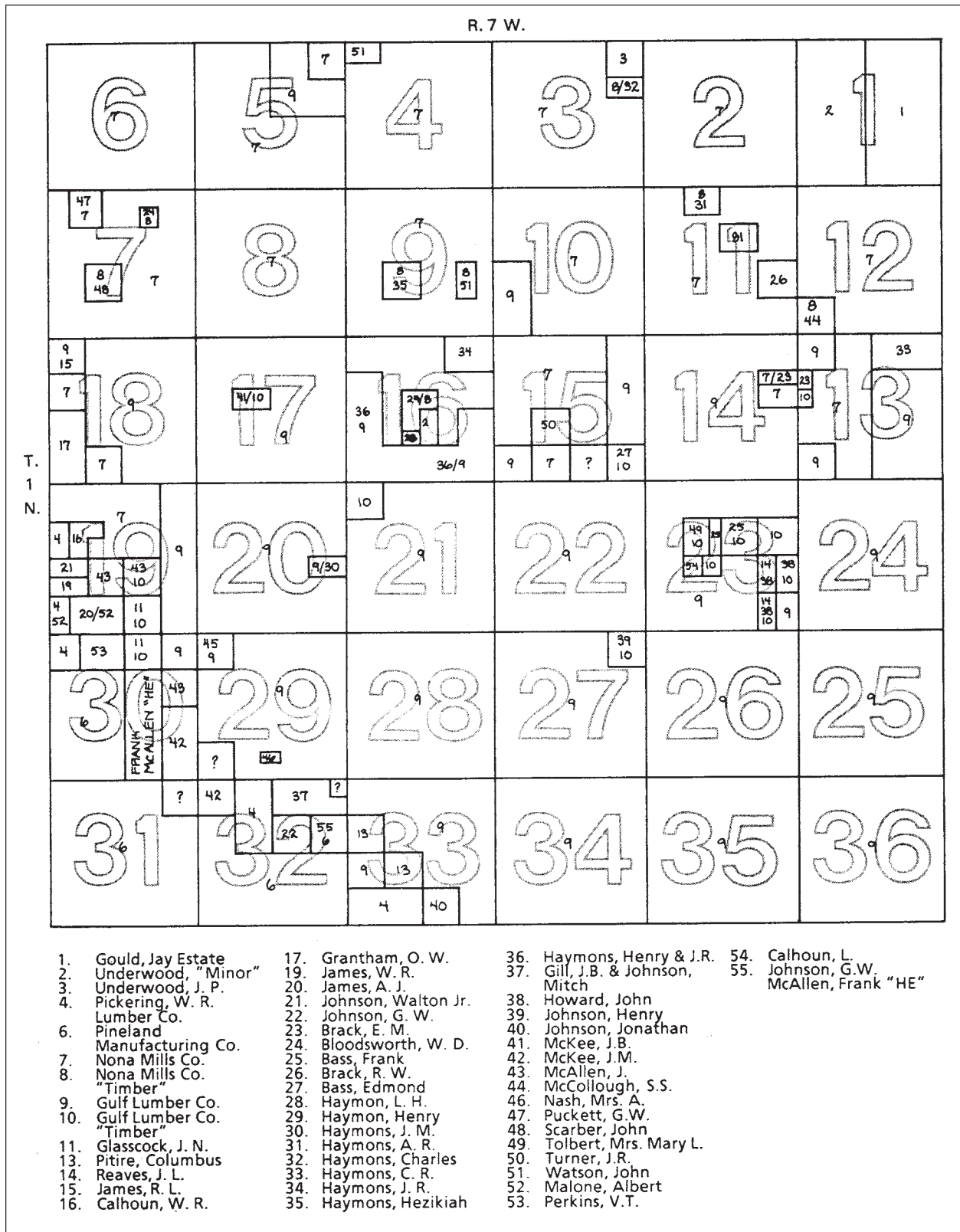


Figure 36 — Landownership, T1N7W, 1910 (from Cantley and Kern 1984:61).

holds known to exist in the township would house one hundred people (five per household). Adding to this figure the maximum number of possible resident renters, one could estimate a maximum additional twenty-two households with a total of 210 people.<sup>2</sup> There are thirty-six square miles in a township. Thus, the density of population at this time was roughly between a minimum of 2.78 and a maximum of 5.83 inhabitants per square mile. In Chapter 2, it was estimated that there were approximately 3.1 people per square mile in the Fort Polk region around 1880 and thus, perhaps, only 112 residents in the township at that time. This would imply an increase of from zero to perhaps as many as three people per square mile in the region over the thirty years from 1880 to 1910. From all indications, the population remained fairly steady in the region, and an educated guess would be that the actual figure is closer to three than six people per square mile in 1910. Using these estimates to project a population for the entire installation, its 218.5 square miles may have had a total population between 607 and 1,274 people (874 people if calculated on four per square mile) in perhaps as many as 254 households. This figure is less than the number of people in Wards 4 and 5 combined in 1890 (1,648) (see Table 18), before the lumber companies came, and thus would seem to be a reasonable estimate of the actual farm community (excluding lumbermen in camps) in 1910.

Cantley and Kern's study of landownership also plotted the location of individual plats in T1N R7W (see Figure 36). In comparing these locations with the original Government Land Office survey (see Figure 24),<sup>3</sup> it is easily seen that the small, privately owned plats clustered along the ridgelines next to the rivers and creeks. In the study, privately owned plats cluster along the Whiskey Chitto in Sections 19, 30, 29, 32, and 33; along Birds Creek in Sections 16, 15, and 23; and along an unnamed stream in the township's northeast

portion in Sections 11 and 12. This pattern is in keeping with settlement patterns across the Southeast and will be further discussed in Chapter 7.

The general distribution and matrix of landownership did not change dramatically in the examined township throughout the period from 1910 to 1940. In 1940, private citizens owned 12 percent of the land, down from 13 percent in 1910. Individual parcels numbered sixty-seven compared to forty-nine in 1910. Corporate landownership was reduced as a result of the U.S. Forest Service purchasing numerous acres of cut-over land from Gulf Lumber and other lumber companies. The government owned 51 percent of the township in 1940, and corporate ownership was down to 36 percent (Cantley and Kern 1984:63).

Cantley and Kern only looked at one township in their study. The Tract Register for Fort Polk (Office of the Chief Engineers 1975) provides a broader perspective of landownership distribution in the entire area that became Camp Polk in the 1940s (Table 19). The evidence from this register not only agrees with the Cantley-Kern study, it indicates that private landownership was even lower for the whole area in the late 1930s than their study projected. The register is divided into several sections including the Main Fort, the artillery range, and the Peason Ridge acquisitions. The register indicates that only 7,543.84 acres, or 7 percent of the Main Fort, was in private ownership, divided up into 160 separate small tracts. At Peason Ridge, only 3 percent was in private ownership, divided into thirty separate tracts. It is not known how much of the property purchased by the Forest Service was in private ownership, but one can assume that most of their property was purchased from lumber companies. The small percentages of private ownership reflected in the register, combined with the data from the Cantley-Kern study, strongly support the assertion that very little of Fort Polk was ever in the hands of private small farms.

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<sup>2</sup> The twenty-two renting households probably did not all live in the township, but this figure is balanced by the unknown number of squatters also assumed to be living there.

<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, Figure 24 does not show the southern two rows of sections in T1N R7W, however, the Whiskey Chitto flows through Sections 30, 32, and 33 as indicated by the cluster of landholdings in Figure 36.

Table 19 — Ownership of parcels at Fort Polk, Louisiana.<sup>4</sup>

	<i>Fort Polk Military Reserve</i>		<i>Fort Polk Artillery Range</i>		<i>Peason Ridge Artillery Range</i>	
	<i>Parcels</i>	<i>Acreage</i>	<i>Parcels</i>	<i>Acreage</i>	<i>Parcels</i>	<i>Acreage</i>
Federal (Forest Service)	1	27,615.18*	1	11,000.00	1	13,000.00
State	4	29.36	3	61.36	1	8.10 ‡
Private	147	6,866.97	13	676.87	30	1,576.20
Lumber Companies	5	26,288.97	26	11,374.16	16	30,168.95
Other Commercial	9	465.53**	17	20,295.91 †	1	417.28
<b>Totals</b>		61,266.01		43,408.30		45,170.53

\* This figure was crossed out on the tract list, but agrees with Burns 1982:74.

\*\* Including three acres owned by Zion Hill Church.

† William T. Burton accounts for all 20,295.91 acres here. On another list, Burton is called Burton Inc. The author does not know if this is a lumber company or not.

‡ Owned by the Vernon Parish Police Jury.

Although there is no one-to-one correlation between the number of parcels and the number of homesteads in any given region, in a rural area like Fort Polk, the number of parcels in private ownership gives an idea as to the number of homesteads. In light of the data presented herein for the twentieth century, and given that the installation's hogwallow lands were sparsely settled in the antebellum period and only slightly more populated before the land speculators arrived, and also considering that the area was closed out by land speculation around the late 1880s, it is not unreasonable to speculate that less than 15 percent of the land that became Fort Polk was ever settled or farmed! To put it more accurately, less than 15 percent of the land was ever purchased or other-

wise legally claimed and used by private citizens. This 15 percent estimate is actually rather high, and most assuredly incorporates any land that may have ever been settled by squatters.

In 1940, the U.S. Forest Service already owned 37 percent of the Main Fort and 29 percent of the Peason Ridge region, purchased primarily from lumber companies. Still, lumber companies owned 36 percent of the Main Fort, and 66 percent of Peason Ridge.<sup>5</sup> If the company called Burton Inc. was also a lumber company, combined company holdings would have been as high as 55 percent of the Main Fort. All together, in 1940, the lumber companies and other commercial interests owned 59 percent of Fort Polk; the federal government, 34 percent; and private citizens, 6 percent.

<sup>4</sup> This list includes all purchases completed as of 1946. Mineral rights on some tracts were not completed until as late as 1967. Most of the tracts were completed in 1941, 1943, and 1945. There are four other tract lists titled "western portion," "Fullerton triangle," "Camp Claiborne," and "...hern portion" (this last title is incomplete). These tracts total an additional 75,445.26 acres but were purchases made between 1967 and 1969 and are not included in this analysis. The total acreage here, 150,144.84, does not agree with Cantley and Kern's (1984) total Fort Polk acreage at 139,838, nor a 1993 figure of 186,000 (Anderson 1993). For purposes of this report the 1940 figures accurately represent the proportions of landownership at that time. It is not known if this list is complete.

<sup>5</sup> The companies owning land in the Main Fort included: Nona Mills, White Grandin Lumber, Pickering Lumber, Louisiana Sawmill Company, and Crowell and Spencer. Texas Creosoting and Sabine Pecan were other commercial interests. At Peason Ridge, the lumber companies included: Peavy-Wilson, Louisiana Longleaf, Wyatt Lumber, Meridian Lumber, Pickering, and Vernon Parish Lumber Company.

## TWENTIETH-CENTURY AGRICULTURE

While the southern and northern woods echoed with the sounds of falling trees, steam loaders, and steam engines, agriculture persisted and Vernon Parish farmers quietly pursued their husbandry. In those areas where lumber mills were busy, farmers and their sons became part-time lumbermen (Hadnot n.d.). During down times at the mill, they returned to the fields. In fact, although the lumber mills brought the parish prosperity and employment, agriculture remained the main non-timber occupation throughout the twentieth century.

Although not clearly indicated in the census figures, the timber population was clustered and mobile. The people who were part of the early twentieth-century population explosion were concentrated in Leesville and in temporary lumber camps and towns. Meanwhile, across the rural landscape, farming was still the primary occupation. This was especially true within the Fort Polk boundaries. Cantley and Kern's study (1984:59), for instance, notes eighty-six occupations listed in T1N R7W, however, 60 percent of those represented were farmers and 33 percent were employed in the lumber industry as turpentine workers, tie cutters, and mill laborers. Perhaps only a few months before or after the census taker gathered his data, these percentages may have changed as a lumber mill hired or laid off people. In any case, many of these workers would go back to farming when the mills closed. In 1940, Vernon Parish had a working population of 4,689. Agriculture employed 43 percent of this population and the lumber industry 17 percent.

Farm census data for twentieth century Vernon Parish is consistent with other historical documentation indicating that the rural community in Vernon Parish remained an Upland South, White, yeoman farm population. Farm size, for instance, is an indication that many of these farmers remained subsistence farmers, just as they had been in the late nineteenth century. In the 1880s, some expanded into general diversified farming with a cash crop and a farm of more than one hundred acres. The average farm size in 1890 was 125 acres; at the turn of the century, it was 123.8 acres. But these were the largest average farm sizes Vernon Parish ever reached. From then on, average farm size dropped to 86.6 acres in 1910. In 1930, with the Depression causing the loss and/or breakup of many farms, average farm size dropped back down to 53.2 acres, and to 55.7 acres in 1940.

But the average does not really indicate the size of most farms. Table 20 provides a breakdown of farms by size. It indicates that at the turn of the century, most Vernon Parish farms (42 percent) were in the neighborhood of 100 to 174 acres, thus within the general farming category.<sup>6</sup> But from then on farms got smaller until in 1930, when half the farms were 20 to 49 acres (52 percent). Important to this argument is the fact that large farms were almost nonexistent throughout the twentieth century. Farms in the general farming or greater category (fifty acres or more) comprised 53 percent of the total farms in 1910, but only 35 percent in 1940. Farms over 175 acres never represented more than 14 percent (1900) of the parish farms; by 1930 and 1940 this figure had dropped to around 2 percent. Large commercial farms never existed

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<sup>6</sup> The 1930 census defines a "general" farm as one in which the value of its products from any one source, cotton for instance, does not represent 40 percent or more of the total value of all the farm's products. A "specialized" farm, such as a cotton farm, has a single crop source that provides more than 40 percent of the total farm products. A "self-sufficient" farm is defined as one that consumes 50 percent or more of its products on the farm. At the time of the census, the average size of a general farm was 61 acres, a self-sufficient farm, 43 acres. Thus, the statement that farm size can indicate farm type (a general or subsistence farm, for example) holds true under the census definition. However, the author defines a general farm as a diversified farm or one that grows a cash crop, such as cotton, but also grows corn or other grains for market and home consumption. By this definition, specialized farms, such as cotton or corn farms of 100 to 250 acres, can fall in the general diversified category in terms of acreage. A small operation of 100 or less acres, even if it only produces a bale of cotton, would also fall into the general farm category by this definition. These farmers were small operators who were successfully raising a cash crop, but probably consumed most of their other products on the farm. The distinction between the author's and the census definitions is, more than anything else, the degree to which a farm is devoted to a cash or a special crop.



Table 20 — Number of farms by size and percent of total farms in Vernon Parish by year.

<i>Acreage</i>	<u>1900</u>		<u>1910</u>		<u>1920</u>		<u>1930</u>		<u>1940</u>		<u><i>Ft. Polk 1940*</i></u>	
	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
<3	0	0	2	0	1	0	2	0	2	0		
3–9	5	0**	57	4	50	4	82	4	58	3		
10–19***	28	3	106	8	162	13	239	13	222	12	48	33
20–49	200	19	442	35	543	43	960	52	948	50	56	38
50–99	231	22	273	21	269	21	363	20	442	23	31	21
100–174	442	42	266	21	162	13	160	9	189	10	10	7
175–259	97	9	72	6	49	4	28	2	35	2	1	0
260–499	48	5	35	3	29	2	13	0	9	0	0	0
500–999	6	0	10	1	9	0	2	0	4	0	1	0
>1000	0	0	12	1	3	0	1	0	3	0	0	0
<b>Total Farms</b>	1,057		1,275		1,277		1,850		1,912		147	

\* From tract register, tract sizes but not necessarily farms.

\*\* Percents less than 0.1 are recorded as 0.

\*\*\* Includes the two previous categories.

Table 21 — Farm acreage by ward, 1930.

	<i>Ward 1</i>	<i>Ward 2</i>	<i>Ward 3</i>	<i>Ward 4</i>	<i>Ward 5</i>	<i>Ward 6</i>	<i>Totals</i>
<b>No. farms</b>	203	382	240	418	326	281	1,850
Crops	4,375	7,276	5,002	7,747	5,651	4,091	34,142
Pasture	2,835	4,305	1,359	5,642	854	1,344	16,339
Woods	4,024	8,028	5,952	7,702	4,335	5,921	35,962
Other	5,299	820	1,571	1,083	2,390	798	11,961
<b>Total Acres</b>	16,533	20,429	13,884	22,174	13,230	12,154	98,404

before World War II. Within Fort Polk (Table 20), the real estate tract registry of property purchased for the camp would indicate that most farmers there probably fell in the subsistence or self-sufficient category or less than 49 acres. Although not directly comparable since not all the tracts were farms, 38 percent of the tracts were between 20 and 49 acres.

Table 21 indicates farm size by parish ward. Generally, in 1930, there were fewer but larger farms in the farming wards (Wards 1, 2, and 3). The average farm size in Ward 1 was 81 acres, compared to 53 in Ward 2, and 58 in Ward 3. In

the timber cutting wards (Wards 4, 5, and 6), the average farm size was even smaller at 53, 40, and 43 acres respectively. Again this indicates that overall the general and specialized farms were primarily found along the Anacoco drainage, while the small subsistence farms were in the hogwallow lands of Fort Polk or in the parish's eastern half.

The census statistics for farm tenure also support the classification of Vernon Parish farmers as Upland South, White, yeoman owner-operators. Prior to the arrival of the railroads, 79 to 94 percent of the farms were farmer-owned. This ownership trend continued even during the Depression,

when the rest of the South was in high tenure. In 1900, 90 percent of farms were owned; in 1910, 82 percent; and in 1920, 85 percent. During the Depression, in 1930, 75 percent of farms were still wholly or partially owned; in 1940, 72 percent (Table 22).

In comparing parish and state figures, Woof-ter's study (1936:195) of farm tenure in the South indicated that in 1910, 65.3 percent of all farms in twenty-nine Louisiana parishes were tenant farms. Overall, in 1910, the state rate was 55 percent tenancy. The U.S. Census indicated that tenancy for all Louisiana farms in 1920, 1930, and 1940 was 57 percent, 66 percent, and 59.4 percent respectively. Table 22 also includes tenure by race. Even the majority of the Black farm population in Vernon Parish owned their own farms until the 1940s.

The 1930 census of farm types provides greater insight into the types of farms seen on the Vernon Parish landscape. There were 324 farms categorized as general farms (according to the census definition), 311 self-sufficient farms, 829 cotton farms, 21 farms specializing in some unspecified crop, 6 fruit farms, 6 truck farms, 6 dairy farms, and 35 animal specialty (probably cattle or sheep) farms. Also, there were 156 "abnormal farms," of which 149 were unclassified, 1 estate, 5 forest product farms (tree farms), 3 horse farms, and a

board or lodging farm. Altogether, the parish had 1,850 farms. Thus, as defined by the census takers, only 18 percent of total farms were general and 17 percent self-sufficient. Cotton farms were in the majority at 45 percent. But under this author's definition, many of the specialty farmers, cotton farmers for instance, were most likely diversifying, growing corn and other crops for consumption and sale to the local market in addition to their primary cash crop. Also, 8 percent of these farms were unclassified. Thus, in keeping consistent with the definition used in previous chapters, the Vernon Parish farm community had made the transition to general farming by 1930. Subsistence or self-sufficient farms were in the minority. General diversified farms were in the majority, with most farmers growing cotton as their primary cash crop. But the specialization in cotton farming in 1930 may be an anomaly rather than a pattern.

Tables 23 and 24 provide census data on crop and animal production in the twentieth century. Corn continued to be a farm mainstay and, except for around 1920, it increased over the years from its nineteenth-century production levels. Although sweet potatoes production declined drastically in 1940, the crop was still being produced on a relatively large scale. On the other hand, oats were abandoned in the 1930s. Perhaps farmers started

Table 22 — Vernon Parish tenure by type and race (White/Black\*), 1900–1940.

	<i>1900</i>	<i>1910</i>	<i>1920</i>	<i>1930</i>	<i>1940</i>
Owners	902/46	1,101/37	1,139/33	1,246/49	1,338/27
Part Owners	5	—	—	98/3	107/8
Owner/Tenants**	6	—	—	—	—
Managers	5	2	7	7	1
Cash Tenants	36	20	29	112/15	—
Share Tenants	51/6	73	40	—	—
Share/Cash	—	13	0	—	—
Croppers	—	—	29	110/12	162/15
Unknown Tenants	—	19	0	184/14	368/36 ***
White Tenants	—	112	81	—	—
Black Tenants	—	13	17	—	—

\* A number following a slash (/) indicates Black representation.

\*\* It is assumed this means that the farmer owned some land and rented or sharecropped the rest.

\*\*\* Indicates all tenants.

Table 23 — Selected Vernon Parish crops, 1900–1940.

	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940
Corn (bushels)	147,100	160,015	148,072	178,903	195,576
Oats (bushels)	4,590	4,971	2,255	20	90
Cotton (acres)	4,447	2,233	3,281	12,592	6,282
Cotton (bales)	1,399	700	529	3,975	3,207
Sweet Potatoes (bushels)	58,991	101,373	133,308	145,986	78,911
Wool (pounds)	36,910	—	8,148	18,736	47,160
Cane Sugar (gallons)	—	65,802	34,731	26,988	47,563

Table 24 — Selected Vernon Parish livestock, 1900–1940.

	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940
Horses	2,006	2,028	1,849	1,797	1,728*
Asses/Mules	392	402	659	871	n/a
Milch Cows	3,052	5,104	1,851	2,488	3,373
Total Cattle**	12,047	17,020	11,757	13,155	18,413
Sheep	15,924	12,753	3,507	6,723	12,104
Swine	16,429	39,420	13,383	19,198	17,260

\* The 1940 enumeration is for both horses and mules.

\*\* Includes milch cows.

to grow cotton on land previously used for oats. The cotton acreage in 1930 was a radical increase from the decline seen between 1900 and 1920. Because raising cotton is time consuming, it is possible the decrease in cotton production during these earlier years was a reflection of farmers finding employment in the lumber industry. Once the mills closed, around the 1930s, farmers returned to their fields and to cotton.

Another reason for higher cotton production may relate to the use of fertilizers. By 1930, farmers were beginning to accept the advice of extension agents who were promoting fertilizers to grow crops on infertile soils. Interestingly, cotton acreage in 1940 was half that of 1930, but yields were equivalent, probably as a result of improved agricultural practices. Wool production more than doubled between 1890 and 1900, and then dropped significantly in the 1920s, to rise again in 1940.

Some subtle changes are seen in the parish's animal production during the twentieth century (Table 24). It would appear that mechanization

came late to the Vernon Parish farmer. The number of horses and mules combined grew gradually until 1940, when the number dropped radically. Cattle fluctuated throughout the study period.

Census statistics do not capture the hope felt by the Vernon Parish farmer at the turn of the century, nor his love of the land. *The Vernon News* special edition in 1900 (May 1) exclaimed to prospective settlers that the accessibility to good markets (brought by the railroads) provided “exceptional opportunities for the gardener and poultryman. Fruits, such as peaches, pears, apricots, plums, berries, etc., are successful and profitable crops. The soil and climate are admirably adapted to every vegetable indigenous to the South.” To add a personal touch, the paper later recorded that Mr. A. M. Phillips made \$600 on the sweet potatoes he grew on only six acres of ground!

Like all farmers, Vernon Parish's agrarians were conservative by trade, if not in their politics. The first agricultural agent, Horace A. Stewart, came to Leesville in 1909 (Curry Ford in Hadnot

n.a.). He had great difficulty getting the farmers to listen to his new ways. Once, he encouraged twelve young men to grow an acre of corn using fertilizer and new cultivation methods. The crop was successful, resulting in between eighty and one hundred bushels of corn per acre; the average at that time was fifteen bushels. Although Stewart was the talk of Leesville, the farmers ignored him. His success came slowly by teaching schoolchildren and by forming 4-H and home demonstration programs (Curry Ford in Hadnot n.a.).

Despite resistance, the work of the agricultural agents continued as they offered assistance in land terracing and hog and cattle vaccination. Agents also established demonstration programs, distributed fertilizers, and, beginning around 1926, promoted beef canning (Wise 1971:87). In the 1930s, a federal effort was initiated in the South to eradicate cow fevers, and all cattle were required to be dipped periodically to kill ticks. Western Louisiana farmers were adamantly against this program, at least partly because of the difficulty in rounding up the cattle in the summer and running them through concrete vats full of creosote. Apparently some federal agents were even killed while attempting to inspect regional farms. There are also stories of farmers dynamiting the vats (Armstrong 1958:165; Marler 1994:176).

Perhaps not all the farmers were conservative in their methods. A 1936 newspaper article noted that the first successful cotton picking machine in the country—invented by John and Mack Rust and manufactured in Memphis, Tennessee—was first demonstrated in Vernon Parish near Leesville around 1933 (*The Sunday Enterprise*, August 30, 1936).

At the end of World War II, agriculturalists in Vernon Parish were optimistic. The Chamber of Commerce's pamphlet on Vernon Parish in 1945 called for those returning from the war to "seek the ancient and honorable occupation of 'tilling the soil' ....[T]here is a clarion call back to nature—to the garden, to the farm, to the soil, to growing plants and livestock" (Leesville–Vernon Parish Chamber of Commerce 1945:33). Dairy farming was one source of hope. It was considered tailor-made to the landscape, with thousands of cut-over

acres, a mild climate, and an eight- to nine-month grazing season (Leesville–Vernon Parish Chamber of Commerce 1945:35). Cotton, corn, cattle, syrup, peanuts, swine, sheep, sweet potatoes, poultry, and garden vegetables were mentioned as productive crops and livestock. The mild climate and two-crop, 254-day average growing season were proudly proclaimed as incentives for Vernon Parish's farm future.

## TWENTIETH-CENTURY TRANSPORTATION

The twentieth-century transportation network originated from the parish's nineteenth-century trails. Roads that served the pioneers were continually improved from 1897 to 1940. Generally, the main arteries today follow the main routes of the nineteenth century. Improvement and expansion of the system in the twentieth century was the result of several different economic and political developments. But the most important was the rise of the lumber industry.

The lumber companies had to get into and out of the pinelands and transport their products to national markets. To accomplish this, lumber companies and railroads were intricately linked under the control of the industrial giants, who put up the capital to build the railroads and bought the land to cut the timber. On the one hand, the railroad enabled the lumber companies to move into the region. However, from a broader perspective, the railroad was planned and built in conjunction with speculators and industrialists purchasing timber resources back in the 1880s. In other words, most of the lumber barons were also railroad builders.

Once the lumber companies were up and running, new roads were built and more rails were quickly laid. In return, the companies brought prosperity to the parish. The parish government received increased revenues through taxation, which, in turn, was used to build new roads and maintain the old. Prosperity also allowed some to buy those new horseless carriages, and, as a result, the pressure to build new roads increased. Police jury records of the early twentieth century show that new roads continued to be a major concern. When



the last of the great lumber companies left in the late 1920s, the road system received a boost from state and federal road programs, which led to the introduction of paved roads. During the Depression, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and Forest Service made additional improvements. The final boost to road development was in the early 1940s, when the U.S. Army moved into the parish. Bridges, culverts, and roads were improved or built to support the movement of military equipment and personnel.

Figures 37 through 42 show a series of highway and ward maps for Vernon Parish between 1913 and 1940. These maps indicate that many of the pre-Civil War routes and trails have developed into Vernon Parish's present-day main highway system. For instance, building the Kansas City Southern rail line (Figures 43 and 44) next to the old trail from Many south to De Ridder helped to ensure that U.S. Route 171 would remain the main north-south artery throughout the twentieth century. In fact, today, U.S. 171 and the railroad parallel each other from Mansfield to De Ridder and then the rails follow State Route 27 (formerly Route 104) to Lake Charles.

Another pre-Civil War route was the road from Alexandria that trailed west from Hineston through the parish to Burr's Ferry, probably the oldest road in Vernon Parish. Interestingly, this road runs through the Fort Polk area between Hineston and Huddleston on maps of the mid and late nineteenth century (see Figures 12 and 23). However, in the twentieth century, it is shown running generally as State Route 21 runs today—north of the installation (Figures 39–42). It is possible that early mapmakers projected a straight line between Hineston and Huddleston, not knowing the road's exact route through this part of Louisiana. As mapmaking techniques improved in the twentieth century, the route would have been depicted more accurately, thus creating a discrepancy with earlier maps. But, it is also curious that the change to the north depicted on later maps occurs after the town of Leesville is born. The northern route was most assuredly present in the mid-nineteenth century, because the hamlet of Walnut Creek existed then and a trail had to go that way. Another possibility is that in

the nineteenth century two routes ran east-west from Hineston to Huddleston. The southern branch might have been abandoned in favor of the northern branch when Leesville was founded and Huddleston was abandoned.

At least two other major nineteenth-century routes survive today. Modern State Route 8, running from the northeast corner of the parish to Leesville, generally follows the nineteenth-century road from the Carroll Jones Plantation to Leesville. In the early twentieth century, this road was designated Route 107, connecting to State Route 21 at Walnut Hill (Figures 39, 40, 42). Modern State Route 463, running along the eastern edge of Fort Polk, probably closely follows the pre-Civil War trail leading from Hineston south to Sugartown.

In speaking of twentieth-century roads in Vernon Parish, it would appear that "all roads led to Leesville." Those not leading to Leesville disappeared or become secondary roads, while those leading to the town became the parish's main arteries. Leesville, at the parish's geographical center, had become not only the center of commerce, industry, and government, but the center of Vernon Parish's transportation web as well. This is evident when looking at the 1930 parish highway map (Figure 40), which is probably the most accurate map for this time frame. The only improved roads depicted on this map that do not run through Leesville are the north-south State Route 143 running through Burrs Ferry, a parallel road from Caney south to Beauregard Parish, 472 from LaCamp south to Fullerton, 322 from Kurthwood to Stille, and a few other short stretches.

It is pertinent to note the almost complete absence of roads within the Fort Polk area during the twentieth century, prior to the installation's construction, except for State Highway 472 from LaCamp to Fullerton, which becomes the Fullerton road within the installation today, and Route 118 from Cravens to Leesville, which is modern Route 10 (Figures 40–42). Both were gravel roads in the 1930s. There is also evidence of a twisting secondary road on the 1940 highway map (Figure 42), which ran east and west from approximately the location of Coopers east to Fullerton. This road, which is also illustrated on a 1941 Forest Service

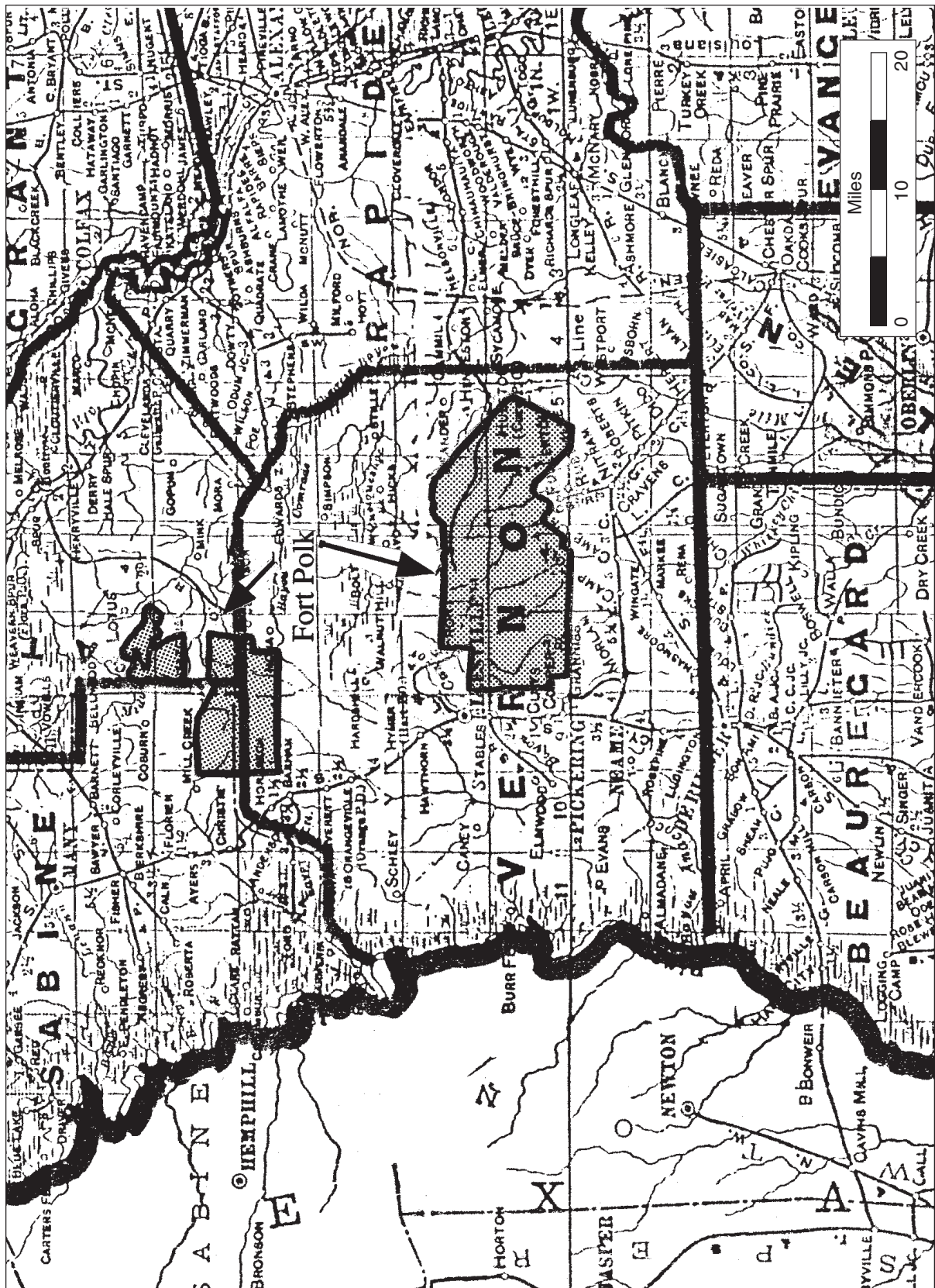


Figure 37 — Section of a 1913 immigration map (Louisiana State Board of Agriculture and Immigration, Baton Rouge; G. F. Cram Publisher, Chicago).

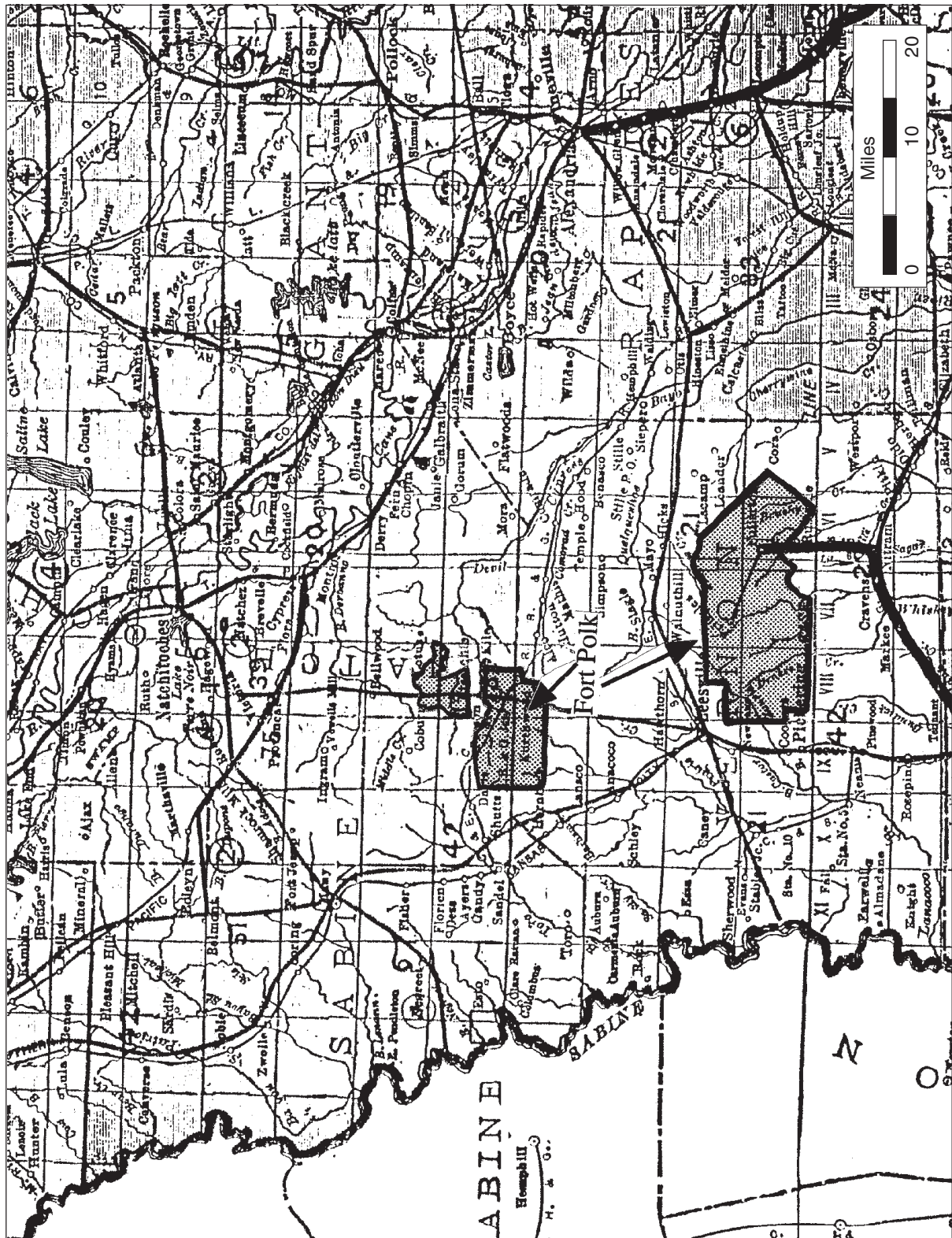


Figure 38 — Section of a 1920 Louisiana highway map (on file Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge).



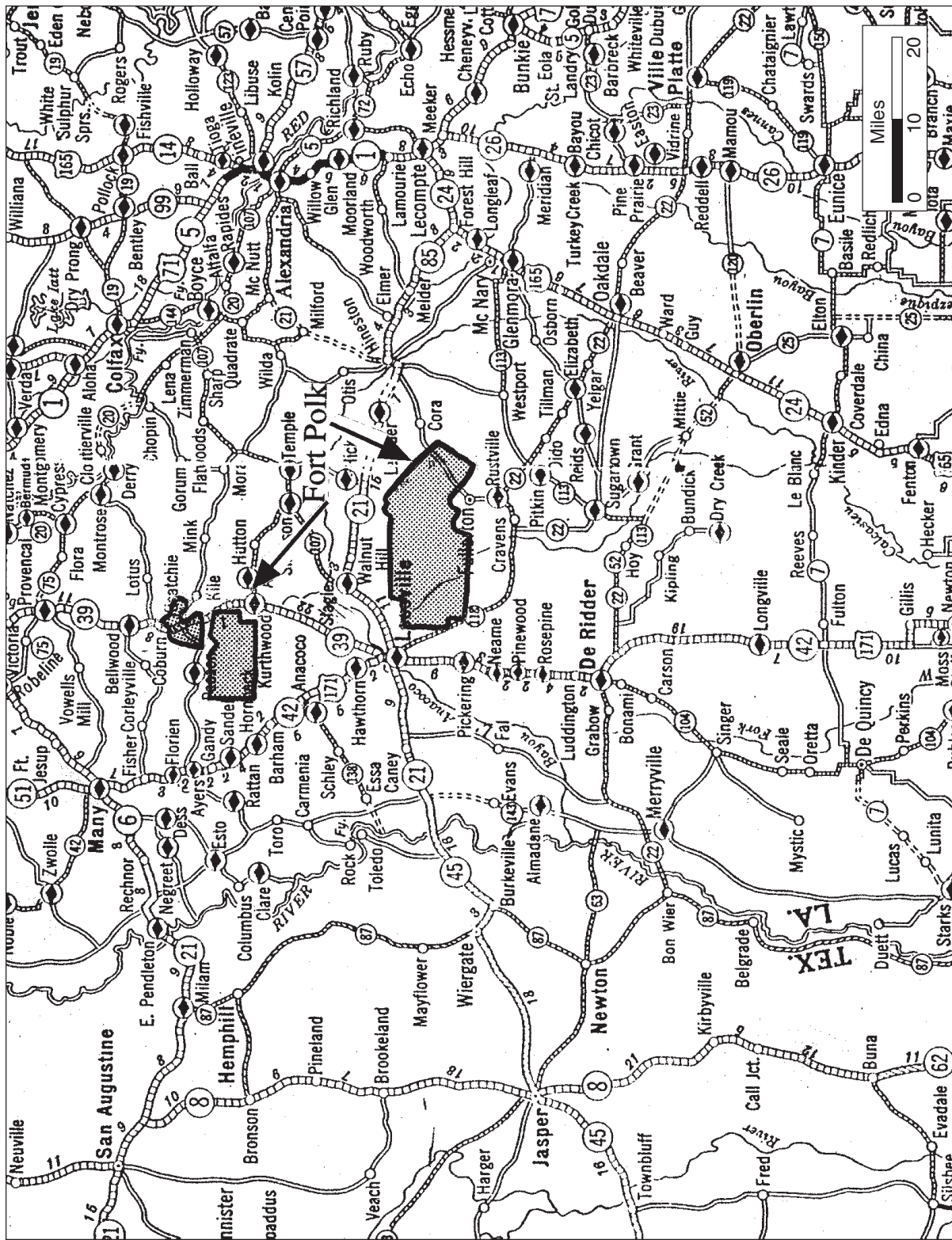


Figure 39 — Section of a 1928 Louisiana highway map (on file Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge).







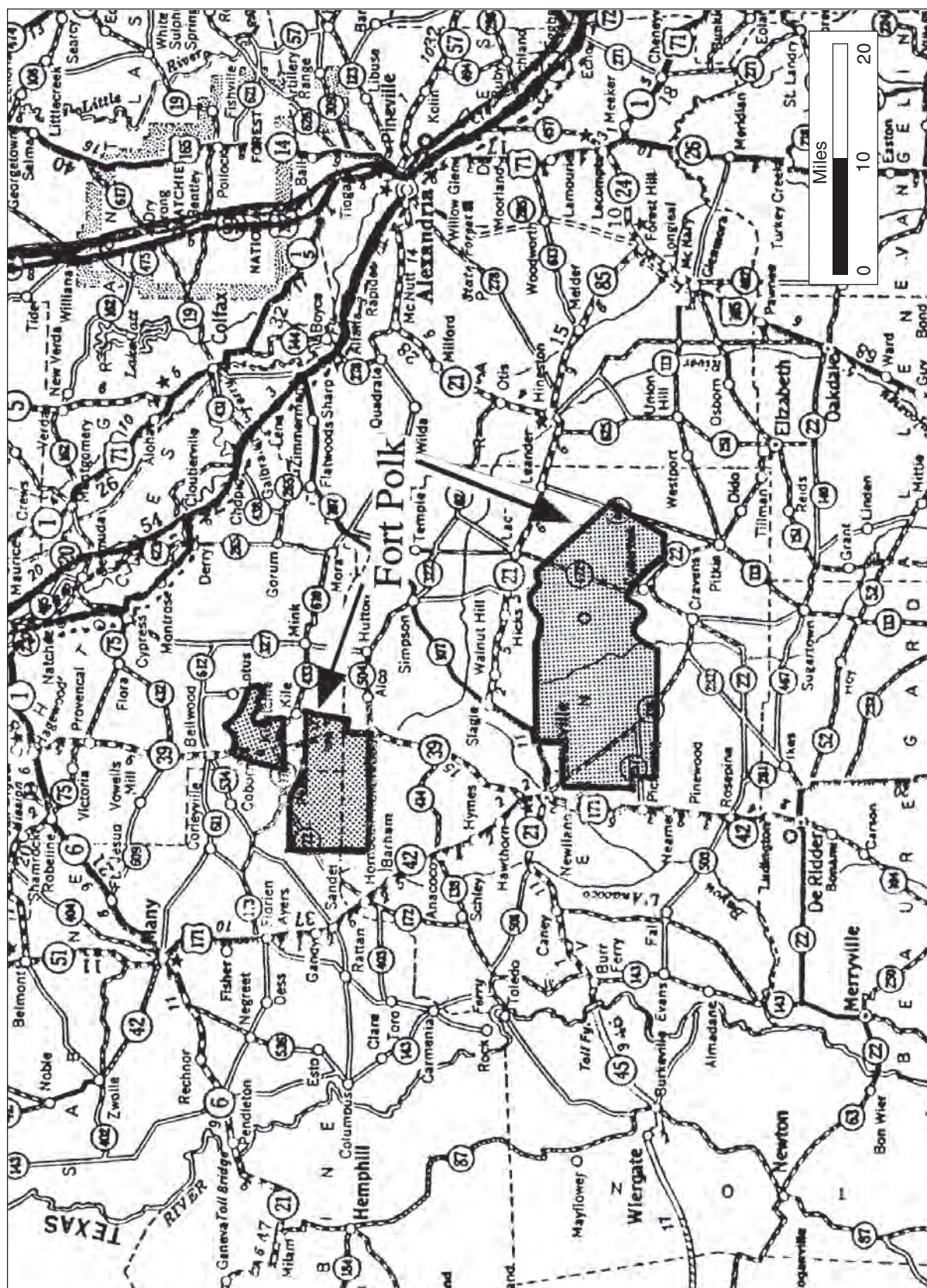


Figure 41 — Section of a 1933 Louisiana highway map (on file Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge).



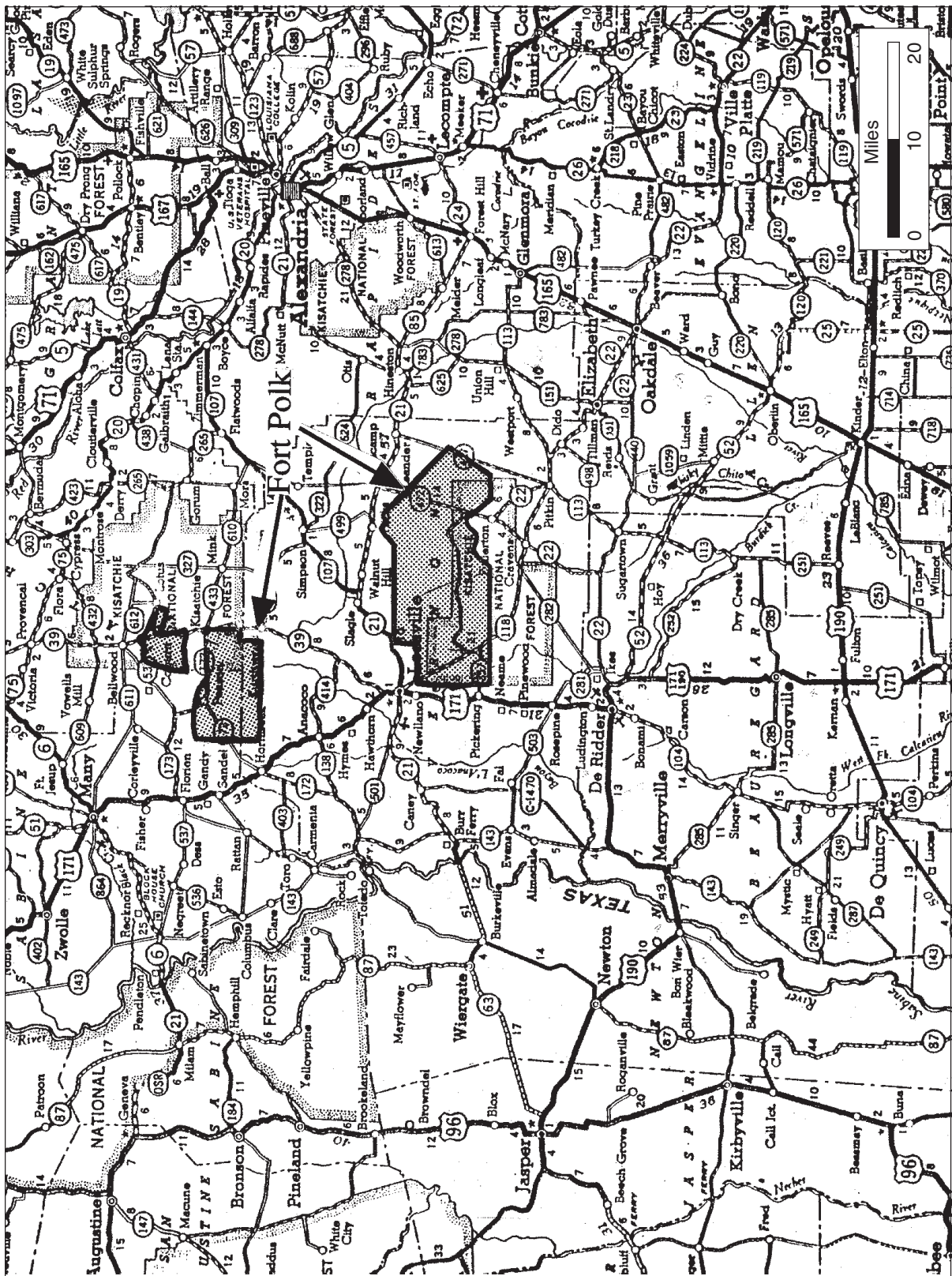


Figure 42 — Section of a 1940 Louisiana highway map (on file Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge).

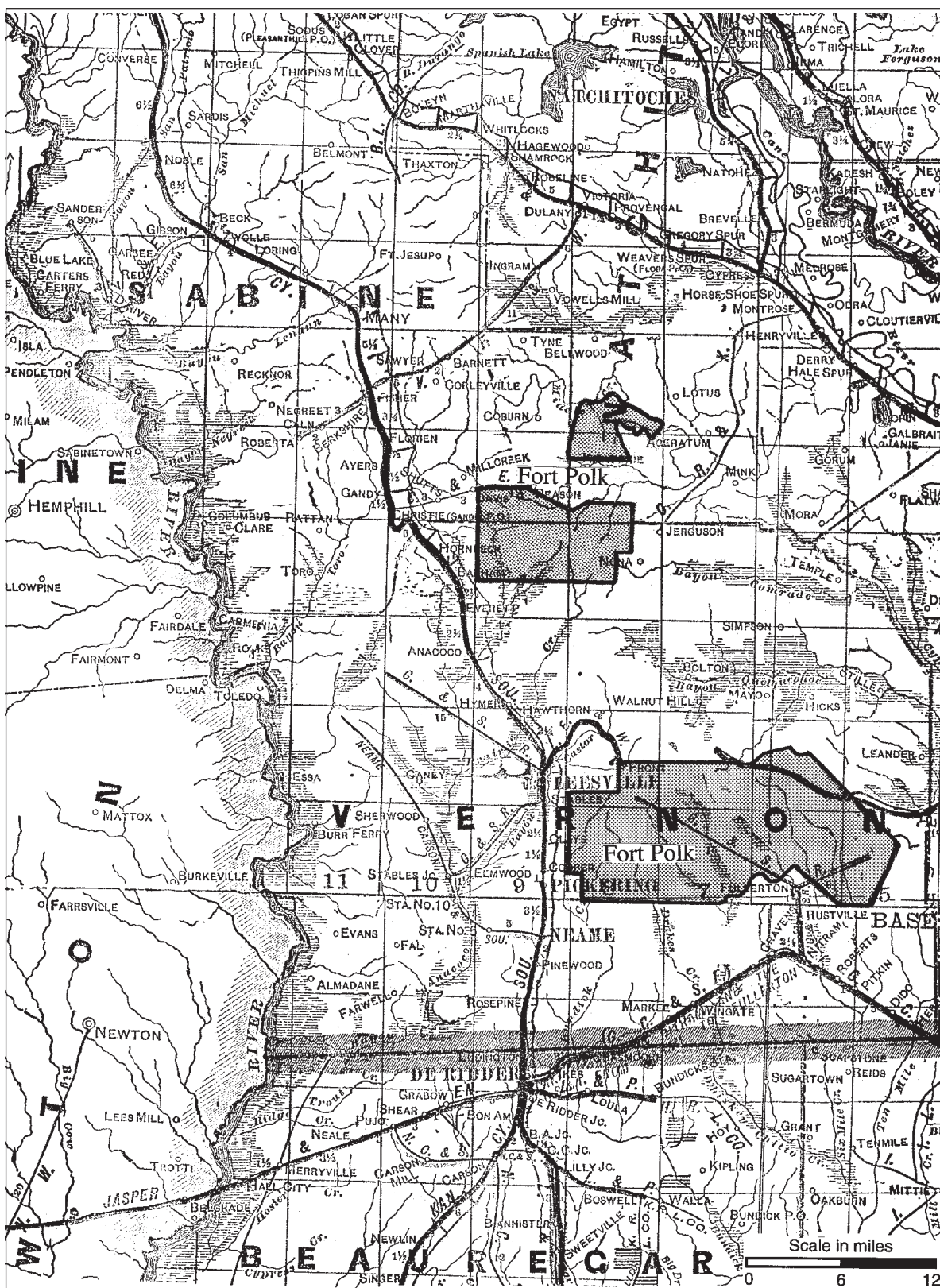


Figure 43 — Railroad map of Louisiana for the Railroad Commission, 1921 (Cram 1921).



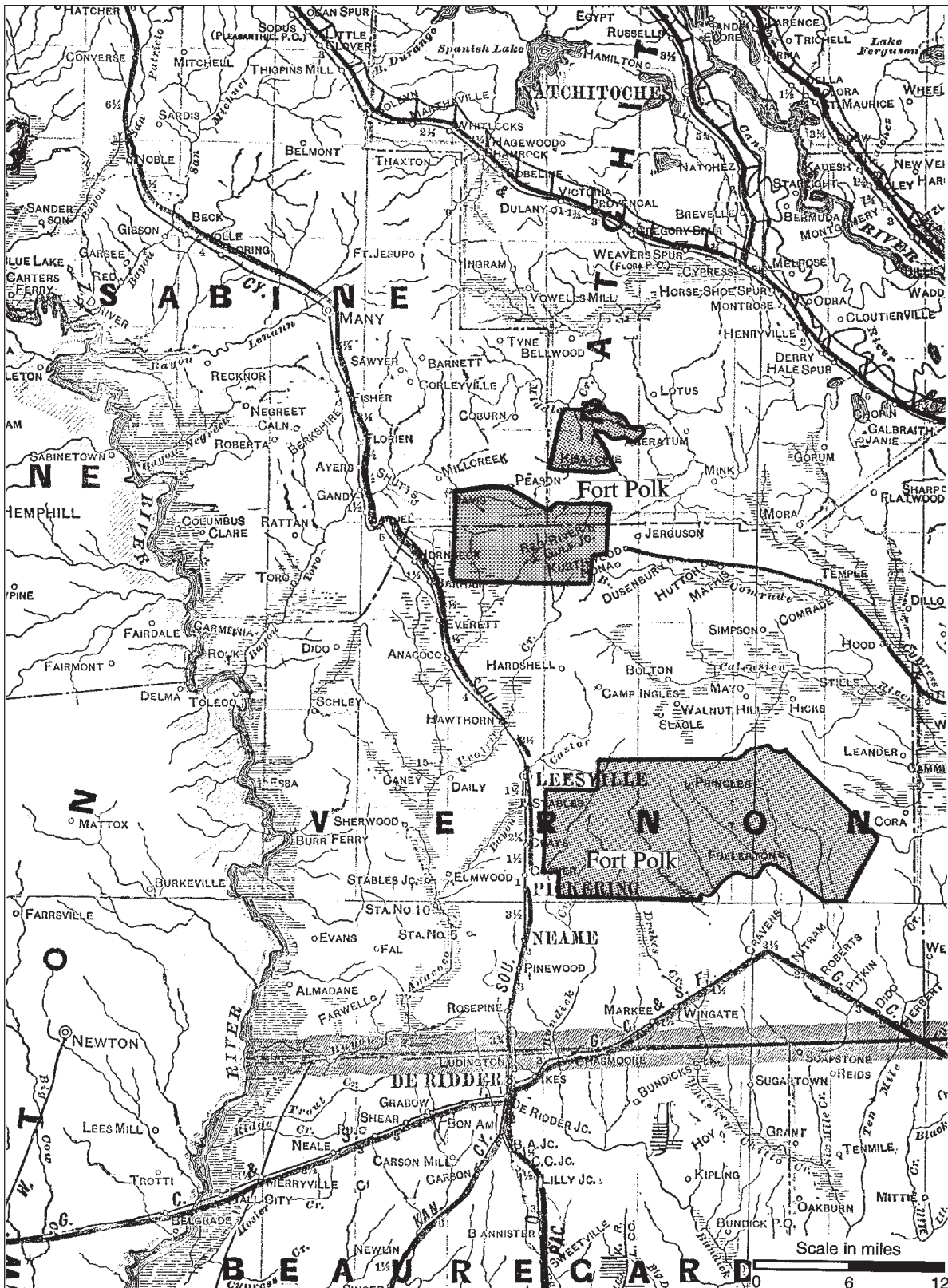


Figure 44 — 1947 Louisiana Public Service Commission railroad map (Cram 1947).

map (Figure 45), is shown most clearly on the 1930 highway map (Figure 40). Here it is depicted as a dirt road running straight east and west until just south of Six Mile where it cuts southeast to Fullerton. It is possible that the modern Mill Creek and Holly Springs roads within the installation are remnants of this old road. The 1941 map also shows another secondary road running from around Rustville north and west to State Route 21 between Slagle and Leesville. It is not seen on the 1930 map. Remnants of this road appear to be the Dugout and Rustville roads within the installation today.

Beyond these examples, one can only speculate about historic roads within the installation. As seen in Figure 46, the number of roads grew as a result of the installation, making it nearly impossible to sort the historic from the military trails. Any other roads that existed, even by 1930, must have been mere trails to farms and homes in the installation because they do not even show up on the detailed 1930 parish road map (Figure 40).

It is difficult to accurately project the Peason Ridge and Horsehead training areas on road maps and, thus, difficult to determine the road system. It would appear that there were few good roads within these areas. Figure 40 indicates that Highway 39, which is part of State Route 117 today, was probably an early twentieth-century road connecting Kisatchie with Kurthwood and Leesville. Also, a secondary road, Route 172, ran southwest from the hamlet of Peason. Beyond this, there appear to have been no other roads except farm and logging trails. Most of these roads would have been constructed rather late.

The Police Jury continued to oversee maintenance of parish roads and assign road overseers as it had in the nineteenth century. In 1908, as provided by state law, the Police Jury authorized the use of convict labor to maintain public roads (Louisiana Historical Records Survey 1941:2:195). First-class convicts received \$14.50 a month; second-class convicts, \$7.50. This sum was probably credited to their fines. In 1909, road width was increased to a minimum of twenty-five feet, but, causeways were still only fourteen feet wide (Louisiana Historical Records Survey 1941:2:285).

Although the federal government first became involved in road improvement with the institution of rural free delivery in 1896 and highway acts in 1916 and 1921, parish police juries continued their slow battle to improve roads on their own until the 1920s. At that time, Governor John M. Parker authorized work on state roads beginning with surveys and hard-surfacing (Davis 1971:360; Preston 1991:18–19, 171). Vernon Parish joined in this effort issuing some \$225,000 in road bonds between 1918 and 1920. By 1920, the parish boasted 163.9 miles of “state highways” (Louisiana Dept. of Agriculture and Immigration 1920:89, 187). However, it would be a while before Vernon Parish saw major improvements. Williams (1976) states that it was 1928 before the first paved road was seen in Vernon Parish, this being U.S. Route 171 from Many through Leesville to De Ridder.

Throughout the twentieth century, Vernon Parish residents simply had to deal the best they could with bad roads, which became impassable when it rained. Agricultural Agent Stella Jones complained that the roads were so bad in the early 1930s that it took two days for her monthly trip to Leander, a village located along State Route 21 on the parish’s eastern edge (Jones in Wise 1971:86). During the Depression, relief efforts were hindered by the poor roads. Although there were improved roads in Vernon Parish, the relief fund in 1935 noted that “unfortunately, very few of our clients live on these [improved roads], and the rest of the road system, as a whole, is unimproved dirt roads that become impassable during the winter months” (Brown et al. 1935:6). Still, with unprecedented wealth from the lumber companies, Vernon Parish citizens took to the roads in automobiles early in the century. The first cars in the parish were ordered by Kyle Ferguson, a Mr. McFarland, and Arthur Franklin in 1907 (Werner and Rowzee n.d.). By 1919, as many as 306 automobiles were registered in the parish, but no tractors (Louisiana Dept. of Agriculture and Immigration 1920:96).

Although road system improvements were made in the late 1920s and early 1930s, these were confined to the major arteries leading to Leesville. Figure 40 provides a detailed look at the road improvements in 1930. The only paved road at that



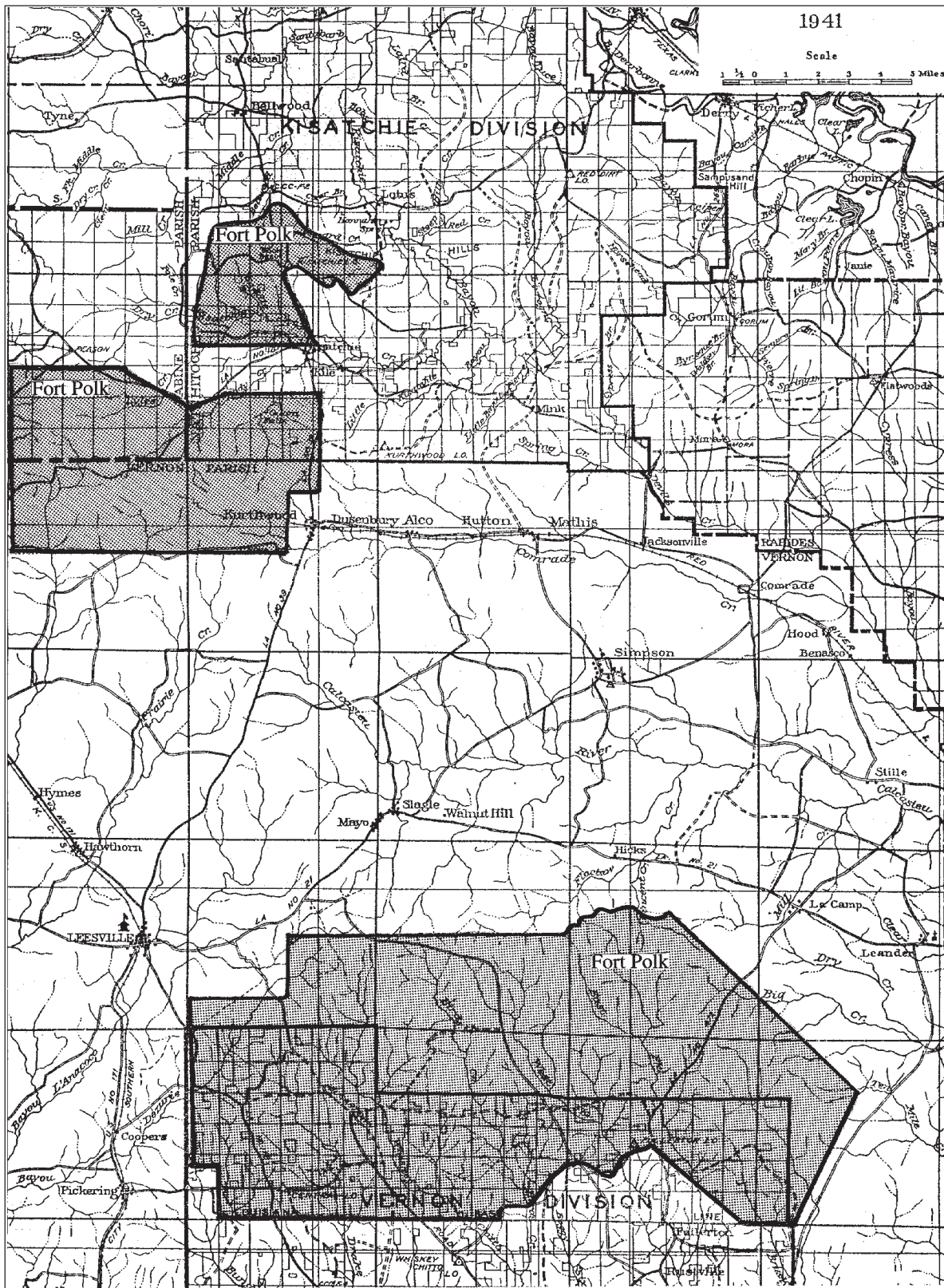


Figure 45 — Portion of Kisatchie National Forest, Louisiana, 1941 (Forest Service 1941).

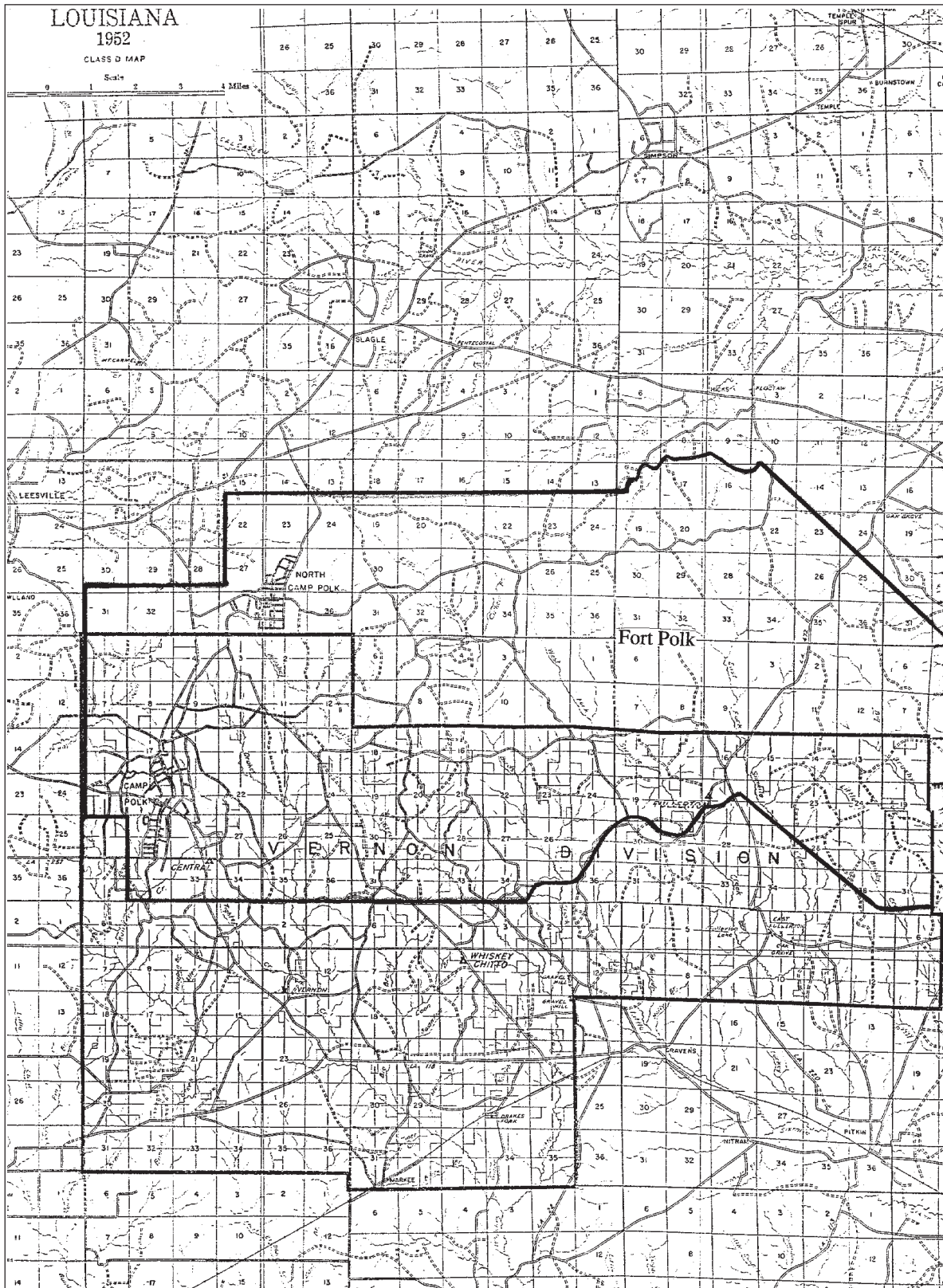


Figure 46 — Portion of Kisatchie National Forest, Louisiana, 1952 (Forest Service 1952).



time was U.S. Route 171 (black line). State Route 107 running from the northeast corner of the parish to Leesville was “surface treated” (Louisiana Highway Commission 1930). Beyond this, State Routes 39 from Kurthwood, 118 from Pitkin, 21 from Leander, and a number of other roads leading to Burrs Ferry, Anacoco, and Fullerton were gravel (dashed black and white lines) or unimproved dirt (double lines). Overall, there were only 240 miles of improved roads in the parish in 1935 (Brown et al. 1935:6). Again, Leesville was at the center of a transportation web, all roads leading to that center of commerce and government.

Road improvements continued in the mid and late 1930s and in 1940. As stated previously, the CCC, the Forest Service, and the army made major improvements. By 1945, Vernon Parish had four hard-surfaced roads (Leesville–Vernon Parish Chamber of Commerce 1945:27). By 1949, improvements resulted in eighty-two miles of hard-surfaced roads and 253 miles of graveled roads (Vernon Parish Planning Board 1949:60). At that time, there were 4,800 cars and 3,100 trucks registered in the parish. Three bus lines, five taxi companies, and the Kansas City Southern lines provided public transportation—mostly used by Fort Polk soldiers. The Kansas City Southern had two passenger trains leaving at 12:50 and 5:10 daily, squeezed between the heavy freight traffic. The bus lines ran five times daily.

### RAILROADS

Besides cars and buggies, railroads were the only other major form of transportation.<sup>7</sup> Without doubt, the railroads opened Vernon Parish to the world and vice versa (Figure 47). Rails allowed the lumber companies to move into the parish, cut the timber, and send it to national and world markets (Fig-

ure 48). Rails created an opportunity and means for the farming community to move their crops to state and national markets. Rails brought thousands of men to Fort Polk and sent them away as soldiers, beginning in 1940. At the same time, rails brought the world’s goods and services to Vernon Parish’s rustic citizens.

Throughout the period from 1897 to 1940, the Kansas City Southern (KCS) line was the main freight and passenger route through the parish. The company’s full name was the Kansas City, Shreveport, and Gulf Terminal Company, chartered for service in Louisiana on July 27, 1897. But the KCS & G was under the control of the KCS, which remained the controlling company throughout the early twentieth century. A large Missouri-based corporation, the KCS owned or controlled many railway subsidiaries, such as the Texarkana and Fort Smith and the Arkansas Western (Poor’s Manual 1915:761–765). In 1915, it controlled some 827 miles of rails that ran through Missouri, Arkansas, Louisiana (249.08 miles), and Texas (Louisiana Dept. of Agriculture and Immigration 1916:17). The KCS still runs today along the line from Shreveport to Lake Charles. In Vernon Parish, it follows the same general line it always has, paralleling U.S. Route 171 from Hornbeck to Rosepine.

A brochure about Granniss Plantation provides freight and passenger prices around 1908 (Pineland Manufacturing Company n.d.). For between 40 and 66 cents, 100 pounds of vegetables could be shipped practically anywhere in the Midwest. For instance, the cost of shipping to Chicago, Illinois, was 47 cents per 100 pounds; 44 cents to Des Moines, Iowa; 52 cents to Green Bay, Wisconsin; only 50 cents to Trinidad, Colorado; and 66 cents to Marquette, Michigan. The cost for emigrants

<sup>7</sup> One or two dirt–grass airports operated around the late 1920s, although information about them is sketchy. A *Leesville Leader* article, dated February 21, 1929, states that a thirty-acre airport called Watson Field was located “between the Anacoco and Kurthwood highways or where the old War Memorial Hospital was located” (north Leesville) (Werner and Rowzee n.d.). This field was later moved to “the fire tower, where it is located now” (Werner and Rowzee n.d.). The first pilots were Abe Allen, a World War I veteran, and Red Farris. The first plane was a Lincoln J. I. Standard, eight cylinder, 90 horsepower plane, license number 3733, owned by W. O. Farris and J. E. Harris of Leesville (Werner and Rowzee n.d.). The airports apparently closed because the planning board reported no public airports in Vernon Parish in 1949.

Commercial river traffic must have died out on the Sabine by the 1930s. According to the Vernon Parish Planning Board (1949:63), none of the rivers were considered navigable in the late 1940s.



Figure 47 — Railroads brought the outside world to Vernon Parish and carried the parish's timber to the world (courtesy Museum of West Louisiana).

moving household goods to Pickering, Louisiana, was 49 cents per 100 pounds from Chicago, Illinois; 43 cents from Kansas City, Missouri; and 32 cents from Lincoln, Nebraska. One-way travel to Pickering from Chicago cost \$21; \$22.20 from Indianapolis; and \$15.50 from Kansas City. Amazingly, it cost \$4.90 to get to Pickering from Alexandria, Louisiana; \$1.95 from Lake Charles; as much as \$3.60 from Shreveport; and \$8.50 from New Orleans, all of which seems rather high for the time.

The KCS route through the parish drew population, development, and industry like a magnet. Many of Vernon Parish's lumber companies built their mills along its long north-south line. Even the Gulf Lumber Company built a mill and town just south of Leesville along this route. But as the timber around this area was being depleted, the company reached deeper into the forests, building

the town of Fullerton. To get into and out of that area, branch lines were needed. Like the other great lumber barons, S. H. Fullerton solved the problem by building his own branch line, the Gulf and Sabine River Railroad (G & SR) chartered on September 1, 1906. He built one line from his mill at Stables southwest to Johnson, Louisiana (see Figure 43)—the line connected to the KCS at Stables—and another at Leesville that ran northwest. At Fullerton, he built a line running south to Nitram connecting with the east-west Jasper and Eastern Railway—the only other main line in the parish (see Figure 43) (Poor's Manual 1915:712). In 1915, the Stables to Johnson line was 11.75 miles long and the north branch stretched 15 miles. The Fullerton line, 17.81 miles long by 1915, was perhaps twice as long in 1921 as two branches ran northwest and northeast from Fullerton deep into the Fort Polk pinelands. R. W. Fullerton and Rob-



Figure 48— Logging train hauling logs to the mill (courtesy Museum of West Louisiana).

ert Fullerton Jr. were directors of the railroad along with S. H. Fullerton. J. T. Burlingame acted as the general manager at Fullerton (Poor's Manual 1915:713).

The G & SR was no mere logging train. Fullerton's railroad was a standard gauge railroad that, through the Jasper and Eastern, connected to many points south of Vernon Parish and throughout southern Louisiana and Texas. During World War I, it made two daily passenger runs to Lake Charles (Burns 1970:3). Fullerton's railroad had nine locomotives, two passenger cars, 129 freight cars, and fourteen service cars. Fullerton planned to expand the railroad to Merryville and Alexandria, but that may not have happened (Poor's Manual 1915:712). The G & SR was abandoned before 1935 (Poor's Manual 1935:64), probably when the mill closed. On the other hand, the 1930 highway map indicates a line running from Cravens to

Pickering called the Louisiana Central Railroad. This line, running through the heart of Fort Polk, might have been part of Fullerton's old line (see Figure 40). The 1935 Poor's Manual does not list this line either as active or abandoned.

As mentioned, the other main line in Vernon Parish was the Jasper and Eastern (J & E). More accurately, the J & E was a connecting line that ran from Kirbyville, Texas, to Oakdale, Louisiana, in Allen Parish. It was in full operation by 1908 (Reed 1941:294). In 1915, the 81.42 mile line ran to De Ridder where it met the KCS and turned northeast to Cravens, Louisiana, and then southeast to Oakdale (see Figure 41). This allowed Fullerton and other mills to get their products to Texas to be sold nationally.

The J & E was organized in November 11, 1904, and was owned by the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe (AT & SF), but leased to the Gulf,



Colorado, and Santa Fe (GC & SF) for fifty years from its charter (Poor's Manual 1915:567). Texas lumber baron John Kirby was instrumental in getting this railroad built in order to capture some of the lumber freight market in Louisiana (Reed 1941:292–295). Both the AT & SF and the GC & SF were large companies with many smaller holdings. In 1915, for instance, the GC & SF had 1,596.4 miles of line and leased another 329.64 miles (Poor's Manual 1915:565). Eventually, the line returned to the AT & SF, as it is today.

Gulf Lumber was not the only mill to develop branch lines in Vernon Parish. Central Coal and Coke ran their own line deep into the parish's southwestern section and called it the Neame, Carson, and Southern Railroad (NC & S) (see Figure 43). In 1915, the NC & S had yet to be chartered and was running under a permit from the state of Louisiana (Poor's Manual 1915:1992). At that time it operated several branches. The Caney to Neame branch was 16.4 miles long, but other branches ran into southwestern Louisiana for a total of 44.78 miles of line. These branches ran to stops called Camp Riley, Pujoe, Longville, and C.C. Jct., and were probably built along land owned by Central Coal and Coke beyond Vernon Parish (Poor's Manual 1915:1992). The NC & S was discontinued in 1926 (Poor's Manual 1935:68).

Nona Mills also had their own little line called the Leesville East and West Railroad (see Figure 43). This 15.5 mile line was chartered on June 19, 1899. It had three locomotives and forty-two freight cars to transport logs to the mill at Leesville from points east of the town (Poor's Manual 1915:407). All these lines were standard gauge (four foot, eight and a half inch) lines. Another Leesville line, called the Leesville, Slagle and Eastern Railroad, was in operation for a short time and abandoned by 1935 (Poor's Manual 1935:66). It may have connected the mill at Slagle to the Kansas City Southern Railroad.

At least three branch lines served the lumber companies in the Peason Ridge region (see Figure 43). The Old River and Kisatchie<sup>8</sup> (OR & K) ran

from Old River to Jerguson, Louisiana, at least as early as 1906 (Poor's Manual 1906:321). At that time it had four locomotives, thirty-six logging cars and four box cars. It was a true logging train with three-foot-gauge rails running for twenty-six miles. The OR & K was owned by the Montrose Lumber Company in 1906. But by 1915, the Frost Johnson Lumber Company owned the railroad, at which time, three locomotives and thirty-six freight cars were running and the rail line had been reduced to nineteen miles (Poor's Manual 1915:948). Figure 43, the 1921 map, also depicts a short branch line of 10.5 miles running from Sandel, Louisiana, in Sabine Parish to Peason. This railroad—the Christie and Eastern Railroad—is also shown on a 1930 Louisiana Highway Commission map. Not much is known about this branch, other than that it was a short private railroad abandoned by 1935 (Poor's Manual 1935:60).

Figure 44 indicates the changes that had occurred in the railroad lines by 1947. All the short branch lines are gone. But a third line running to the Peason Ridge area at this time dead-ends at Kurthwood. This was the Peavy and Wilson Railroad, which connected to the Red River and Gulf Railroad at Kurthwood (De Ramus 1989). The Red River and Gulf lasted much longer. In 1915, it was a short branch from LeCompte to Long Leaf in Rapides Parish. It obviously lengthened when lumbering moved north into the Peason Ridge region. It was chartered on April 21, 1905. Because C. T. Crowell and A. B. Spencer were on its board of directors, the Crowell-Spencer Lumber Company probably owned the line at that time (Poor's Manual 1915:965). Marler (1994:155) states that the Red River and Gulf ran until 1953.

Since the late nineteenth century, attempts had been made to run an east-west line across the heart of Vernon Parish (see previous chapter). During the early twentieth century, this effort continued but also appears to have been unsuccessful. In 1908, the Police Jury moved for a parish vote on a tax to construct the Alexandria, Leesville, Lufkin, and Western Railway. Then in 1913, the citizens

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<sup>8</sup> Sometimes spelled “Kissatchie” with the double “s” (see Poor's Manual 1906, 1915).



of Wards 1 and 3 petitioned to hold a special election to extend the St. Louis Southwestern Railway Company of Texas from White City, Texas, to Leesville. That same year, an ordinance was promulgated for a special election to vote on building the Orange and North Eastern Railway from East Orange, Louisiana (Calcasieu Parish), through Leesville to Natchitoches. It is doubtful any of these railways were built, although a line called the Alexandria and Western Railroad was chartered and may have been built in another parish (Poor's Manual 1935:57).

Finally, the army built a railroad during the war to transport soldiers to and from Camp Claiborne and Fort Polk (O'Halloran, January 31, 1952). This railroad was 47.66 miles long and used the old Hillger-Deuches-Edwards logging road (Gray 1955:32).

### LUMBER TOWNS, VILLAGES, POST STOPS

The growth and decline of Vernon Parish's population in the twentieth century is clearly evident in the number of little villages that sprang up across the landscape between 1897 and 1920 only to be abandoned in the late 1920s and the 1930s. Those villages and towns that depended solely on the mills for their survival had a short but intense life. Outside of the mill towns and timber camps, however, the population growth was slow, steady, and slight. Throughout the period from 1897 until World War II, Vernon Parish remained primarily a rural, country parish. Its largest towns were Leesville and Fullerton. Following are summaries of the places and locations that were part of the twentieth-century parish landscape (Figure 49; also see Figures 37–46).<sup>9</sup>

#### ALCO (DUSENBURY)

The little village of Alco was a rail stop and possibly a mill town along the Red River and Gulf Railroad between the end of the line at Kurthwood and Hutton in north-central Vernon Parish. It was also a post office from September 1922 until at least 1930, according to Post Office Department (1973) records. N. Hadnot held the postmaster position in 1925; William Lewis in 1926. The records also imply that Alco was called Dusenbury from November 1920 until 1922.<sup>10</sup> However, McDaniel (1983:12) mentions that a general store was located between Dusenbury and Alco, so they possibly were two different locations. Alco appears on commercial road maps dating to 1920 (see Figure 38) and 1933 (see Figure 41), but not on the more accurate 1930 highway commission map (see Figure 40). The 1941 Forest Service map (see Figure 45) depicts both, but only Dusenbury appears on the 1947 railroad map (see Figure 44).

The village was much larger than just a rail stop, for the Alexandria Lumber Company ran a mill there in the 1920s (Louisiana Dept. of Agriculture and Immigration 1920:187; McDaniel 1983:4; Scoggins 1961:19). McDaniel (1983:13) also mentions that the village had a dentist (see Kurthwood). Today Alco is gone, but the little hamlet called Dusenbury exists south of the abandoned railroad bed.

#### ALMADANE

The little southwestern hamlet of Almadane (spelled Almodane on Figure 40 and Almadale on Figure 42) survived from the nineteenth century. With a population of sixty in 1892, it was larger than Burr's Ferry (see Chapter 4). It is well illustrated on most of the twentieth-century maps (see Figures 37–44). The last postmaster recorded was

<sup>9</sup> There are numerous possibilities for locational and chronological errors in this discussion. Many of the place names were discovered from examination of inaccurate maps and incomplete postal records. The latter indicates post office stops that may or may not necessarily be the locations of hamlets, camps, or rail stops. Rural post offices were often named for the postmaster, and names changed with new postmasters. As settlement patterns changed, post offices closed or were consolidated. Finally, a hamlet may have been called one name, the post office serving it another.

<sup>10</sup> Several rail stops still existed in the late 1940s, at least on the maps, while their post offices had been closed earlier. This is probably not unusual since most of these little stops had been abandoned but were still important place names for railroad use.

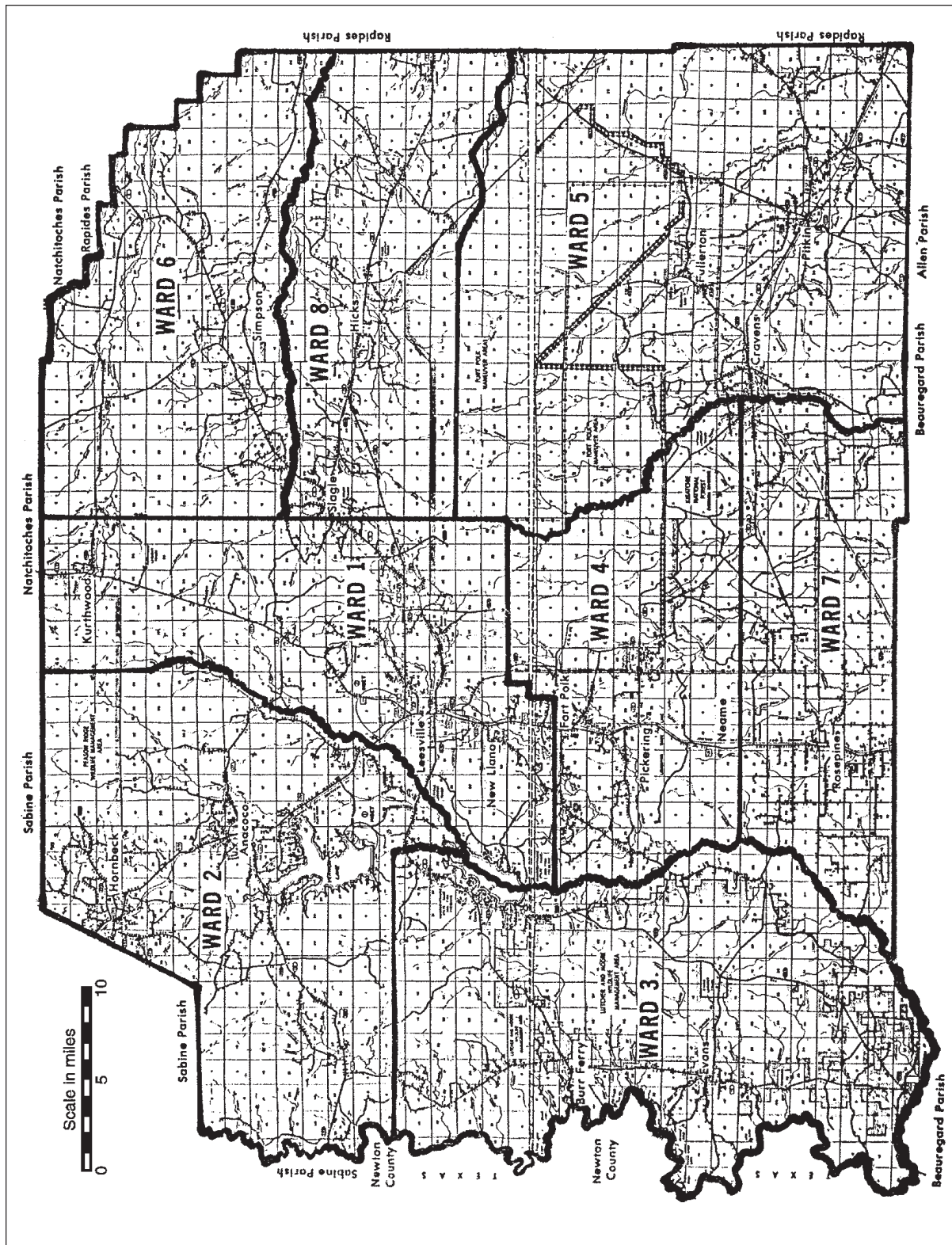


Figure 49 — Vernon Parish ward map, post-1938 (from Wise 1971:2).

Samuel Allardyce, appointed in 1916 (Post Office Dept. 1973). Almadane may have lost post office status sometime after that, but its date of discontinuation is not noted in the post office records.

#### **ANACOCO**

Old Anacoco continued to thrive during the twentieth century, in part because of its location along the Kansas City Southern Railroad and U.S. Highway 171 (see Figures 38–44, 49). At one time, it was called Orange, or at least its post office was called that beginning around 1899 (see Figure 37). However, the post office was again called Anacoco by 1911 when Letha Foster was appointed postmaster (Post Office Dept. 1973). Powell Brothers and Sanders, a small lumber mill, operated there from 1902 to 1907 (Hadnot in Sandel 1982:96). The J. H. Anderson Lumber Company also operated there for a time.

#### **AUBURN**

Auburn, illustrated on the 1920 road map (see Figure 38), lies in the northwest corner of the parish. It was a post office stop from 1905 to 1915 (Post Office Dept. 1973), after which time the mail went to Anacoco.

#### **BARHAM**

A mill town along the Kansas City Southern Railroad between Hornbeck and Anacoco, Barham was one of W. R. Pickering's enterprises (see Figures 37–41, 43–44). The mill was a sizable operation, and the town associated with it was quite large. One census figure places the population at 800 in 1905 and 1,500 in 1906. Block, however, considers this an exaggeration. Pickering did employ as many as 300 workers in the woods and at the mill. By 1920, the population was down to 250 (Block 1996:3). At its peak, Barham was a mill town on the order of Pickering and Cravens. The post office operated, with several interruptions, between 1902 and 1931. When it was closed for good, the mails were sent to Hornbeck (Post Office Dept. 1973). Weber-King also ran a mill in Barham in the 1920s, after the Pickering mill closed down (Louisiana Dept. of Agriculture and Immigration 1920:187).

#### **BENASCO**

Benasco, a post office and rail stop, was located along the Red River and Gulf Railroad, north of Stille in northeast Vernon Parish (see Figures 38 and 45). The post office was open from 1919 until 1925, after which the mail went to Sieper.

#### **BOLTON**

The Bolton post office operated from 1900 to 1919, after which the mails were sent to Slagle. Bolton was located north of Walnut Hill along the Calcasieu River and was probably never larger than a post office and general store. However, that same location may have once been the site of an early Vernon Parish settler (see Figures 37, 43, 44).

#### **BURR FERRY (BURR'S FERRY)**

An important ferry crossing in the nineteenth century, the historic village of Burr Ferry declined in the twentieth century when the Sabine River was abandoned as a transportation route. During this period, the name changes from Burr's to Burr on contemporary maps. Fortier (1909:138) wrote that the village had "a money order post office, and in 1900 a population of 52," three less than it had in 1892 (see Chapter 4). Still, it is usually illustrated on road and parish maps throughout the twentieth century to the present (see Figures 37, 40–44, 49). Around 1922, as the lumber industry drew the population away from west Vernon Parish, Burr Ferry lost its post office and the mail went to Caney. The post office was reestablished in 1929.

#### **CANEY**

Caney is illustrated on several twentieth-century maps (see Figures 37–44), including recent highway maps. Situated in Ward 3, it is located in west-central Vernon Parish. The post office operated until 1914 (Post Office Dept. 1973).

#### **CLAYS (CLAYS SPUR)**

Clays or Clays Spur was a rail stop and siding "four and one half miles south of Leesville and two miles east of Highway 171" (Wise 1971:48). This places the spur near the heart of the cantonment area of modern Fort Polk. Clays was probably situated along Fullerton's Gulf and Sabine River line or

the Louisiana Central Railroad. However, contemporary maps, admittedly inaccurate, place Clays along the KCS main line, still some four miles south of Leesville (see Figures 37, 43, 44).

#### **COOPER(S)**

Cooper, a stop along the KCS south of Leesville, was home to the Lockwood and Bass Lumber Company, the Arbuthnot and McCain Lumber Company, and the Lockwood and Ross Company from 1903 to 1907 (Hadnot in Sandel 1982:96; Wise 1971:48). Cooper boasted a school and a church. On both a main rail line and a through highway, Cooper was often found on early twentieth-century maps (see Figures 37, 38, 43–45).

#### **CORA**

The nineteenth-century post office and hamlet called Cora, located east of Fort Polk, survived into the 1930s (see Figures 37–39, 44). Marler wrote that it was an isolated post-stop at the end of a dead-end road near Mt. Moriah Church, hence, its exact location was probably along or near modern State Route 463 near Aefman. Its last postmaster was appointed in 1929, but no records indicate when the post office was discontinued (Post Office Dept. 1973). Marler (1994:111) states that the post office was not closed until around 1953.

#### **COTTONWOOD**

The nineteenth-century hamlet Cottonwood (see Chapter 4 and Figure 20) is not illustrated on the twentieth-century maps. Its post office closed in 1915, and the mail went to Pinewood thereafter.

#### **CRAVENS**

Cravens, a moderate to large mill town and rail stop, was located south of Fullerton in Ward 5 (see Figure 49) along the Jasper and Eastern (or Gulf, Colorado, and Santa Fe) rail line (see Figures 37–44, ). The Pickering Lumber Company owned the mill there (Wise 1971:50). The town had many amenities, including a hotel, commissary, schoolhouse, church, and blacksmith shop. An 1896 map of the town depicts a “Negro quarter” with fifty-three houses, a wood quarter with twenty-six, and a White quarter with one hundred (Block 1996:14).

In 1909, Fortier (1909:322) noted that the village “is the trading center for a considerable district.” This center probably served the people living within the Fort Polk boundaries. Cravens had a post office from 1908 to 1928 when the mail was transferred to Pitkin (Post Office Dept. 1973). On leaving, Pickering sold the sawmill (and, perhaps, some of the homes) to the Urania Lumber Company based in LaSalle Parish (Block 1996:15).

#### **DIDO (AUBREY)**

Down the line east of Cravens, past Pitkin, was a series of little rail stops including Dido (see Figures 37–44). Dido was established in the late nineteenth century, grew to prominence as a lumber camp in the early twentieth, and shut down when the mills closed (Wise 1971:50). The post office records for Dido are confusing, with four separate listings for Dido. It seems that the Dido post office and lumber camp was called Aubrey from 1902 to 1907, when the name changed back to Dido (Post Office Dept. 1973). The post office then operated until 1923, at which time the mail was sent to Pitkin. Figure 44 adds to the mystery, showing two Didos: one along the GC & SF in the southeastern corner of the parish and another in the northeastern corner. This may explain the four entries for Dido in the post records.

#### **ELMWOOD**

A nineteenth-century hamlet in Ward 3 (see Figures 37, 40, 43, 44), Elmwood continued as a post office until around 1920 (Post Office Dept. 1973). Its population reached forty in 1900 (Fortier 1909:389). For a time, Elmwood might have had an even larger population, as it was located along Fullerton’s Gulf and Sabine River branch line connecting to the Neame–Carson Railroad just south of Elmwood at Stables Junction (see Figures 43–44). Thus Elmwood was in the heart of the active, thriving lumber and turpentine community.

#### **ESSA**

A post office and road stop in Ward 2, Essa was located near the junction of State Routes 138 and 148 (see Figures 38, 39, 43, 44). The Essa post office operated from 1915 to 1930, at which time



the mails were transferred to Anacoco (Post Office Dept. 1973).

#### **EVANS**

Situated south of Burr Ferry along State Route 143, Evans (see Figures 37–44, 49) was a post office from 1909 to at least 1922 (Post Office Dept. 1973). The first postmaster was Robert Evans. Wise (1971:46) states that before Evans, nearby Sea was a post office. Postal records indicate it operated from 1899 to 1907, but not where mail was sent afterwards. Wise writes that the area was settled early by the Jonathan Day Cain family.

#### **EVERETT**

Everett was a post office from 1900 to 1907, after which the mail was transferred just north to Barham (Post Office Dept. 1973). Everett was a rail stop in the mid-1930s (see Figures 37, 40, 43, 44). On a 1920 highway map (see Figure 38), a stop called Lansco is shown at or near the same location. No other maps show Lansco, and it was never a post office. However, Hadnot (in Sandel 1982:96) states that Lansco was the home of the Pate and Everett lumber mill, which operated from around 1900 to 1905.

#### **FAL**

Fal was a post office from 1917 to 1929 at which time the mail was transferred to another little post office called Knight. Both were located in Ward 3. Fal was northeast of Almadane (see Figures 38–44). Wise (1971:49) names it as one of the “booming [lumber] towns during the peak lumber years,” and indeed the Kirby Lumber Company ran a mill there in the 1920s (Louisiana Dept. of Agriculture and Immigration 1920:187).

#### **FARWELL**

Located south of Fal and southeast of Almadane, Farwell (see Figures 38, 43, 44) was a post office stop from 1916 to 1927 (Post Office Dept. 1973).

#### **FRONT**

Front is depicted on only two maps, Figures 37 and 43. Located in the very northwest corner of Fort Polk’s main post, it appears to be the final

stop on the Leesville East and West railroad. More than likely it was only a loading terminal for Nona Mills and lasted only as long as the railroad was needed for shipping lumber. There was no post office at Front.

#### **FULLERTON**

Although today’s environmentally conscious society might condemn the Gulf Lumber Company’s practice of cut and run, this judgment must be balanced with the prosperity and opportunity offered its employees. All that remains of Fullerton today is an extensive archaeological site, but it stands as clear testimony to the wealth and prosperity experienced by its residents.

First, one must imagine the hogwallow lands in the late nineteenth century. This rustic, agrarian, and isolated landscape was not only a land of forest beauty, it was also a land of poverty. Then, in 1906, S. H. Fullerton arrived and literally carved a modern (essentially futuristic) town out of the forest. Named for its founder, Fullerton (see Figures 37–46, 49) provided unprecedented material wealth for the common man. Other mill towns boasted similar success and a diversity of shops and facilities for its residents, but Fullerton was probably the largest mill town (except perhaps for Leesville) in Vernon Parish and perhaps in all of western Louisiana at its economic peak.

Fullerton was a planned community in the modern sense (Burns 1979). The workers’ houses have been described as “comfortable,” and, indeed for the early twentieth century, they were very comfortable with free electricity twenty-four hours a day, running water, iceboxes, indoor plumbing, and sewer connections (Burns 1970:1) (Figure 50). There was little difference between the managers’ and laborers’ houses in terms of size or amenities, but each house style was a little different (Richardson 1983:198).

The town had an elementary school and a high school with a checkout library and a concrete swimming pool. The pool was filled from the Whiskey Chitto through a drainpipe that occasionally discharged, besides cool water, a water moccasin into the throng of happy swimmers—lending extra excitement (Richardson 1983:199).



Figure 50 — Fullerton's homes were substantial modern structures (courtesy Museum of West Louisiana).

Two hotels were opened in Fullerton, the first of which burned. The original building was a two-story, U-shaped structure with verandah and was heated by electricity (Richardson 1983:198). The second hotel was called the Hotel Des Pines and boasted individual rather than boarding house dining, hot water, and baths in every room.

The town's business district contained a commissary, market, telephone office, bank, and drug store with soda fountain, all in one large steel and concrete building. The commissary was supplied with fresh vegetables by local farmers. A post office, barber shop with three barbers, feed store, bakery, cafe, dairy, picture show, jail, blacksmith shop, refrigeration plant (icehouse), and train depot could also be found in town (Burns 1970:4, 8; Richardson 1983:199). Two dance pavilions (with separate facilities for Whites and Blacks), a ball park with a team that Red Smith once played on, a basketball court, and playgrounds provided the

community with entertainment. A Masonic Lodge, two churches, and a hospital staffed by company doctors met the town's spiritual and health needs.

Of course, the Gulf Lumber Company owned the town and many (but not all) of its shops. Houses rented for around \$20 a month for workers, \$13 for foremen, and were like modern condominiums in that rent included the cost of repairs and upkeep (Burns 1970:7–8). Employees with families paid \$2.50 for medical service, single men paid \$1.50. Burns (1979:203, 205) implies that, unlike many other lumber companies, Gulf Lumber did not issue scrip or tokens. This system of payment forced employees to spend their "money" in company stores, thus keeping them tied to the company. Instead, Gulf Lumber paid wages in cash.

In keeping with the times, White, Black, and Mexican workers were segregated. The Mexican workers lived at "Smokey Hill" in houses built as part of Gulf Lumber Company's original camp

number 1. (In fact, several camps were set up in the woods for workers. Richardson notes that there were seven in 1915.) Housing for Blacks was less impressive than for Whites. Blacks were concentrated in an area beyond the railroad spur called the “Quarters,” which were described by Richardson as “dreary, temporary settlements” (1983:199). Though segregated by their living areas and as laborers in the forests, workers were more integrated in the mills.

Fullerton’s fortunes rose and fell with the mill. By 1927, most of the land had been cut over. The company pulled out, attempting to sell the town for about \$50,000—a fraction of the corporation’s \$3.5 million investment (Burns 1970:5). But there were no buyers. Operations died slowly. First the logging crews went, then the sawmill closed as did the dry kilns. Then the people moved away. Fullerton made a celebration of cutting the last tree, selecting one White and one Black laborer to cut it down (Figure 51). Burns reports that the tree’s rings dated it at around 800 years old (Burns 1970:6). However, the tree identified in Figure 51 as the last tree Fullerton cut does not appear to be that old. Later in the ceremony, the steam whistle was tied-down while its wail slowly and sadly changed pitch as its ran out of steam.

Earlier, Fullerton had sold 16,000 or 20,000 acres of land near Leesville to the Newllano Colony. Between 1933 and 1938, the U.S. Forest Service also purchased 36,000 acres of Fullerton land at \$1.40 per acre (Burns 1970:6).



Figure 51 — The end of an era. The last tree is cut at Fullerton (courtesy Museum of West Louisiana).

#### GRANNISS (GRANNISS PLANTATION)

Many lumber tycoons believed that once the timber was cut the barren lands could be converted into productive farmlands, or as Robert Long of Long-Bell Lumber Company was quoted as saying “the plow follows the skidder” (Maxwell and Baker 1983:196). Lumbermen had experienced some success with this conversion in Wisconsin,



so this belief was not without some foundation. Also, according to a 1929 newspaper report, Long-Bell had successfully introduced a satsuma orange growing industry in the De Ridder area (Wise 1988). Thus, as the timber was cut, the southern mill owners sold thousands of acres of Texas and Louisiana cut-over land to Northerners and European immigrants. To attract settlers, some companies set up demonstration farms.

In Vernon Parish, the Pineland Manufacturing Company tried to develop 20,000 acres of cut-over land into Granniss Plantation, named for the company president G. E. Granniss (Wise 1971:48). This demonstration farm lay four miles east of Pickering, according to Wise (1971:48), however a company brochure stated that the plantation's demonstration plot was only "half a mile of the railway station" (Pineland Manufacturing Company n.d.:30.)<sup>11</sup> In either case, the area now lies within the Forest Service's Vernon Ranger District, just south of Fort Polk (see Figure 37).

An advertising brochure, dating to around 1908, vaunts the plantation's virtues and provides some interesting insights (Pineland Manufacturing Company n.d.). The brochure points out the low western Louisiana population, mild climate, and cheap land at \$10 an acre. Land there could be purchased all at once with a 10 percent discount or 25 percent down and 25 percent over the next three years. Another selling point was that clearing the land was as easy as burning the fallen timber and stumps (Pineland Manufacturing Company n.d.:11). The brochure implied to its target audience—Midwestern farmers whose land was close to exhaustion—that the lazy Southerner was living in a farming paradise and that an ambitious hard-working Yankee could make a fortune on the land:

*Nature has done so much for man in Louisiana, and a living was so easy to get, that any*

*special exertion on his part was deemed entirely unnecessary. The climate so mild and pleasant, made a strong well built home a luxury and not needed....Two or three bales of cotton would provide the simple clothing, and if more was needed a few days' work in the nearest lumber camp would provide the where-with. The woods were full of razorbacks; deer indolently fat, could be found in any of the thickets, and a grasshopper put to proper use would supply all the black bass or channel catfish wanted....The native farmer has largely increased his production, but in the aggregate it is only a modicum compared with the quantities actually consumed. (Pineland Manufacturing Company n.d.:13-14)*

Other attractions touted were a climate ready for fruit and truck farming (especially peaches), a large local market for truck farm goods (that being the nearby lumber workers), the village of Pickering on a direct rail line to southern and northern markets, and a strong colony of fellow growers with such supporting facilities as packeries and canneries. The company was confident enough to offer discount priced round-trip tickets from Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, the Dakotas, and other Midwestern states for those prospective buyers interested in visiting. Apparently the colony failed to attract enough farmers to meet the costs of setting up the plantation because it went bankrupt in 1918 (Wise 1971:48).

#### **HARDSHELL**

Hardshell was a post stop in north-central Vernon Parish between Leesville and Kurthwood (see Figure 44; also see Figure 37). The stop was removed from the main lumber areas and traffic route so the population in the area probably did not fluctuate much. The post stop was discontinued in 1918, and the mail went to Leesville thereafter.

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<sup>11</sup> Although the owner is the Pineland Manufacturing Company, this Kansas City, Missouri-based company most assuredly was another subsidiary of a major lumber company. The location of the plantation implies that it might be connected to the Pickering Lumber Company. Maxwell and Baker (1983:196) state that Long-Bell set up a farm "near De Ridder," but if their remark is based on the 1929 reference noted by Wise, the timing is incorrect. For that matter, Pickering was still in business in 1908 when the brochure was written, so the real owners of the Pineland Manufacturing Company remain a mystery.



### HAWTHORN

Hawthorn, a mill town on the KCS, was the first stop north of Leesville (see Figures 37–45). The post office (and probably combined rail stop) was established in 1899. As it was on the main highway and rail routes, it operated until 1931, at which time the mail was transferred to Leesville. Prominent early pioneer Nathan Bray was postmaster in 1902 (Post Office Dept. 1973). Hawthorn's mill was built prior to 1904. By that time, it had a cutting capacity of 100,000 board feet a day. The mill was owned by W. T. Strange (Block 1996:208).

### HERBERT

Herbert, a nineteenth-century post stop, was in the parish's southeastern corner, south of Dido but still north of Tillman. Although by 1898 it was no longer a mail stop, it survived as a rail stop along the Jasper and Eastern Railroad (see Figures 37, 38, 43, 44).

### HICKS

Another nineteenth-century post stop, Hicks was located in Ward 8 in the parish's east-central portion and still exists today along State Route 121 (see Figures 37–41, 43–45, 49). A lumber town through the twentieth century, it had a population of forty-five in 1900 (Fortier 1909:532).

### HORNBECK

With a railroad siding and maintenance area on the KCS main line (see Figures 37–44, 49), Hornbeck grew in importance through the twentieth century (Figure 52). By 1900, it boasted a population of 225, making it a medium-sized village in comparison to other hamlets in the parish. Created as a lumber town and terminus of a railroad division, Hornbeck survived the lumber industry's decline and became an important distribution and transportation center for the parish's northern agricultural community. Fortier described Hornbeck



Figure 52 — Hornbeck became a thriving community with the railroad's arrival (courtesy Museum of West Louisiana).

in 1909 as handling two hundred to three hundred bales of cotton and several hundred loads of lumber each year. "It has a money order post office, express office, telegraph station, a number of mercantile establishments, and furnishes supplies to the northwestern part of the parish" (Fortier 1909:537). The town's development suffered a setback in 1912 when the railroad division moved to Leesville. Nonetheless, Hornbeck continued to prosper until its lumber mills closed in the 1930s (Wise 1971:43). Hornbeck's future was soon tied to the ups and downs of a "bedroom community" for Fort Polk's many employees. It also became the gateway to the Toledo Reservoir.

#### **HUTTON**

Hutton was a rail stop and post office along the Red River and Gulf Railroad between Kurthwood and Simpson (see Figures 38–41, 44, and 45). The post office was established in 1920, and the last postmaster appointed in 1926 (Post Office Dept. 1973). It is not known where the mails went afterwards. Hutton still exists today as a small hamlet.

#### **HYMES (HART)**

Hymes was the next mill town and rail stop along the KCS north of Hawthorn (see Figures 37, 40–43, 45). The Hymes post office operated under the name "Hart" from 1902 to 1914. Afterwards the mails were sent to Hawthorn. The first postmaster was Wilber Hart. Records indicate that around 1901, the post office might have been called Hymers after G. W. Hymers, who was appointed postmaster. However this post office was never in service (Post Office Dept. 1973). It is possible that when Hart became postmaster the post office was renamed Hart, while the hamlet retained the name Hymes (Hymers). The Hymer Lumber Company operated in Hymes from 1900 to 1910 (Hadnot in Sandel 1982:96).

#### **KISATCHIE**

An old nineteenth-century Natchitoches Parish settlement, Kisatchie remained a small post office stop through the twentieth century, serving Fort Polk's Peason Ridge region (see Figures 39, 42–45). It still exists today as a small hamlet.

Kisatchie, as with many rural communities, was the name given to both the place where post office, school, store, church, and cemetery were established and a greater community whereby people from the surrounding area referred to themselves as living at Kisatchie. The latter usually covered a wider area, and only rarely are historians able to reconstruct such a community. However in this case, the Kisatchie community was "approximately nine miles long and two miles wide" (Kadlecek and Bullard 1994:175).

#### **KNIGHT**

Knight was a post office south of Fal in Ward 3 (see Figure 38). It was established in 1924 with George Hawthorn as postmaster. The records show no other activities after this date. Since Knight is near Farwell, perhaps there was a name change sometime in the past.

#### **KURTHWOOD**

Kurthwood, a lumber town of some prominence in the 1920s, was on the caliber of Pickering, Stables, and Fullerton (see Figures 38–42, 44, 45, 49). Kurthwood was built by Joseph H. Kurth Jr., the son of lumber baron Joseph Kurth (McDaniel 1983:4). After working in east Texas, Kurth Jr. moved to Rapides Parish and built the small Pawnee Land and Lumber Company, which operated until 1919. Then he moved to north Vernon Parish, where he purchased thousands of acres in and around the Peason Ridge Training Area and established the Vernon Parish Lumber Company (Figure 53).

The town of Kurthwood was the equal of Fullerton in all respects, except perhaps in total size. It had all the amenities of Fullerton, including an ice plant, three hotels (one for Blacks), a feed store, school, commissary, church, ball park, movie house, doctor's office, barber shop, and pool. Homes for the mill workers had electricity, telephones, and running water (McDaniel 1983:5). The telephone system served not only Kurthwood but also Alco, Peason, and Many (McDaniel 1983:14). The town even had a plant for making and bottling Chero-Cola and an automobile agency (McDaniel 1983:8,12).



Figure 53 — Vernon Parish Lumber Company town and mill, Kurthwood (courtesy Museum of West Louisiana).

Kurth Jr. was Kurthwood. He constructed his own home in Kurthwood, where he operated the town and mill he built. He was intimately involved in the lives of the people who worked there and was even the town's first postmaster (Post Office Dept. 1973). He bought one of the first radios in the parish and set it up for all to listen to important news and sports events. The local people knew him to be a good, fair man.

Unfortunately, the Vernon Parish Lumber Company closed in 1929. The last tree was cut with much ceremony and sadness, as it had been at Fullerton. On the closing of the company, many were left without jobs. Some moved, taking their homes with them to be rebuilt in Leesville and other nearby towns. Those who stayed no longer paid rent for housing. But, unlike Fullerton, Kurthwood remains today. In 1930, the Anderson-Post Hardwood Company bought part of the Kurth property. The houses that remained were soon

filled with new families. Kurthwood underwent a face-lift; some new buildings were built, old ones torn down, and still others modified for hardwood production. Through the Depression, the town struggled but survived and, during the 1940s, recovered. When the Vernon Parish Lumber Company closed, the post office also closed. There is no record that it continued when Anderson-Post rebuilt the town. The nearby Dusenbury and Alco post offices probably served Kurthwood. The Anderson-Post Hardwood Company operated for some fifteen years (McDaniel 1983:32).

#### LACAMP

LaCamp was a crossroads between Hinston and Leesville along modern State Route 121 (see Figures 38, 40–42, 45). A post office was stationed there from 1926 to 1929, when the mails transferred to Leander, just down the road to the east. Like Slagle, LaCamp was a lumber town, although



not on a main rail line. The mill at LaCamp was owned by the Louisiana Sawmill Company and operated around 1920 (Louisiana Dept. of Agriculture and Immigration 1920:187).

#### **LEANDER**

Leander is the first hamlet one encounters entering Vernon Parish along State Route 121 from Hineston to Leesville (see Figures 37–45). A post office was established there in 1903. The last record of a post office was in 1929 (Post Office Dept. 1973).

#### **LEESVILLE**

Centrally located Leesville (see Figures 37–46 and 49) was Vernon Parish's seat of government and its predominant town in the late nineteenth century. It has never relinquished its prominence. Only Fullerton, in the 1920s, ever challenged Leesville, but this was short-lived as Fullerton was dependent on the mill while the citizens of Leesville diversified their economic base. Wise (1971:29) states that Leesville was first incorporated in 1898, but Lawrence (1961) and Hernandez (1959) argue that the date was February 15, 1900. Leesville was incorporated as a town in 1915 (Vernon Parish Tourist and Recreation Commission n.d.).

Leesville, at the turn of the century, was the pride of Vernon Parish. This “enterprising little city of 1,300 inhabitants” was regarded as an example of modern, progressive Vernon Parish (*The Vernon News*, May 1, 1900). In the midst of the virgin pineland forests, the people of Vernon Parish had rapidly built a thriving community, in large part assisted by Nona Mills. The town's explosive growth at this time must have been quite a shock to the turn-of-the-century farmer of old Vernon Parish.

By 1897, Leesville had erected a jail “capable of accommodating twenty or thirty prisoners,” and a new brick and stone courthouse was completed in 1899 (*The Vernon News*, May 1, 1900). Lining the streets were ten general stores, four drug stores, three hotels, two restaurants, two barber shops, two blacksmith shops, two livery stables, boarding houses, a bakery, a butcher shop, two millinery stores, two ice cream parlors, a fruit and vegetable

shop, and a photograph gallery. *The Vernon News* proudly noted that the town had three “club rooms and [a] billiard hall,” but no saloons. There were enough residents to keep seven doctors, a dentist, seven attorneys, an undertaker (Figure 54), three tailors, and a shoemaker in business. And, in 1928, the parish's first hospital was built in Leesville (Vernon Parish Planning Board 1949:40).

In 1904, two banks served the community—the First National Bank of Leesville and the Bank of Leesville (Dalehite 1962:3). Later, by 1918, the First State Bank and the West Louisiana Bank had been established in town. Leesville was probably the site of most if not all the banks in the parish during the early part of the twentieth century.

With plenty of empty land nearby to be occupied by new settlers, two real estate agents and a United States commissioner worked out of Leesville. In 1911, the town even had its own planned community—like Granniss Plantation—to attract Northern immigrants. Called McFarland Heights, this 76-acre tract was owned by the Leesville Real Estate and Improvement Company (*The Earth News*, Feb. 1911).

With the presence of Nona Mills, the town had a complete waterworks system. An electric light plant was soon to follow. The water system was served by a 100-foot-high tower supporting a 35-foot-high, 30-foot-wide water reservoir producing enough pressure to reach to the third story of the town's only three-story building (Wise 1971:29).

Leesville was also the center of west-central Louisiana news and information. At the turn of the twentieth century, *The Vernon News*, a weekly paper, was still in print. However, it was the *Leesville Leader*, established in 1898, that became the parish's main newspaper (Wise 1971:24). The *Leesville Leader* was the successor to the *Lightning* (or the *Leesville Lightning*) first published in 1898. The parish played an important role in social movements at this time. From these sprang the populist paper the *People's Friend* in the late nineteenth century (Louisiana Dept. of Agriculture and Immigration 1928:187).

Leesville, supported by Nona Mills, continued to grow and prosper in the 1920s. Wise tells fond tales of his boyhood during this time, of listening





Figure 54 — Third Street, Leesville (courtesy Museum of West Louisiana).

to the hum of the mills and the wail of the trains coming and going on the Kansas City Southern.

*The greatest happening was the daily arrival, each afternoon, of the KCS passenger train, the Flying Crow. Most everyone had a Chevy, a Model T, or later Model A, found it exciting to drive to the depot and watch the monster engines snort their great gushes of steam.*

*I remember Leesville from my youthful view as a place of great excitement. There were lusty brawls on Third Street; The Quarters were always erupting; and the school house kept burning down. (Wise 1971:90)*

Some people, however, were less than enamored with Leesville. Famed movie actress Joan

Blondell was quoted in a 1931 newspaper article as saying that “on Saturday unless somebody stabbed somebody else, the day was unsuccessful for the town as well as our restaurant” (in Wise 1988). She may have had a point. For instance, on September 25, 1930, an article in the *Leesville Leader* stated that “Saturday afternoon and night were rather disappointing. Only a few arrests were made, one man for being drunk, two for fighting and another for selling liquor. It is expected that there will be more doing around here next Saturday night” (in Wise 1988).

The town thrived in the 1920s. Its population grew to 2,518 in 1920 and 3,291 in 1930 (Hernandez 1959; WPA 1936:1). Besides Nona Mills and Gulf Land and Lumber, there were other lumber companies in the county seat, including Weber-King and Brown Lumber Companies (Louisiana

Dept. of Agriculture and Immigration 1920:187). Like the rest of the parish, the town saw bad times after the mills left. However, smaller mills created some employment, and the town survived, unlike Fullerton. With the Depression, the population dropped to less than 3,000, and only one mill survived. A WPA paper described Leesville in 1936 as having the “usual necessary community stores, most of which are located within a stretch of six blocks on Main Street” (WPA 1936:2). But the town had two banks, a motion picture theater, two hotels (National House with thirty-six rooms and Hotel Leesville with thirty-five), and several restaurants and sandwich shops. It also had a bus station.

By 1940, despite the impact of the Depression, Leesville was doing well. It had maintained a population of around 3,000 inhabitants—2,891 to be exact (Hernandez 1959; Laney 1940:205). Census data show that the town had eighty-five stores, including twenty-one food, two general, four merchandise, two clothing, two furniture, and four automotive stores. It also boasted nineteen filling stations, three lumber and hardware stores, twenty-five restaurants, and two drug stores. If a Vernon Parish resident needed specialized drugs, merchandise, auto parts, hardware, or store-bought furniture and they could not travel to Alexandria, they came to Leesville. There were 175 stores in Vernon Parish in 1940, 49 percent of them in Leesville.

The coming of Camp Polk, and then Fort Polk in 1941, was an economic boost as great as the railroad’s arrival in 1897. Construction workers at the camp flooded the area for housing, food, and other services. By 1945, the population had increased to 18,000 (Hernandez 1959; Leesville–Vernon Parish Chamber of Commerce 1945:25). The town, with federal support, added 435 housing units for officers in an area that became known as Lee Hills. Two other World War II housing projects, Allendale and West End Heights, were built during the war, and more than 1,000 homes were constructed between 1941 and 1945 (Ver-

non Parish Planning Board 1949:36). A new sewage system and gas lines were installed. Most important, a new hospital was built around 1945 called the War Memorial Hospital.

As the seat of government, the town had built a two-story wood courthouse on land donated by Dr. Smart in 1871. This building lasted until around 1897. A brick and concrete courthouse, built by P. J. Duffy, replaced the original in 1899. Hadnot (1975) states that it cost \$55,000 (probably confusing it with the third courthouse), but the Louisiana Historical Records Survey (n.d.b.) records a cost of only \$12,500. Extensive repairs had to be made to this building in 1902, when the foundation failed. Of course, there was a legal battle with the original contractor, but the records do not report the outcome (Hadnot 1975).

By 1907 or 1908, the courthouse was declared unsafe, the foundation failing. The parish entered into yet another contract to build an entirely new structure.<sup>12</sup> But again, legal problems ensued when the contractor W. C. Whitney refused to accept the certificates of indebtedness, and the Police Jury annulled the contract. The lawsuit went to the Louisiana Supreme Court, who ruled in the parish’s favor. Another contract was awarded to F. B. Hull Construction Company of Jackson, Mississippi, for \$57,685 to build the courthouse that stood at least until 1975 (Hadnot 1975; Louisiana Historical Records Survey n.d.b.) (Figure 55). In 1924, the courthouse was expanded at an additional cost of \$31,355 (Louisiana Historical Records Survey n.d.b.).

Leesville’s postmasters were numerous. James Durham, who was appointed in 1899, was described as “a conscientious, painstaking and courteous official, fully alive to the importance of the position he holds” (*The Vernon News*, May 1, 1900). Eight other postmasters followed Durham between the date of his appointment in 1899 and 1940. Some had familiar Vernon Parish names, such as Smart, Cowley, and Davis (Post Office Dept. 1973).

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<sup>12</sup> Also at this time, the old deed of Dr. Smart was found to be incorrect; the wrong block had been assigned. This was cleared up by the Police Jury who gave Smart’s widow a deed to city block 13 in exchange for block 18 where the courthouse actually rested (Vernon Parish Police Jury Minutes, 16 May 1908, in Louisiana Historical Records Survey 1941; also see n.d.b.).



Figure 55 — Leesville’s third courthouse (courtesy Museum of West Louisiana).

### MAYO

Mayo was located a few thousand feet west of Slagle along State Route 21, just north of the Main Fort (see Figures 40, 43–45). Although very near each other, they both had post offices at the same time (Post Office Dept. 1973). Mayo’s was established in 1899, discontinued around 1907, and then reestablished, operating until 1925. Several of the Mayo family were postmasters, including Elizabeth, Joseph, and Napoleon. The 1941 Forest Service map clearly indicates a little settlement in the area between Slagle and Mayo. In fact, it had a solid population from the very beginning, reaching fifty by 1900 (Fortier 1909:142).

### NEAME

Neame was another lumber town located along the railroad about twelve miles south of Leesville (see Figures 37–44, 49). Built by Central Coal and Coke

in 1898, it was originally called Taylor, then Keith, and finally Neame after financier Joe Neame (Wise 1971:49). Central Coal and Coke provided a commissary, a market, and also paid a doctor to treat company employees. Two churches and two schools were built, one each for Whites and Blacks. During World War I, the company also operated a cannery. At its height, Neame had an ice cream parlor, barber shop, pool hall, railroad round house, swimming pool, pressing shop, lodge for Woodmen of the World, boarding house, open air movie theater. It also had a band and its own baseball team (Block 1996:110). Klondike, a section on the north side of town, housed White and Mexican families (McCain n.d.:3). South of town, a suburb called Doggie provided saloons, gambling parlors, and bawdyhouses for the mill workers.

Neame was a post office from the time of its establishment in 1898 to at least 1926. (Wise states



it closed in 1932.) The population was two hundred in 1900. Eventually the mill employed as many as nine hundred men, so the village probably reached more than 1,000 inhabitants at its peak (Fortier 1909:215; Wise 1971:49), although Block (1996:110) puts the maximum population at nine hundred.

After the mill burned in 1925, the town was quickly abandoned. The Kansas City Railway attempted to raise strawberries in the area, and, just before World War II, the area was mined for gravel. One mill worker was Gene Austin, who became a famous recording star (McCain n.d.).

#### NEWLLANO

In 1917, in the midst of labor unrest and in keeping with its tradition of nineteenth-century Populism, Vernon Parish became the home of a socialist experimental colony called Newllano (Figure 56; see also Figures 41, 42, 49). Despite financial problems from the beginning, the utopian colony

survived until late in the Depression due to the strong leadership of George Pickett. At one time, Pickett's power and control over the colony was so complete, he was essentially a dictator. As Davison (1994:25) explains, "George T. Pickett was Llano and Llano was George T. Pickett."

The Newllano del Rio Co-operative Colony was the creation of Job Harriman. A true socialist who had failed continually in California politics, Harriman eventually decided that the future of socialism lay in demonstrating its economic viability through cooperative communities. The Newllano Colony began in Antelope Valley, California, in 1914. The location proved to be a poor choice. A planned reservoir turned out to be unfeasible because it would not capture enough needed water. Harriman was soon on the road seeking another location. The answer to his problem was found in Stables, Louisiana, just a mile south of Leesville, next to the future location of Fort Polk. Gulf Lumber had recently cut over the lands



Figure 56 — Newllano (courtesy Museum of West Louisiana).



in that area and planned to abandon their mill and mill town with up to one hundred shacks, a hotel, an office, a school, warehouses, and drying sheds (Davison 1994:11). The colony purchased 20,000 acres of land surrounding Stables, much of it within present-day Fort Polk. In October 1917, 300 of the 1,000 California colonists began moving to Louisiana.

At first the move appeared to be a disastrous mistake. A trusted colleague in California saw Harriman's absence as an opportunity to overthrow Harriman's authority and litigation followed. The colonists were also having trouble adjusting to local farming conditions. When the colony could not meet payments, the Gulf Lumber Company approved a new deal whereby property could be purchased 1,000 acres at a time at \$6 an acre. However, by 1919, only fifteen families remained at Newllano.

Harriman's bad luck continued when a new board member, George Pickett, was named. Through force of personality and a financial coup, Pickett began his rise to the top. He was fortunate in capturing the heart and money of socialist publisher Theodore Cuno, who gave the colony \$6,000. The money met the second installment owed to Gulf Lumber. From this point on, Pickett's power grew.

Through Pickett's management, the colony also grew. He set upon a campaign to raise funds to build a new hotel, library, theater, and homes, all while consolidating his power and influence. Eventually friction between Harriman and Pickett came to a head with a special election in 1924. The stakes were high—the winner would become the colony's president or general manager; the loser would leave the colony. Pickett narrowly won and from then on ruled the colony with a tight fist.

Newllano was founded on a series of socialist principals including: (1) collective ownership of "things used productively;" (2) member labor to the community; (3) member profits to the community; and (4) general suppression of individual rights and privileges over the good of the whole (Davison 1994:5–6). Women had equal rights with men. Membership in the colony cost \$2,000, of which \$1,000 was paid in cash on entering, plus

\$200 for additional adults, \$150 for children between twelve and twenty-one, and \$100 for children under twelve. The remainder of the fee was worked off at a dollar a day.

A general assembly created plans, and a five-person commission passed legislation. However, these attempts at a quasi-democracy failed. The legislation held no authority, and the freewheeling debates in the assembly often degenerated into name-calling. The real power rested with Pickett, who held weekly "psychology" meetings in which members could voice complaints. Pickett used this forum to soothe disgruntled members, cajoling them to greater efforts, and to control unrest.

Despite continued unrest and financial problems, the colony survived with what appears to have been an ongoing turnover in membership. There was no rent for housing, no bills for water and electricity, and free meals at the hotel. Everyone was supposed to wear simple unadorned clothing. Each member was to find suitable work and labor at it eight hours a day for the colony.

One of Pickett's pet projects and loves was working with children. Early on he created a "junior colony," which became known as "kid colony." The children were taught four hours a day, and trained in some profession for another four hours. The older children taught the younger ones and ran the kid colony, learning management, leadership, and a working skill. The children even built their own facilities. The program, one of the colony's successes, was perhaps too successful, for the children once grown found good jobs outside the community. Only a few stayed with the colony to assume leadership positions. This was just one of the many problems that contributed to the colony's ultimate failure.

Newllano grew slowly, but by 1935 it had some twenty-eight different cottage and larger industries besides farming and lumber. Enterprises included a laundry, print shop, gristmill, tailor shop, paint shop, machine shop, garage, hotel, power plant, butcher, bakery, service station, recreation center, candy shop, coffee shop, sheet metal shop, and tailor and sewing room (Figure 57). The colony's main industry, however, was lumber products. Newllano had a sawmill, planing mill, shingle mill,



and crate factory. The farm economy was based on raising poultry, sheep, hogs, and a goat herd; running a dairy; cultivating truck gardens and a nursery; and growing the usual crops. Raising goats was one of Pickett's special experiments. To this day, the hill south of Newllano is known as Billy Goat Hill.

The colony printed three different newspapers during its existence: the *Vernon Parish Democrat* for local consumption (1917–1930); *The Llano Colonist* for international distribution; and the *American Vanguard*, which published only fifteen issues (Wise 1971:41). The *Vernon Parish Democrat* became the *Industrial Democrat* after 1930 and was then absorbed by the *Leesville Leader* in 1937 (Wise 1971:24). Newllano also had a library with as many as 7,000 volumes available for loan (Gremillion n.d.a.:5).

An article in *The Llano Colonist* in 1932 described the town in detail.

*The highway runs through it almost straight north and south, side by side with the Kansas City Southern Railroad. Most of our industries lie east of the track and for about a quarter of a mile face it. First at the north end is the K.C.S. building that serves as freight house. This has a shelter on the south side for waiting passengers. A little south from the depot and about a hundred and fifty feet from the track is the post office building of one story which houses also the general office and Mr. Pickett's office. To the south of this is a long one story building running east and west, the front end of which is the grist mill. Back of that is the candy kitchen with a wing on the north side where the cannery is located. Back of the candy kitchen are the bakery and the peanut butter factory.*

The author described the ice plant, electric plant, steam plant, veneer mill, crate shed, and new hotel, to name just a few buildings, and continued:

*The colony built a dance floor above the old kiln and it is known as the roof garden. It is the largest hall between New Orleans and*

*Shreveport. Under the roof garden is the theater, potato kiln, electric shop, plumbing shop, and broom factory.*

*Down the highway about two hundred yards is the new tourist camp.*

The author ended the article by writing:

*The great need here as far as the appearance of the colony as a whole is concerned is paint. We could improve the looks about 500 percent if we could use the paint brush for a few weeks. Well, when the oil well comes in we will paint it in oil. (The Llano Colonist 1932)*

The reasons for the colony's ultimate failure are numerous and complex, but intrinsically tied to the ideology on which it was founded. Although Newllano lasted several years, each year it was on the brink of economic collapse, saved often by outside donors or a fresh supply of new members. Anyone could join as long as new members signed a form agreeing to its first principles. Not surprisingly, many elderly people saw the colony as a means of late life care and paid the initial \$1,000 but could not contribute productive labor. Social outcasts and troublemakers were also filtering in, adulterating the cause of the ideologues.

Unrest and dissension was a constant problem; it led to one of the colony's largest upheavals, the May Day Revolt of 1935 (Davison 1994:70). The general assembly fell into cliques and was subject to power plays as personalities clashed. No authority existed to police the troublemakers. The colony had also made bad economic decisions, including oil speculation. These and other problems eventually forced Newllano to enter receivership in 1937. One of the colony's many rescuers, J. B. Pollard (who donated \$5,000 in 1930), was appointed overseer (Wise 1971:42). Not until 1965 were final legal bills paid and settlements resolved.

The post office operated from the colony's inception until around 1931 (Post Office Dept. 1973). While the colony had closed down by 1938, the village survived and was incorporated in 1942. Today it is a Leesville suburb.



### ***Christian Commonwealth Colony***

At the peak of the Newllano movement, the Christian Commonwealth Colony came to Leesville. Purchasing land from the Newllano group, Dr. Samuel W. Irwin tried to create a similar colony but with a Christian focus (Vernon Parish Planning Board 1949:10). The colony's success and failure, as with Newllano's, was ultimately linked to a strong personality, in this case Irwin. A former president of the College Monte Marie in Rome, Italy, Irwin had operated a similar colony in the Balkans before moving to Newllano in 1931 (Gremillion n.d.a:6). On his arrival, he immediately became involved in religious work throughout the parish.

Newllano members helped the Christian Commonwealth Colony get started by constructing homes and other needed buildings. The commonwealth furnished five acres of land to new members on a cooperative basis for five years, after which the land was leased as long as the members desired. The land could be worked individually, but the member was still required to assist the colony in other work. The colony never flourished and was probably absorbed into Newllano, for Dr. Irwin left after his wife died in 1932. The colony was "out of existence" sometime prior to 1949 (Vernon Parish Planning Board 1949:10).

### **NITRAM**

Nitram, at the junction of the Gulf, Colorado and Sante Fe Railroad (Jasper and Eastern) and Fullerton's Gulf and Sabine River Railroad, was an important rail village in the early 1920s (see Figures 37, 38, 43, 44). Records indicate that there was a post office at Nitram in 1914 and 1915, but no other information is provided.

### **NONA**

Nona is located suspiciously close to Kurthwood in Figures 37 and 43, but Figure 44 depicts them as two separate places. It would seem that Nona might have had a connection to Nona Mills, however, no definite connection could be found. In any case, a post office was established there in 1909. It operated until 1921, when the mail was directed to Kurthwood.

### **PEASON**

Peason, in Sabine Parish, was a lumber town and rail terminus for the Christie and Eastern Railroad (see Figures 39 and 42–45). The size of Kurthwood, this village thrived from around 1916 to 1935. Peason's peak population ranged between 1,500 and 2,000 inhabitants. The mill at Peason employed some 450 people. Mill houses, typically with pyramid-shaped roofs, were built for the employees. The houses also had electricity and water (Jones 1979:5a). The telephone line from Kurthwood to Many ran through Peason. Today only the railroad bed exists.

### **PICKERING**

Pickering (see Figures 37–45 and 49), a thriving lumber town south of Leesville, was built by the W. R. Pickering Lumber Company in 1898. According to Fortier, some 4,000 lumber cars were loaded and shipped out of Pickering annually. By 1900, with a population of 1,000, the town challenged Fullerton in size (Fortier 1909:307). Most of the eight hundred people who lived there in 1908 worked in the mills or the woods. Pickering had a large department store, a hotel, a school, and its own physician. However, residents had to travel to Leesville or Rosepine to do their banking (Pineland Manufacturing Company n.d.:31). The town also had its own "notorious" section called the "bottom" (Wise 1971:48). Pickering's development suffered greatly after 1926 when the mill experienced its second fire (Wise 1971:48). Nevertheless, the town faded away slowly, and, in 1936, three hundred people were still living there. A few years earlier, in 1929, an article in the *Leesville Leader* defiantly stated:

*Pickering is still here with its high school of over 300 enrollment, two good up-to-date retail stores, three filling stations with a mixture of other stuff to see, a post office and the woods full of good live farmers that have no need to be ashamed of their profession; these men live in modern homes. They ride in automobiles. They raise their own meat and bread, and have milk and butter the year around. (in Wise 1988)*



### **PINEWOOD**

Pinewood was a rail stop along the Kansas City Southern between Neame and Rosepine (see Figures 38, 39, 41–44). It had a post office between 1912 and 1922, after which time the mail was sent to Neame (Post Office Dept. 1973). Roberts Lumber Company, formerly located at Pitkin, operated a mill at Pinewood from around 1910 to 1920 (Hadnot in Sandel 1982:96).

### **PITKIN (SLABTOWN)**

With the construction of the Gulf, Colorado and Sante Fe Railroad, the nineteenth-century settlement called Slabtown (see Chapter 4) became the hamlet Pitkin, an important mill, rail stop, and road junction south of Nitram (see Figures 37–44, 49). Its population of fifty-four in 1900 probably rose much higher during the peak lumber days (Fortier 1909:450). Exactly when the name change occurred is unclear. According to Wise (1971:50), Slabtown was renamed Lydia in 1905 and then Pitkin in 1906. But Fortier (1909:450) still refers to Slabtown in 1909 and indicates that it had “large sawmills and other lumber industries.” The Pitkin post office was established in April 1908, but the Slabtown post office does not close until March 1909. Wise (1971:50) wrote that Slabtown was the name of the post office and that when it moved to Hilcoe, it retained the name Slabtown. This may explain some of the date discrepancies. Adding to the confusion, “late Sigler” is noted in the post office records under Pitkin, as if the Pitkin post office was once called Sigler (Post Office Dept. 1973). This is probably not the case, as Sigler existed on its own, according to Fortier. In any case, it is the same Pitkin that survives well through the twentieth century because of its location as a junction along routes 22 and 118 (now 10) and 467 (now 463).

### **RENA**

This post-hamlet called Rena is illustrated on Figure 37 along the Beaugard-Vernon Parish line and nowhere else. There was a post office there from 1906 to 1916 (Post Office Dept. 1973). One source indicates that the hamlet was in Beaugard Parish (Rosteet and Miguez 1994:439).

### **ROSEPINE**

Rosepine, another lumber town along the Kansas City Southern Railroad, was on the scale of Stables, Pickering, Neame, and Pinewood (see Figures 37–44, 49). Although a settlement prior to the railroad, Rosepine began its real growth when the railroad arrived. Rosepine flourished and died with the rise and fall of the lumber industry, as did Pickering, Neame, and Pinewood. In 1900, Rosepine’s population was seventy-five (Fortier 1909:396). But the town grew much larger. Wise (1971:52) and Cupit (1963:40) reported at least 1,000 people by 1906. Cupit adds that Rosepine incorporated as a village on December 24, 1902, and reached town status in 1906. During its heyday, it supported a bank (Rosepine Banking Company), two hotels, five dry-goods stores, three groceries, a drug store, a barber shop, three restaurants, two churches, a school, and seven saloons (Dalehite 1962:3; Wise 1971:52). The town was frequented by lumberjacks seeking entertainment and had a reputation for being rowdy. The local mill, Rosepine Lumber Company, left around 1908. By 1912, the town had died, according to Cupit (1963:44–45). The incomplete postal records note the last appointment in 1907. Rosepine still survives today along U.S. Route 171.

### **RUSTVILLE**

Rustville—named for Paul D. Rust, Gulf Lumber’s Secretary (Block 1996:157)—was a stop on Fullerton’s rail line between the town of Fullerton and Nitram (see Figures 37–39, 43, 45). Fullerton operated a turpentine still here. Most of the town’s residents were Blacks who worked at the still. At its peak, Rustville had 129 cottages, a commissary, a meat market, a church, and its own school (Block 1996:158–160).

### **SCHLEY**

A post stop from 1899 to 1915, Schley was located in the northwestern portion of the parish near Anacoco (see Figures 37–39, 41, 44).

### **SIGLER**

Sigler was a post-hamlet located “on Brushy creek, six miles east of Slabtown” (Fortier 1909:449).

This would put it near Occupy Church No. 2 today. It is not illustrated on any contemporary maps, although it had a post office that operated from 1901 to 1908. Afterwards, the mail went to Pitkin (Post Office Dept. 1973). Around 1900, one of the postmasters at Dido was named Sigler. There is an unreadable notation about a name change in the postal records, which also indicate a connection to Pitkin. In 1906, Ely Bidgood (or Bedgood) was postmaster at Sigler. In April 1908, she was appointed postmaster at Liddy and then Pitkin. Liddy was possibly another name for the post office at Sigler.

#### **SIMPSON**

Simpson's long history stretches back into the early nineteenth century (see previous chapters). Although not on any railway, its location at the junction of modern State Routes 465 and 8 ensured its survival to the present (see Figures 37–46, 49). Its post office operated until at least 1929 (Post Office Dept. 1973). Simpson's growth received a major boost from Camp Polk, as the community found employment in building the post and serving the needs of the soldiers. One indication of the town's development was the establishment of its own newspaper, the *Leghorn Times Herald*, published by Leghorn Press (Lewis 1956:20).

#### **SIX MILE**

Six Mile was one of the few small post-hamlets located within Fort Polk. It is found along Six Mile Creek southeast of Leesville (see Figure 40). While the 1882 Government Land Office (GLO) map (see Figure 24) does not show Six Mile, it locates Swain's Mill on Six Mile Creek's northeast bank (in the northeast corner of Section 13) just across from where the hamlet would later develop. The GLO survey also shows a road meandering east in the direction of Six Mile's location and splitting up a mile or so before it gets to the hamlet. Cantley and Kern's study indicated that the land was owned by Nona Mills and Gulf Lumber in 1910, although the area around the mill was actually owned by C. R. Haymons. Several members of the Haymons family owned land in the township at that time. Another owner was E. M. Brack. The Six Mile

post office operated from 1903 until 1908, at which time the mail was transferred to Leesville. The first postmaster was Nancy Hamon (probably another member of the Haymons family); later a Clemie Hamons filled the position. In between the two appointments, Robert Brack was offered the post, but declined (Post Office Dept. 1973).

#### **SLAGLE**

Slagle still survives today along State Route 8, formerly Route 21 (see Figures 38–42, 44–46, 49). It was one of the rare mill and lumber towns that was not located along a major rail line. The mill was operated by the White Gandlin Lumber Company (Louisiana Dept. of Agriculture and Immigration 1928:187). However, during its peak years, Slagle was probably quite large, in the size range of Cravens, Pitkin, or Pinewood. Wise (1971:53) quoted a 1931 article reporting that E. P. Ferguson of Glenmora purchased the entire town, including the store, mill, dry sheds, sawmill, and some 100 houses for White families and another 150 houses for Black families. The first Slagle post office opened in 1919 and operated until around 1930. Slagle, Mayo, and Walnut Hill were so close together that they were probably, essentially, all part of one large community.

#### **STABLES**

Stables, near Leesville, was the other town owned by Gulf Lumber. Although often overshadowed by Fullerton, it was a fully functioning town in its own right (see Figures 37, 38, 40, 43, 44). Two mills operated here, and the town's structures included 215 cottages, a commissary, and a boarding house (Block 1996:71). Many of the laborers from Stables helped build Fullerton. The town peaked in 1908, having reached a population of around seven hundred (Block 1996:72). Stables was sold to the Newllano colony in 1917, after Gulf Lumber cut all the trees in the area and began concentrating on their operations at Fullerton. The Stables post office was established in 1905, implying that Gulf Lumber began their operations in the area around that time, although Block believes it was established a year later (Block 1996:71; Post Office Dept. 1973).

### STILLE

Stille (see Figures 37, 38, 40, 43–45), a little posthamlet in northeast Vernon Parish, is a good example of how difficult it can be to confirm place names and locations. Some maps indicate that Stille was located along the Red River and Gulf Railroad; others depict it just south of the railroad (see Figure 45). A 1920 Louisiana highway map (see Figure 38) may help solve this mystery. The map depicts a rail stop, also called Stille, just a few miles north of the Stille post office (Figure 58). It is possible that Stille and many other little hamlets like Stille were established before the railroads arrived. Once the rail lines were laid, these hamlets, or general stores, or store–post office combinations would relocate (sometimes just a few miles away) to be closer to the railroad line, and thus have the advantages of being a rail stop. Another possibility is that a new rail stop would be built and then named after the nearest little com-

munity. In any case, local residents probably defined their community by both locations. The Stille post office operated from 1905 to 1924.

### TEMPLE

Temple is in the northeast corner of the parish, probably along the Red River Gulf Railroad. Besides its location, not much else is known about Temple. It was a post office for just one year, 1914 (see Figures 38, 39, 41–44).

### TILLMAN

A rail stop and post office, Tillman was part of the Tillman Mill. Located in the parish’s southeast corner along the Gulf Coast and Santa Fe Railroad (see Figures 37–39, 41, 42), it was the last stop on leaving Vernon Parish. The mill may have actually been in Beauregard or Allen Parish. In any case, the post office was in Vernon Parish and operated from 1910 to 1924 (Post Office Dept. 1973).



Figure 58 — The Stille post office (courtesy Museum of West Louisiana).

### **WALNUT HILL**

The early nineteenth-century settlement of Walnut Hill continued to survive during the twentieth century within the complex of the crossroad communities of Mayo, Slagle, and Walnut Hill (see Figures 37–45). Its post office operated until 1925, at which time the mail was moved through Slagle (Post Office Dept. 1973). Walnut Hill had a population of seventy-five in 1900 (Fortier 1909:583).

### **WHISKEY CHITTO (WHISKACHITTO)**

Whiskey Chitto (see Figure 46) was one of four post-hamlets (including Front, Pringles, and Six Mile) believed to have been within Fort Polk. Again, the post office records are confusing with regard to its history and location. It was noted in Chapter 4 that William Davis was the postmaster from 1889 to 1892. Beside his name in the postal records is a notation saying “no papers.” A later entry indicates that the Whiskachitto post office also operated between June 1908 and January 1909, with Davis again as postmaster (Post Office Dept. 1973). While the exact location of the Whiskachitto post office is not known, it would be safe to say it was on Whiskey Chitto Creek near the school. Another way to locate it would be to find Davis’s plot of land in the tax assessor’s office.

### **WINGATE**

Wingate, a post office and rail stop, was situated along the Gulf Coast and Sante Fe Railroad just north of Markee and south of Cravens (see Figures 37, 43, 44). A post office perhaps as early as 1896, it closed in 1900. Thereafter, the mail went to Cooper or Leesville (Post Office Dept. 1973).



Many other twentieth-century place names are now largely lost to history. The following are known simply as points on a map or have been briefly or vaguely mentioned in the documents. Camp Ingles (see Figure 44), probably a lumber camp, was located northwest of Walnut Hill. Burnstown (see Figure 46), between Simpson and Temple, may have been a crossroads that was given a family name. Sherwood, north of Evans near the Sabine

River, is depicted on the 1920 highway map (see Figure 38) but is otherwise undocumented. Found on this same map is Tennant, a rail stop along the Vernon-Beauregard Parish line. Jackson’s Chapel is mentioned by Wise (1971:48) as a “sparsely settled community” five miles south of Leesville. He also mentions Hunt’s Spring, north of modern Cooper. Both of these were church-school locations without post offices. Edwards appears on the 1913 immigration map (see Figure 37) as the end of the line for a road or rail line at the very northeast corner of the parish. It is not illustrated anywhere else. Morlam appears on this same map east of Neame in the Providence area. Hadnot (in Sandel 1982:97) mentions a McRae settlement seven miles north of Leesville that had a lumber mill called Stone Lumber Company.

A number of small rail stops along the Red River and Gulf railway into Kurthwood are illustrated on period maps, but have no other documentation. These are Jacksonville, Hood, Mathis, and Comrade (see Figure 45; also Figures 38, 44). Just to their north was Jerguson, at the terminus of the Old River Railroad (see Figures 43, 44). Along the Gulf, Colorado and Sante Fe (Jasper and Eastern) was a little stop called Markee (see Figures 37, 38, 43, 44). Another such stop along that railroad was Roberts between Pitkin and Dido (see Figures 37, 43, 44).

Several Vernon Parish post offices were mentioned in the postal records but they could not be found on the maps nor could their locations be determined from the documentation (Post Office Dept. 1973). Many of them were most likely named after their postmasters. They include Velma, (1910–1911); Russell (1905); Redmond (1906); Daily (May 1914–June 1915); Dillow (1909–1911? dates are difficult to decipher); and Eddy (1901–1909). Parkville operated from 1908 to 1909 with Samuel Bedgood as postmaster.

The post office records provide general locations for a few other post offices. Lake operated from 1899 to 1905, after which the mail went to Natchitoches Parish, indicating a general location in northeast Vernon Parish. The mail for Drake, a post office from 1902 to 1904, was transferred to Rosepine. Drake was probably located in the south



central part of the parish. Cryer, a mail stop from 1916 to 1917, must have been in the proximity of Pinewood, for its mail was sent there after 1917. Rudd Ferry was open from 1903 to 1906, when the mails were transferred to Burr's Ferry. Obviously Rudd Ferry was a Sabine River crossing. Sandy was a post office from 1904 to 1905. Although there was a Sandy Creek, this Sandy was probably near Slabtown since its mail was transferred there (Post Office Dept. 1973). Toledo, at Toledo bend, was listed as a Vernon Parish post office until 1901 when the mail was transferred to Schley. Twentieth-century maps indicate that Toledo was on the Texas side of the Sabine.

Within the boundaries of what is now Fort Polk were two more post stops with imprecise locations. One is Pringles (see Figure 44), located somewhere near the headwaters of the west branch of Six Mile Creek. Bee (1903) was possibly located along Bee Branch, a branch of the Whiskey Chitto.

In addition to these post offices were several small communities or kin-based settlements that dotted the parish landscape. They perhaps never had a general store or post office, but came to be named for the family that lived there, building a home or a cluster of homes as the family grew. Of these little communities, Jetertown is of interest to the Fort Polk story. It will be discussed further in Chapter 7.

## TWENTIETH-CENTURY SOCIETY AND POLITICS

Although the lumber business brought an influx of new people, including ethnic minorities, to Vernon Parish, its cultural milieu did not change at all. At the turn of the century and continuing until the onset of World War II, the people of Vernon Parish remained a decidedly rural, White Southern community. Independence, self-sufficiency, and Protestantism were at the heart of the culture.

### CHURCHES

The churches in Vernon Parish were an obvious reflection of its Protestantism. From 1897 to 1940, most of the religious population were Southern

Baptist (Table 25). The Southern Baptists never represented less than 45 percent of membership in all denominations in Vernon Parish throughout this period. Methodists were the next most important representation. Most telling, non-Protestant religion was never more than 14 percent of total church population. (It is safe to assume that the category "All others" in Table 25 did not comprise a significant non-Protestant or non-Christian population.)

At first glance, the statistics in Table 25 seem low. They might have been higher had the census takers gathered the data by going from door to door asking occupants "Do you belong to a church?" Instead they mailed census schedules to "denomination officials." Although census data may not always be consistent with local documentation, the numbers are probably not that different. For instance, the total membership of the Vernon Parish Baptist Association in 1915, which included churches beyond the borders of Vernon Parish, was 2,686. This compares favorably with the 1916 data in Table 25 (Vernon Missionary Baptist Association 1915). By 1945, the association's membership was 6,067 (Vernon Missionary Baptist Association 1945).

Table 26 lists Baptist churches constituted from 1897 to 1941 in the west-central Louisiana region. Most were within the parish, but not all. Typically, they were small, rural, community churches with between fifteen and two hundred members. Other churches established between 1897 and 1941, according to Wise (1971:60–72), included the First United Methodist Church (1898), Church of God (1912), Bethel A.M.E. (1902), Assembly of God (1913), and Union Grove church—a nondenominational church shared by Baptists, the Church of God, and the Church of Christ.

From the statistics, it seems that church membership is low, hovering between 23 and 35 percent of total population, however, religion was one way in which rural folk organized their communities. Churches helped provide a sense of place (Sitton 1995:75) and camp meetings and revivals were social events of major importance. In the nineteenth century, among the first buildings con-

Table 25 — Vernon Parish church membership (from U.S. Bureau of Census 1906, 1919, 1930, 1941).

<i>Denominations</i>	<i>1900</i>	<i>1916</i>	<i>1926</i>	<i>1936</i>
Southern Baptist	1,861	2,153	4,797	2,412
Other Baptist	n/a	618	686	722
Methodist	605	1,215	1,146	517
Roman Catholic	—	170	196	50
Church of Christ	—	—	—	42
Disciples of Christ	—	—	73	141
Episcopal	—	11	—	—
Lutheran	—	11	—	—
All others	378	589	252	610
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,844</b>	<b>4,767</b>	<b>7,150</b>	<b>4,494</b>

Table 26 — Vernon Baptist Association churches, 1897–1941 (Vernon Missionary Baptist Association 1945).

<i>Church</i>	<i>Date</i>
Alco .....	1926
Bay Spring .....	1916
Big Hammock .....	1904
Canaan .....	1939
Cold Spring .....	1909
Cooper .....	1906
Crystal Spring .....	1941
Dr. Wise Memorial .....	1938
Gallalee [ <i>sic</i> ] .....	1902
Gorum .....	1936
Green Hill .....	1940
Kurthwood .....	1942
Leesville .....	1898
Mt. Bethel .....	1934
Mt. Carmel .....	1910
Newllano .....	1941
Oak Grove .....	1940
Pine Grove .....	1929
Pine Hill .....	1900
Pitkin .....	1909
Silver Creek .....	1923
Simpson .....	1927
Slagle .....	1935

structed by settlers as a community were churches and/or schools. In making the transition into the modern era of the twentieth century, schools played an increasingly important role in community infrastructure.

### SCHOOLS

The population explosion that occurred in Vernon Parish at the turn of the twentieth century coincided with a statewide movement to improve education (Smith 1938). Although educational progress continued slowly, Vernon Parish schools did improve. At the state level, the new constitution of 1898 provided for public schools and began the process of standardization by setting age limits for children (six to eighteen years old). It authorized kindergartens, provided for state funds apportioned on a per educable basis, and directed the state general assembly to develop a plan for its schools (Robertson 1952:3). Constitutional reform was quickly followed by the establishment of standards for teacher examination and certification. In 1905, school libraries were authorized (Davis 1959:259). Compulsory school attendance was first enacted in 1877. A stronger statewide law, requiring 140 days of attendance a year, followed in 1916. But, these laws were not strictly enforced until after 1944 (Davis 1959:261; Robertson 1952:178). Most importantly, the state legislature began to provide funding in the early twentieth century. For instance, in 1928, the state began to furnish students with free text books (Robertson 1952:198).

Vernon Parish rural folk at the turn of the century were still reluctant to support schools through taxation. A 1900 parish superintendent's report noted that although a tax as high as six mill was authorized under the state constitution, "all the aid we received last year from the parish was a two-

mill tax” (Cain in Robertson 1952:19). Cain concludes his comments by stating:

*We have numerous small schools, but I think large central schools would be much better; the people of Vernon are not united enough to effect such a change yet....The attendance during 1898 was good, but was much better last year, until the sickly season set in. The principle obstacles in the way of school work here are scarcity of funds, small schools, careless parents and teachers who are not fully prepared for their work. (in Robertson 1952:19)*

Cain was right about numerous schools. His 1899 report recorded seventy-two public schools for Whites, seven for Blacks. A total of 2,883 White and 213 Black students attended, taught by seventy-three teachers for the White and seven for the Black students (Wise 1971:11). Also, 250 students attended five private schools. At the time, teachers’ monthly salaries were \$30.57 for White males, \$29.77 for White females, \$26 for Black males, and \$21 for Black females. But the parish was only spending about seventy-five cents per child enrolled (Wise 1971:11). In 1907 and 1908, Vernon Parish’s numerous schools were organized into equally numerous school districts as follows: Anacoco, Black Land, Bowel, Brushy Creek, Calcasieu, Castor, Center, Cold Springs, Comrade, Cooper, Cypress, Dido, Echo, Friendship, Glade Springs, Good Hope, Hornbeck, Horse Branch, Hunt Springs, Indian Creek, Leander, Leesville, Mt. Vernon, Orange, Simpson, Six Mile, Soapstone, and Whiskachitto (Wise 1971:18).

The parish’s school buildings at this time were fairly typical of those found across the rural upland South. Most were small, one- or two-room buildings of rough-hewn logs.

*The schools were taught in simple log house built by the early settlers. Some of the floors were dirt and some were puncheons made from split logs of pine or oak. The seats were made from split logs with pegs put into bored holes on the round side for legs. There was no backs*

*and usually were too high if obtainable, and the children’s feet could not touch the floor. (Cupit 1963:48)*

With the increase in wealth from the lumber industry, Vernon Parish became more amenable to providing local support. Through the first three decades of the twentieth century, major progress was made. In 1910, the parish voted a four-mill tax for schools (Wise 1971:34) and, around 1909, even set up a Teachers Institute (Wise 1971:21). By 1934, the people’s attitudes toward education had changed dramatically. A study of the parish school system reported at that time that the people of Vernon “vote school taxes freely” (Arnold 1934:5).

By the 1930s, Vernon Parish school facilities and the quality of education was slightly below the midpoint in comparison with other Louisiana parishes. In the 1930–31 school year, the average daily attendance rate was 4,359 pupils, with a per pupil valuation of \$2,604—\$200 less than the state median. Arnold ranked Vernon Parish schools thirty-eighth out of sixty-six parishes in the state (Arnold 1934:68). Teachers had an average of 2.5 years of college compared to the state average of 3.3 years. However, Arnold notes that a high percentage (68 percent) of Black teachers had five or more years of experience (Arnold 1934:39–45). The average salary for White teachers was \$929.60, while the state average was \$1,130.46. The average salary for Black teachers was \$364.71, compared to the state average of \$463.40.

Tables 27 and 28 list the schools in 1930–31. In a 1929 newspaper article, Leesville, Hornbeck, Pitkin, Orange, Simpson, Slagle, Rosepine, Fal, and Pickering were listed as high schools (Dalehite 1962:2), while the rest were elementary schools. Fal High School is not mentioned in Arnold’s report of schools in 1930–31. Elementary schools mentioned by the paper but not by Arnold include: Flactor, Burr Ferry, Barham, and Lilly.

The Whiskachitto, Six Mile, and Cypress (and perhaps Flactor) schools served the community within the area that is now Fort Polk. Note that Whiskachitto had as many as four teachers and sixty-three students in daily attendance. A 1933

Table 27 — Vernon Parish White attendance and number of teachers, 1930–1931 (from Arnold 1934:47).

<i>School</i>	<i>Average Daily Attendance</i>	<i>Teachers (No.)</i>
Alco .....	99 .....	5
Big Creek .....	42 .....	2
Cole-Central .....	50 .....	3
Cora .....	19 .....	1
Cypress .....	34 .....	2
Davis Mill .....	47 .....	2
Dillon .....	22 .....	2
Evans .....	207 .....	11
Gravel Hill .....	89 .....	4
Groves .....	7 .....	1
Hicks .....	32 .....	2
Hornbeck .....	323 .....	13
Hutton .....	17 .....	1
Kurthwood .....	18 .....	1
Leander .....	58 .....	3
Leesville .....	898 .....	29
Mulberry .....	44 .....	2
Newllano .....	93 .....	4
Orange .....	301 .....	14
Pickering .....	240 .....	11
Pitkin .....	467 .....	17
Rosepine .....	212 .....	11
Simpson .....	327 .....	13
Slagle .....	169 .....	7
Stille .....	11 .....	1
Whiskachitto .....	63 .....	4

State Department of Education bulletin provides more details about these schools. In 1932–33, Whiskachitto had two teachers and fifty-eight students—all in elementary school—and was open eighty-eight days a year (Foote and Sisemore 1933). The school cost \$3,000 to build in 1928. Flactor had two teachers and forty-three elementary students, while Cypress also had two teachers and forty-one students (Foote and Sisemore 1933). Fifty-five Whiskachitto students (Figure 59) were transported to the school over twenty-five miles of dirt roads.

During the early part of the century, schools, like churches, still represented communities and towns, and the people identified with these institutions. School consolidation, however, continued

Table 28 — Vernon Parish Black attendance and number of teachers, 1930–1931 (from Arnold 1934:54).

<i>School</i>	<i>Average Daily Attendance</i>	<i>Teachers (No.)</i>
Alco .....	117 .....	4
Happy Hour .....	57 .....	1
Hood .....	37 .....	1
Hutton .....	50 .....	1
Leesville* .....	196 .....	8
Log Camp .....	43 .....	1
Neame .....	11 .....	1
Oak Grove .....	37 .....	1
Pickering .....	9 .....	1
Pine Grove .....	21 .....	1
Slagle .....	73 .....	2

\* *The only Black high school.*

during the first half of the century, and as this took place, schools lost some of their importance in this respect. By 1949, the number of parish schools had dropped to eight high schools and four elementary schools for Whites and one high school and four elementary schools for Blacks (Vernon Parish Planning Board 1949:43). Nonetheless, schools were still often the center of social activities, such as football games. Leesville’s first football team was started in 1910 (Wise 1971:39). By 1929, the team was playing an eight-game schedule with schools such as Oakdale, Vernon, De Ridder, Natchitoches, Merryville, and other out-of-parish high schools (Wise 1971:34).

#### **SOCIAL ACTIVITIES**

Schools and churches were the main community organizations for social activity, but as the century progressed opportunities for social interaction and community development increased and began to center around towns and villages. Freemasonry came early to the parish and continued to grow through the twentieth century. The Orange Lodge was organized in 1908. Opportunities for women also increased. The Order of the Eastern Star organized in Leesville in 1905, and the Daughters of the Confederacy in 1913 (Wise 1971:74). For children, 4-H and other agricultural clubs were





Figure 59 — The Whiskachitto school on Fort Polk (courtesy Museum of West Louisiana).

developed, and Girl Scouting started in 1935. Family gatherings, picnics, fairs, and school activities opened up the isolated parts of the parish to the rest of the regional community. Social gatherings included band concerts, and, early in the century, Leesville (Figure 60), Neame, and Pickering all had town bands (Wise 1971:36). Slowly the parish became more cohesive, and Leesville became increasingly important as its center. As roads improved, Leesville became even more accessible, but this centralization would retard the growth of most small communities.

#### **POLITICS AND SOCIAL CHANGE**

Lumbering brought unprecedented prosperity to many in Vernon Parish. For the first time, some residents had an income well beyond what had

been customary. Local merchants and farmers profited from the increase in customers. Such benefits were largely responsible for the warm welcome local residents gave the lumber industry without regard for future conservation.<sup>13</sup> But not all were satisfied, or satisfied for long. The dangerous working conditions, poor wages for unskilled labor, long hours, and abrupt cutbacks on production and personnel contributed to an undercurrent of discontent. The noisy, frenzied pace of industrial production was a shock to the slower-paced agrarian lifestyle of west-central Louisiana (Cook and Watson 1985:126). Nationally, indeed globally, labor movements led by malcontents and idealists were fueling the fires of unrest at the turn of the century; it was not long until the South was also inflamed. Only a few years before, Vernon Parish

<sup>13</sup> For a different perspective see David Saposs, *Left Wing Unionism: A Study of Radical Politics and Tactics*, New York (1926:168), referenced in Cook and Watson (1985:127). Saposs argues that the locals resented the lumber industry's intrusion on their land.



Figure 60 — Leesville brass band, 1912 (courtesy Museum of West Louisiana).

farmers were making their voices heard and votes count in a populist revolt. At the turn of the century, unhappy lumber workers began to make the parish, once again, a center of discontent.

Unrest in the mills and fields had a precedent in the 1870s when workers at Orange, Texas, struck over long hours and poor pay (Allen 1961:166). In the Sabine camps north of Orange, there was already unrest just prior to 1900. But real dissension, to the point of violence, was yet to come. In 1902, Louisiana mill workers struck at Ruddock (Cook and Watson 1985:127). Then, in 1907, the unrest spread to west-central Louisiana. Laborers walked out of Long-Bell's mills protesting the plan to increase hours and cut wages due to a business depression. This strike included the De Ridder mill, just south of Vernon Parish. The dispute was

quickly settled, but both management and labor were alerted to the probability of future strife.

The De Ridder walkout brought the region to the attention of the national union movement. At the same time, alarmed mill owners organized the Southern Lumber Operators' Association to defend themselves against the union threat.<sup>14</sup> The union movement in the western Louisiana region was led by Arthur L. Emerson and Jay Smith. Emerson was an experienced woodsman from Tennessee who drifted from job to job. John Kirby, president of the Southern Lumber Operators' Association, said that Emerson had been fired from Gulf Lumber for stealing blankets at a boarding house in Fullerton (Fickle 1975:62). Whether or not this is true, it seems that Emerson did indeed work "undercover" at Fullerton "testing and polling [mill

<sup>14</sup> Pro- and anti-union sentiments are as strong today as ever, and it is difficult to find objective or neutral reporting of the movement. The main sources for the discussion here are works by Fickle (1975) and Cook and Watson (1985)—both publications are alive with passionate rhetoric.

laborers] about their willingness to support a union” (Fickle 1975:64). So he certainly must have been an unpopular figure with management. Emerson and Smith organized the first local at Carson, Louisiana, south of Fullerton, on December 3, 1910. Emerson was elected president of the Brotherhood of Timber Workers at Alexandria in 1911. That year the organization’s membership reached 25,000. Locally, in Fullerton and Leesville, Emerson evidently encountered a large measure of sympathy. In 1908, Pat O’Neil established *The Toiler*, a weekly socialist newspaper published out of Leesville (Cook and Watson 1985:129). The paper was a recruiting organ for the Industrial Workers of the World.

Through 1911, mill operators, led by John Kirby of the Southern Lumber Operators’ Association, challenged the union’s organizing efforts by requiring their employees to swear they would not join the union. As tensions grew, mill operators threatened and executed lockouts and hired detectives to trace union members. An eleven-mill lockout in the De Ridder area put 3,000 laborers temporarily out of work (Cook and Watson 1985:132). Meanwhile, both sides appealed to the Blacks. The unions claimed their goal was to improve the living and working conditions of Blacks and Whites alike. The operators countered that once the unions were formed, White laborers would use the unions to take all the jobs (Fickle 1975:68).

In August 1911, Kirby and Emerson met face to face. Kirby was in De Ridder giving a fiery speech about the dangers of unionism. At the conclusion of Kirby’s speech, Emerson, who was in the crowd, got up on a wagon and challenged Kirby to a debate. Kirby ordered the band to drown out Emerson, who retreated to a ball field and gave a pro-union speech. There was no violence that day, but tensions continued to seethe. Toward the end of 1911 and into 1912, the operators gained the upper hand as their lockouts were hurting the union laborers. Furthermore, operators began to use Black agricultural workers in the mills to replace union members. The Brotherhood sought help from the Industrial Workers of the World.

Violence finally broke out in 1912 at Graybow (or Grabow) just southwest of De Ridder in Beau-

regard Parish. Graybow was the site of the Galloway Lumber Company, and its mill became the site of a union strike. The owner swore he would not give in to union demands. Tempers rose for a few days prior to July 7, as union men toured towns like De Ridder, Bon Ami, and Carson, rallying support and giving speeches. On July 7, Emerson was beginning to speak at Graybow when shots were fired into the crowd. Each side claimed that the other fired first. But among the crowd were both well-armed lumbermen and the operators’ hired gunmen. Alcohol was free-flowing, and it was only a matter of time before the first shots were fired. In the end, four men died, and forty more were injured (Fickle 1975:78). (According to Allen [1961:174] five men were killed and forty-seven wounded.) Interestingly, it was Emerson who asked that the governor call in the troops, which he did. The troops, together with local authorities, rounded up sixty-four union members and six company men.

The bloodshed seemed to temporarily sober both sides as the Graybow incident was sorted out by legal authorities. Within the operator’s ranks, dissention also grew and the tide seemed to turn in the union’s favor. Mill operators began bickering among themselves, some admitting that conditions were indeed bad at some mills. But at the same time, they rallied to step up efforts to defeat the union. Meanwhile, union members became closer and old differences were forgotten as they rallied around their jailed comrades. Mass meetings were held in Leesville during the rest of the year, and socialists won seats in local elections (Fickle 1975:81–82). The long trial ended in the fall with all sixty-four of the union men acquitted. However, the union had won only a small battle. In the end, the Graybow riot worked against the union movement in western Louisiana. The operators blacklisted Graybow participants, locked out others, and hired nonunion labor. Reforms, such as small pay increases and less hours, were instituted by some mill operators. Meanwhile, the trial practically bankrupted the union. After an unsuccessful strike at Merryville, Louisiana, the “Louisiana-Texas Lumber War” ended with the operators victorious (Fickle 1975:83).



Although the union did not die out completely, unionism never gained a strong foothold in west-central Louisiana after that. Strikes occurred during the twenties and thirties in Texas, and it is assumed that these spilled over into or even started in Louisiana (Allen 1961:184). However, even as late as 1944, Louisiana had only six union-organized lumber establishments (Allen 1961:185).

According to Allen (1961:187), many factors caused the unions to fail during this period. In the South, more lumbermen were married with children than in the North, where unions were more successful. Also, large southern industrial operators at this time could better afford temporary strikes. Most of a mill's operating costs was labor. A closed mill brought no profit, but it also brought cost savings. Owners had other mills operating elsewhere in the country, so a temporary lockout or strike in western Louisiana was not considered critical to their overall bottom line.

Unionism and socialist colonies like Newllano were in keeping with the populist trend in the parish's political history. Likewise, during the Depression years, Vernon Parish was in love with the controversial Governor Huey Long. As Wise (1977:1) quips, "His supporters, in fact usually kept only two pictures on the home fireplace mantel—one of Jesus Christ and one of Huey P. Long." Vernon Parish voted for Long by a three to one margin over any of Long's other opponents. During Long's impeachment proceedings, the Police Jury even formally endorsed the embattled governor. Long, knowing he was strongly supported in the region, visited Leesville during the Fourth of July celebrations in 1929. A crowd of 20,000 was estimated to have attended (Wise 1977:11).

## **THE GREAT DEPRESSION AND THE ARMY**

Exactly how bad the situation was in Vernon Parish during the Great Depression is difficult to measure. On the one hand, many people who had been employed in the lumber industry were out of jobs by the 1930s. On the other hand, except for one year during the 1930s, Vernon Parish led the state in lumber production, and *somebody* was work-

ing in those mills. The effect on farms and farmers is more difficult to understand. Census data indicate that tenancy did not rise as sharply as in other parishes. So many Vernon Parish farmers retained their land. But many others had to get loans to keep going. Stella Jones recalled that in 1932, the courthouse was filled with farmers waiting their turns to apply for loans (Jones in Wise 1971:86). Overall, the parish suffered from the loss of the prosperous lumber business. However, the Vernon Parish population may have had options not available in the state's other parishes.

One source of temporary employment for local youth was the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). Another was through the 1933 Federal Emergency Relief Act, which provided grants to state relief projects (Morris 1965:343). However, in 1934, the unemployables in Vernon Parish were dropped from the rolls and referred to local agencies. The Police Jury responded by passing a one-cent gasoline tax to care for unemployables and mothers aid cases (Brown et al. 1935:1).

A 1935 Vernon Parish Relief Fund report provides an insight into the extent of local distress. The fund assisted mothers without resources, the blind, aged, infirm, and families without support. When the fund began, applications flooded in and the organization had to hire additional personnel to process the forms. Eventually 599 applications were received, of which 314 were accepted (Brown et al. 1935:5). The report indicates that many of these people were helped by receiving clothing for their children. The fund personnel made 956 home visits in 1935 and arranged for local doctors to examine the high school children. The doctors found many children suffering from hookworms and anemia. They also recommended tonsillectomies for 98 percent of the children and arranged for a school bus to transport them to Shreveport for their operations. Of the \$17,627 expended through the fund, \$14,000 came from a gas tax. All told, in 1935, the fund directly assisted 190 adults and 205 children, not counting those examined in school.

Certainly the wealth in the parish decreased during the Depression years compared to the lumber years. One measure of this can be seen in the



material culture. In 1930, the parish had 2,148 car registrations; the total dropped to 1,344 in 1935, and 1,107 in 1937 (Anonymous n.d.a). In 1937, 791 trucks were registered, and only 168 residences and 132 businesses had phones. One exception was the increase in homes with radios, from 226 in 1930 to 1,600 by 1937.

The Depression ultimately ended as a result of world events far removed from western Louisiana. As the United States prepared for global war in 1940, the U.S. Army sought land to practice maneuvering large numbers of men and materials. Despite the hard work of the Forest Service and the CCC, large tracts in Vernon Parish were still relatively open, rolling, “submarginal,” cut-over land with little occupation (Burns 1982:73)—precisely what the army required. The army chose a location just seven miles southeast of Leesville and called it Camp Polk after General Leonidas Polk, the “fighting bishop” of the Confederacy (Wise 1971:26). These lands were owned primarily by the Forest Service, some 27,615 acres in all (Burns 1982:74).

Through the spring and summer of 1940, military vehicles and green-clad soldiers were seen more and more frequently marching and convoying up and down western Louisiana’s formerly quiet dusty roads. No part of the parish was spared the army’s invasion as the entire parish was within its planned maneuver area. But most activity was concentrated in and around modern-day Fort Polk where the army engineers arrived to prepare for battle. Camp Polk not only billeted the troops and served as a depot, but was also the monitoring umpires’ headquarters (Casey 1971:27).

Just prior to the famous Louisiana Maneuvers, Vernon Parish experienced a major road improvement project—the first indirect benefit of the army’s presence. In order to make western Louisiana’s bridges and culverts safe for tanks, the engineers were loaded “aboard trucks filled with lumber and tools. Every shaky bridge and culvert [was] strengthened, steep ditches [were] regraded, poor roads [were] improved” (Perret 1991:41).

The first of the Louisiana Maneuvers began in April and May 1940, pitting tanks against tanks in a mock battle (Perret 1991:40–41; Pollacia 1994). Leesville and the area east to Leander became the battleground. At one point, Leesville was actually the scene of a tank battle. As citizens watched from rooftops, tanks raced through town firing blanks at each other in mock combat (Pollacia 1994:84).

The big “battle” occurred between September 15 and 28, 1941, when nineteen divisions were locked in mock combat from Lake Charles to Shreveport (Miller 1987:324). General Mark Clark drew up the plans for the second maneuvers using a Standard Oil Company map of Louisiana and Texas. Drawing a circle around Shreveport and a line of departure south of that, he ordered Lt. General Ben Lear to move south with his 130,000-man Red army and attack Lt. General Walter Kruger’s 270,000-man Blue army across the Red River. Kruger was to move north from Lake Charles through the Vernon Parish region and stop Lear’s advance. In Lear’s command was George Patton and in Kruger’s, Dwight Eisenhower.<sup>15</sup> Kruger and Eisenhower bottled up Lear and Patton’s armor against the Red River winning round one (Perret 1991:43–44). In the second round, Lear was ordered to defend Shreveport. This time Kruger had Patton on his team. It was during this battle that Patton made his famous 300-mile flanking movement through Texas, attacking Shreveport unexpectedly from the north.

It is unfortunate that so many Americans first saw Vernon Parish as a stumped, open, brushy land. As a result, maneuver veterans rarely reminisce glowingly about west-central Louisiana. Few knew that its former timbered beauty had been transformed into the lumber for a significant number of their own homes. But when the army arrived in 1940, the parish was largely a wasteland compared to its appearance in the late nineteenth century. A friend of Eisenhower described Camp Polk as an area “where I don’t think any human beings have been for fifty years. We found snakes all over the

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<sup>15</sup> And somewhere in between was Private Donald E. Smith, 148th Infantry, 37th Division, the author’s father.

place, rattlers. We killed fifteen, twenty rattlers a day, and we were just torn apart by the ticks. A lot of men had poison oak....It was a hundred degrees in the day time and forty or thirty at night” (in Miller 1987:323). Powell Casey, a Louisiana native, thought he was ready for the mosquitoes, but “they seemed to have grown since we left” (Casey 1971:27). Chiggers were also a big problem, for which storekeepers prescribed coal-oil as a remedy (Casey 1971:27).

The men ran into more trouble once they hit the roads outside of the camp. The ground had a firm but thin crust, which trapped trucks and tanks. Once wet, the dirt roads became impassible. It often seems to historians that large armies attract rain—the Louisiana Maneuvers were no exception. Rain greeted the soldiers on opening day, turning roads into quagmires for the remainder of the exercises; and round two opened with a hurricane (Miller 1987:327). Despite attempts to protect reforested areas, damage occurred. Soldiers cut some trees for camouflage, and, in open areas, trucks and tanks rutted the ground that had only recently recovered from rutting by log skidders.

With people out of work, the army was, like the lumber mills before, an economic godsend. Estimates that the army was going to spend some \$28 million locally on the maneuvers and construction of the fort were actually conservative. By the end of World War II, the costs had risen to more than \$44 million (Pollacia 1994:148; Wise 1971:26). During the mock battles, some 11 million pounds of bread, 8.5 million pounds of meat, and 9 million potatoes were consumed in 18 million meals (Miller 1987:323). Some of these supplies were purchased locally.

Once the army decided to stay, construction workers poured into Leesville and the surrounding area to build the fort while thousands of soldiers trained. Laborers were organized into three eight-hour shifts of some 2,000 men each (*Alexandria Daily Town Talk* 1983:102). The fort’s construction required 7,500 truckloads of sand, gravel, and lumber; 35 million kegs of nails; 220,000 barrels of cement; 4.3 million square feet of wall-board; and 3.9 million square feet of roofing paper (Anderson et al. 1988:112). As the land was

taken over by the military and the fort shot up faster than a slash pine, farmers and the military attempted to coexist. But cattle grazed on the parade grounds and hogs found shade under the barracks and, eventually, farmers were told to remove their stock (Cantley and Kern 1984:64).

With construction occurring at an unprecedented pace, Leesville, for the moment, was stunned. Between January 16, 1941, and February 15, 1941, the population jumped from 3,500 to 15,000 and, eventually, reached 18,000 during the war. Streets were jammed with cars and people. But the town soon recovered. Businesses boomed and money poured in as new businesses were created. Rents went through the roof. “There were people staying in chicken houses, sleeping in barns, or we’d shed them” (Oaks in Cantley and Kern 1984:64). Banks stayed open until nine in the evening. Vernon Parish’s state trooper allotment rose from fifteen to 127 to control the roads (*Alexandria Daily Town Talk* 1983:102). Meanwhile, the army also bought land in the Peason Ridge area to establish a firing range. Although eight families were forced to leave, most people in the Kisatchie area were happy for the new job opportunities brought by the army (Scoggins 1961:23).

Camp Polk’s construction and the war not only affected Leesville, but also the surrounding communities. Simpson, for instance, became a “rushing little city....It was very common to see a continuous line of motor vehicles traveling the main and side roads both day and night. The construction of the camps and conversion of people to the military gave everybody in Simpson a job, and there was more money in Simpson than ever before in its history” (Lewis 1956:18).

The war again transformed the rural parish landscape and its people, as had the timber industry. This time the transformation was not through the removal of timber, but through furious activity. The remaining woods and broad open spans of cut-over land were suddenly overrun with masses of men and equipment. Farms were invaded by thirsty, hungry soldiers, and the quiet countryside erupted with intermittent gunfire. Occasionally, short and long artillery rounds passing overhead would scare the wits out of those living next

to firing ranges (Scoggins 1961:24). During the war, some eight million men passed through the gates of Fort Polk, maneuvered around Vernon Parish and western Louisiana, and spent time seeking entertainment in Leesville before going overseas to battle.

## **SUMMARY**

The twentieth century saw the transformation of the pineland landscape and the end of Vernon Parish's isolation from the nation and the world. The stage had been set in the late nineteenth century by the lumber barons who purchased large tracts of land in anticipation of the depletion of the northern and eastern forests. Then at the beginning of the century, these entrepreneurs moved into

western Louisiana, followed by many of their lumbermen. They built railroads and mills and extracted the pines. This tremendous effort brought unprecedented activity, jobs, and material wealth to Vernon Parish that lasted until the 1930s. Then the great lumber companies moved on, leaving the remaining resources to smaller companies.

The cost to the landscape was high. Most of the parish pineland was now cut over and infertile. Recovery came with the U.S. Forest Service, CCC, and U.S. Army. The Forest Service began a reforestation program, then the army turned the region into a training ground. New jobs, new opportunities, and a new way of life came with them. And yet throughout this period of radical landscape change, small farms survived and independent farmers continued to tend their lands, sometimes unaffected by the changing times.



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## Chapter 7

# THE PEOPLE AND CULTURE OF VERNON PARISH

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Although the D'Artigeau and LeComte families were the first to settle, or at least claim land in Vernon Parish, it was the Franklins, Smarts, Brays, and numerous other Anglo-Americans who established a permanent presence and shaped the cultural landscape that we see today. Arriving separately or in a train of wagons, Vernon Parish's first homesteaders, and those who followed, shared a common history, identity, and values. They were a people united by a singular culture. They were people of the Upland South.

In Chapters 1 through 6, Vernon Parish history has been seen through the lens of landscape change and chronological history. This final chapter looks at the people from a different, broader perspective—through the eyes of cultural geographers and archaeologists. This chapter delves deeper into the nature of Vernon Parish's settlers. It examines trends and patterns in the history and culture of the people who made Vernon Parish home.

### THE UPLAND SOUTH

The single most encompassing theme that defines the people, culture, ideology, and cultural landscape of Fort Polk and Vernon Parish is the cultural tradition of the Upland South. Indeed, Vernon Parish, practically speaking, could be called the type-site for Upland South culture. By *type-site* it is meant that the region typifies the culture's characteristics and attributes and can be pointed to as a pure example, or archetype of that culture. Although a few aspects of parish culture may have slight variance with what has been defined traditionally as Upland South, the people, their settlement, economic patterns, ethnic mix, world view, woodland environment, and way of life, all fall deeply into the very core of Upland South culture as defined by scholars, folklorists, cultural geographers, and archaeologists. In essence, Vernon

Parish's people and culture define Upland South culture as much as the Upland South culture defines them.

Who are the people of the Upland South? How are they unique? Scholarly definition of the Upland South as a distinct region and culture began with an article by Kniffen (1965) and has since been discussed, elaborated on, and expanded on by numerous cultural geographers since then (Clendenen 1973; Glassie 1968; Jordan 1981; Meyer 1975; Newton 1971, 1974; Otto 1985; and Otto and Anderson 1982). Archaeologists have found this tradition to be a useful explanatory framework for research on small southern yeoman farmsteads in the following areas: regions along the Tombigbee River (Adams et al. 1981; Futato 1989; Smith et al. 1982); northeast Texas (Jurney and Moir 1987; Jurney et al. 1988); Arkansas (Sabo 1990; Stewart-Abernathy 1986); Missouri (Smith 1993); Tennessee (Ahlman 1997); North Carolina (Clement et al. 1997; Stine 1989); and South Carolina (Joseph et al. 1991; Resnick 1988).

The term Upland South defines both the cultural tradition of the White yeoman, farmer-hunter-stockman, plain folk and their geographical area of settlement in the Upland South and southern portions of the northern states. Even prior to the cultural geographers' interest in an Upland South tradition, historians identified this ethnic group as a distinctive culture, using terms like "plain folk" (Owsley 1949). Frederick Jackson Turner (1920) also used the term Upland South "though he often seems to attach a physiographic connotation to the term" without the cultural connotations (Newton 1971:72). Other regional variations on the term include Upcountry, Upper South, and the Backcountry. The latter term is confined to the Appalachian chain during the mid-1700s, which was the springboard for the nineteenth-century migration west (Crass et al. 1998; Fischer 1989; Ford 1986; Jordan and Kaups 1989; Otto and Anderson



1982:89). Even anthropologists have recognized the distinctive traits of the southern farmer, labeling the region in which they live the “hill south” (Arensberg 1955).

Upland South defines a tradition and ideology originating with the Celtic and Welsh peoples who migrated to America as early as the 1670s, initially settling in western Virginia (Newton 1971) or, according to Jordan (1981), in the Delaware Valley. Blending with Chesapeake Tidewater, German, and English traditions of southern Pennsylvania, this multicultural amalgamation resulted in “an independent small farm owner/operator who relied on traditional solutions to everyday problems which affected their economic, social, and settlement systems” (Smith et al. 1982:9).

These highly individualistic, often lowland Scots and Scotch-Irish<sup>1</sup> rapidly migrated down the Appalachian chain beginning as early as the 1720s. With the arrival of perhaps as many as 52,000 more Scots between 1760 and 1815, the Scotch-Irish began a rapid expansion through the eastern woodlands (Johnson 1991:220). This migration spread north into southern Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois; west into Kentucky and Tennessee; and south through upper Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, and eventually Louisiana, Texas, and Missouri (Glassie 1968:235; Kniffen 1965; Meyer 1975; Newton 1974). People of English and German ancestry mixed freely with them, creating a highly adaptable frontier people. With local exceptions, the land they settled was remarkably similar—mountainous or rolling, forested, often rugged, with plentiful game and marginal agricultural soils. A seemingly unstoppable wave, the Upland South cultural tradition finally ran its course at the point where the eastern woodlands ended and the midwestern open prairies began. In the Vernon Parish region, the initial migration of Upland South people was checked briefly by Spanish-controlled Texas. But even then, they surreptitiously penetrated the east Texas Big Thicket, using the western-Louisiana Neutral Ground as a refuge in times of danger.

It is uncertain if these people freely chose the Appalachian backcountry woodlands and Upper South for their migration and settlement or if they followed this route because the fertile lowlands were already controlled largely by the plantation class. However, cultural geographer Milton Newton (1974) goes so far as to state that these people were “preadapted” for the topography and climate found in the upper heartland of eastern America. By preadaptation he meant “a set of traits possessed by a particular human society or part of that society giving that group competitive advantage in occupying a new environment” (Newton 1974:152). Highly adaptable, greatly mobile Upland South people possessed the necessary traits for rapid occupation of America’s eastern woodlands. With only the decimated Native American tribes in their way, they were practically free to roam. Otto and Anderson (1982:91) note that “this woodlands-adapted agriculture of the plain folk permitted them to occupy the vast Southern forests in only two to three generations in the period between 1790 and 1840.” Though Upland South people lacked the capital and labor resources of the planter class, the abundant woodlands offered them easily obtainable building materials, hunting subsistence, and grazing land for hogs and cattle. The rapidity of the migration according to Otto and Anderson (1982:96) was due to the need for a “steady supply of fresh woodlands” that kept them migrating westward generation after generation as the Native Americans were pushed even further west.

While the concept of the pan-Upland South as a distinct cultural tradition is widely recognized, its geographical limits are still being determined. Otto and Anderson (1982:90), for instance, define the Upland South (ca. 1835) as encompassing an area from Lancaster, Pennsylvania, to mid-Texas, and from southern Iowa to northern Florida. Jordan and Kaups (1989:8–9) define a core domain that spans the region from Delaware down the Appalachian chain, through upper Georgia and Mississippi, north to upper Ohio, and west to cen-

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<sup>1</sup> The term “Scots-Irish” is more technically correct, but “Scotch-Irish” has become acceptable by common usage (see Jordan and Kaups 1989).

tral Texas. Then they define an even broader area of general influence that extends through practically the entire eastern United States, only excluding the lower Coastal Plain and very upper part of Michigan and Wisconsin. A middle ground between the two extremes is perhaps more accurate, with the southern and eastern extent ending at the interface of the Piedmont and the Coastal Plain, but then stretching through upper Georgia into east Texas. The northern border would run along the Pittsburgh, Columbus, Indianapolis line (Interstate 70), reaching to the Missouri-Kansas border.

Just as the Upland South's geographical extent is the subject of academic debate, so too is its origins. Traditionally, the Upland South has been primarily attributed to the Scotch-Irish. However, Jordan and Kaups (1989) contend that the many traits normally ascribed to the Scotch-Irish were in fact originally Finnish and Native American. "Our main thesis, to be defended in ecological, diffusionary terms... is that American backwoods culture had significant northern European roots.... In our view, the role of the Celts in frontier America has traditionally been greatly overstated, the Indian influence consistently underestimated, and the Finnish contribution almost wholly ignored or, without adequate scholarly evidence, dismissed" (Jordan and Kaups 1989:35, 37). Their argument is not that northern Europeans settled the Upland South geographical region themselves, but that the Celts were the cultural carriers of traits borrowed from early Swedish-Finnish settlement along the Delaware River in the late 1600s. Thus, they do not dispute that poor White Protestant Scotch-Irish yeoman served as the "economic foot soldiers" in a surge of migration of Europeans to the southeast (Johnson 1991:220). "The Scotch-Irish subsequently supplied the largest single genetic input to the backwoods population, setting the colonization machine in rapid westward motion" (Jordan and Kaups 1989:247). However, the traits (especially such folk architecture as log buildings) actually were an amalgam of Scotch-Irish, Finnish, and Native American cultures. Jordan and Kaups (1989:38–92) rightly point to evidence of this in the northern European Old Country, and the lack of a log construction tradition in Scotland or Ireland.

Then there is the question of the evolution of the Upland South culture as it changes through the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century. According to the cultural geographers who first studied the Upland South, the culture in its purest, earliest form is defined by an independent, self-sufficient pioneer, a hunter-herdsman who moved frequently and swiftly west searching for better game, fewer neighbors, and graze for his free-ranging hogs and cattle. But eventually, many of these people settled and became successful yeoman farmers and even specialized farmers. Others lost their land in the Civil War and became poor, landless tenants competing with newly freed Blacks. There was, of course, a human spectrum of all combinations in between these two extremes of economic status from farmers to "poor Whites" (Bolton 1994; Flynt 1979). Many of these two economically divergent but culturally similar peoples had identical settlement and social patterns. These similarities have profound implications for archaeologists who try to identify different types from artifacts. For instance, recent research in South Carolina has found that ethnicity and social status at twentieth-century Upland South sites is practically invisible at the site level (Cabak and Inkrot 1997:9–14). This will be discussed further, but it is worth noting here that the archaeological remains at Fort Polk have become increasingly valuable because most of the settlers there were self-sufficient yeoman farmers archetypical of the Upland South. Their archaeological manifestations might provide a clearer type-site for the study of these people and their culture elsewhere.

Overall, the scholarly debate is simply an effort to better understand the Upland South culture. The premise here is that a distinct cultural tradition defined as the Upland South did and still does exist across the South and is well represented in the history and archaeology of Vernon Parish. Across the South, regional variations or, better stated, local adaptations of Upland South culture are evident. The use of "backcountry" in South Carolina, for instance, is correct because it defines the people of the initial Scotch-Irish migration down the Appalachian chain. Those of direct Scottish descent adapted to a similar pineland on the

piedmont of North Carolina (Clement et al. 1997). Meanwhile, the people of the northern Ozarks of Missouri adapted Upland South culture to the local environment of a rolling prairie between two sharply defined woodlands (Smith 1993). But within Fort Polk, Upland South culture appears as an “unaltered” strain in the pinelands of western Louisiana. The following discussion details the historical and cultural patterns seen at Fort Polk and in the Vernon Parish region that are characteristic of the Upland South tradition.

## UPLAND SOUTH POPULATION AND SETTLEMENT PATTERNS

### POPULATION ETHNICITY AND DENSITY

First and foremost, the Upland South cultural tradition is wholly associated with white, Anglo- or

northern-European Americans (Figure 61). While Upland South people are not totally Scots and Scotch-Irish, these Celts, mixed with English and Germanic peoples, represent the majority. Vernon Parish’s population reflects this pattern. Statistics note that throughout Fort Polk and Vernon Parish’s history, the population remained overwhelmingly Anglo-American Protestants. Although there were some French along the Red River and Spanish along the Camino Real, the D’Artigeaus and LeComtes in Vernon Parish soon were invisible, for they were hardly settled before the Anglo-Americans and English slipped into the region, hunting, herding, and building homesteads while cautiously avoiding governmental authorities.

The first reliable census data for the region (1880) indicate that the overwhelming majority of the people in Vernon Parish were White Anglos who had migrated from northeastern Louisiana.



Figure 61 — Typical Upland South farm family. The Le Bleu homestead on Section Line Road (courtesy Museum of West Louisiana).

The rest were from the southern tier of Gulf states with Mississippians in the lead, followed by Alabama and Georgia natives. Blacks came to the parish at the turn of the twentieth century to seek employment with the newly arrived lumber companies. By the 1920s, they represented as much as 25 percent of the population. However, they also left with the lumber companies. As a result, up to 1940, they had no great influence on the parish's cultural patterns, especially within Fort Polk. Today, Blacks comprise a much larger percentage of the population, largely due to assignment at Fort Polk. Two other minorities also came and probably left with the lumber companies—Italians and Mexicans. They had no great influence on regional cultural patterns. The Redbones possibly influenced cultural patterns within Fort Polk, but because Redbone-defining characteristics are vague and undocumented, it is impossible to determine the extent of their significance.

Concerning population density, this study has demonstrated repeatedly that it was sparse throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Settlement was scattered (dispersed) in Vernon Parish and apparently even more so within Fort Polk. The parish's settlement history did have periods of augmentation. For instance, when the land was declared part of the United States, settlement received an immediate boost. However, in the antebellum period, west-central Louisiana was more of a temporary stop for settlers heading into Texas, a staging ground during the filibustering campaigns, and a refuge for Texas settlers during the Mexican War.

Those attracted to the area at this time were the hunter-stockman squatters who were in the van of the Upland South migration west, and who would continue to move west when neighbors came too near or the game became too scarce. In other words, many of the earliest settlers probably moved on. When real settlement did occur, beginning in the late antebellum period, the first of the Upland South yeoman farmers claimed the rich, fertile lands along the Anacoco Prairie and, to a lesser extent, along the Calcasieu and Sabine Rivers where subsistence farming could possibly succeed. Meanwhile, the hogwallow lands of Fort

Polk were usually avoided. In Chapter 3, it was estimated that less than seven hundred people had settled Fort Polk by the 1860s, and this included all of modern Ward 5. It is a generous figure. The first glimpse of the true parish population in 1880 indicates only 5,160 inhabitants concentrated along the fertile land near rivers. By 1890, there were still only 1,648 people in Wards 4 and 5 combined, an area encompassing all of the Main Fort. And by that time, the speculators were buying up the rich pine uplands beyond the creek beds.

As noted at the beginning of this book, purchase of Fort Polk's hogwallow lands by the lumber speculators and lumber barons in the 1880s and 1890s occurred at a critical juncture. The rich farmable lands in the parish were about filled to a capacity comfortable for Upland South people. The vast majority of the settlers within Fort Polk were still hunter-stockmen squatters living along the first terrace of land on the Whiskey Chitto, Birds Creek, and Six Mile, and farming the river bottoms. Settlement would have perhaps filled out along this terrace and spread into the upland areas during the late nineteenth century. Instead, just as the land was surveyed and parceled, the speculators began purchasing large unclaimed tracks. Some of the original settlers who had the economic means tried to legally obtain their land from the government and keep it from being gobbled up by timber speculators. Others without funds continued to live on the timberland as squatters. But further government sanctioned settlement was thwarted by the lumber barons and speculators.

The land stayed in the hands of the lumber companies through the 1920s, and then was purchased by the government. Evidence from the northern part of the parish indicates that squatters continued to settle and live on timberlands with no interference from the lumber companies, even during the 1930s. This must have also occurred to some degree within Fort Polk, but may have been restricted by the Forest Service's purchases. The animosity toward the Forest Service was perhaps not just the result of closing the free-ranges and the antburn policies, but also because some believed they had a right to live on the land as they had for generations, regardless of land ownership,



In the Peason Ridge area, settlement history was similar to that seen within the Main Fort. The following land-use history at archaeological site 16VN138, the James Owers farmstead, is probably typical. Owers's land was originally purchased as part of a large railroad land grant given to the Texas and Pacific Railroad Company, who, in 1884, transferred the lands to the New Orleans Pacific Railway Company (Thomas et al. 1993:79). For financial reasons, the latter company sold the land to Jay Gould. This noted land baron purchased 55,300.71 acres of west-central Louisiana for its timber assets at a cost of \$152,076.92 or \$2.75 per acre. Gould's heirs sold the land to the Forest Lumber Company of Kansas City, Missouri, who sold it to the Louisiana Longleaf Company in 1918 (Thomas et al. 1993:80). In 1926, Owers purchased forty acres of this tract in the southeast quarter of Section 5 of T4N R9W. He attempted to farm ten acres and left the remaining thirty in timber. Owers refused to sell his land to the federal government when the army moved into the area. He was taken to court, lost the case, and, in 1943, received \$1,150 for his farm. This Owers example emphasizes the fact that farming and homesteading did not actually occur in the area until the late 1920s, and lasted only a short time at that.

As related in Chapter 5, perhaps only three to six people per square mile were living within Fort Polk's main post at any one time. In the township studied by Cantley and Kern (1984), only twenty households had been confirmed in 1910. Chapter 6 recounts that the total population at that time on future Fort Polk land was projected between 600 and 1,200 people. With the Forest Service purchase of the cut-over lands, sparse habitation remained the pattern until the army arrived in 1940. The Real Estate Tracts confirm this, noting that only 7 percent of the land was in private ownership when the army purchased the Main Fort tracts, even less, 3 percent, at Peason Ridge. As an educated guess, only around 15 percent of the fort was ever settled or farmed during its entire history, even assuming that squatters lived on the land up until the Forest Service arrived. Of this 15 percent, a much smaller percentage of land would have actually been tilled for crops. Furthermore, the sparse settlement

would have been concentrated along the Whiskey Chitto, Birds, and Six Mile creeks during most of the period of private settlement.

#### **INTERSITE SETTLEMENT**

Since cultural geographers are among the foremost researchers of Upland South culture, it is natural that much attention has been paid to its settlement patterns. Upland South settlement patterns are indeed distinctive and can be seen both at the intersite and intrasite level. First, intersite settlement patterns include: (1) adaptation to woodland areas with plentiful game and marginal agricultural lands that usually must be cleared (Otto and Anderson 1982); (2) dispersed, kin-structured settlement and hamlets; (3) in keeping with dispersed settlement, a low-density of population where "the emphasis is, of course, on dispersion of a substantial portion of the population" (Futato 1989:82); (4) dispersed, low order, central place, or community service sites (general stores, grist mills, churches, schools) (Newton 1974:151); (5) a courthouse-town and county system that focuses on civil order and concentrates the skill of the elite over the "peasantry" (Newton 1974:152; Zelinsky 1951:173), thus becoming the maximum unit of settlement (Futato 1989:82; Sabo 1990:143) and allowing a minimum of people to represent both the elite and subordinate members of society (Newton 1974:151); and, (6) domestic sites located on high ground, next to water early and next to roads later (Newton 1974:151; Sabo 1990:140–146; Smith et al. 1982:239). Even a cursory examination of Vernon Parish and Fort Polk history indicates that these patterns were characteristic of the settlement there.

Although the historical record clearly indicates a dispersed low-density settlement pattern, archaeological analysis of population density does pose some interesting complications. Some archaeological studies have agreed with the historical data, while others have concluded that settlement within Fort Polk may have been a little more dense than the historic record indicates. These will be looked at in turn. The first and most thorough set of data comes from Anderson and his colleagues (1988) and generally supports the census

and land-use history discussed herein (also see Anderson et al. 1999 for an updated version of the earlier research). Anderson and fellow archaeologists studied settlement patterns within Fort Polk by examining Government Land Office (GLO) plats and comparing them to information gathered from the many systematic archaeological surveys that have been conducted on the installation since the 1970s. The GLO maps, dating from 1880 to 1883, depict the location of drainages, agricultural fields, roads, and structures.

Anderson found that the illustrated agricultural fields were concentrated near the water drainages both in the Peason Ridge area and the Main Fort (Figures 62 and 63) (Anderson et al. 1988:257–263). In the areas of gentle rolling terrain, fields were larger than in the more steeply sloped areas. Interestingly, they found a pattern of dispersed agricultural fields, many of which had no structure illustrated near them. This was especially true on GLO maps of the Main Fort area. They concluded that “a number of smaller fields were created in the isolated areas suited to agricultural production, and settlement was dispersed in order to access these smaller tracts” (Anderson et al. 1988:263). In comparing the archaeological data with the maps, they were surprised to find that only one archaeological site location (16VN788) corresponded directly to a cultural feature on the maps, and this was an agricultural field with no building illustrated nearby (Campbell and Weed 1986).

Finally, they looked at the archaeological data alone by plotting farm sites on maps and comparing the different topographies at each site. They found that the majority of farmsteads (71 percent) were located on ridge slopes, noses, or crests, with an additional 14 percent on bottom terraces. Some 43 percent were found on a slight (5 percent) slope. Of greatest interest, 52 percent of them were found some 601 meters from permanent water (Anderson et al. 1988:276–278). They concluded that:

*Historic settlement at Fort Polk appears to be predicated on several factors. Most important*

*among these is the nature of agricultural practices in the area. Because fertile crop land was limited in availability and extent, primarily due to the dissected nature of the locality, most farmers appear to have relied on three, four, or more dispersed small (ca. five acre) fields. House settings thus would have been established in environments that provided access to these dispersed fields. Fields appear to have been located on the major and minor drainages of the Fort, but house settings themselves were somewhat distant from these water courses. Ridge noses and slopes overlooking one or several drainages were probably preferred habitats, although not to the degree of statistical significance....Based on historic maps, settlement density within the area of the Fort was sparse, yet the number of agricultural fields presented far outnumbered those that would have been serviced by the limited number of structures shown. This information, and the routes of early roads, suggests that many of those who farmed in Fort Polk lived outside the immediate area. (Anderson et al. 1988:280–281)*

Where there is agreement between history and archaeology, the historical data help explain the archaeological findings. To begin with, farms were dispersed, probably because fertile land was limited to the lowland areas near streams. The upland pine landscape was barren for crop production. One reason plots were small was because one man could handle only around “two acres of tobacco, perhaps eight acres of cotton, or 25 to 30 acres of corn” in any one year (Otto and Anderson 1982:92). With hogs and cattle roaming free, the fields had to be fenced. A large field would be difficult to fence, and extensive fencing difficult to maintain. Furthermore, since fertilization was unheard of (an Upland South pattern in itself), even the lowlands were quickly exhausted and new fields had to be opened while the old fields were abandoned or lay fallow.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Even in 1923 only 668.75 tons of fertilizer were shipped to Vernon Parish. This figure was the twenty-seventh lowest in the state (Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Immigration 1924:122).

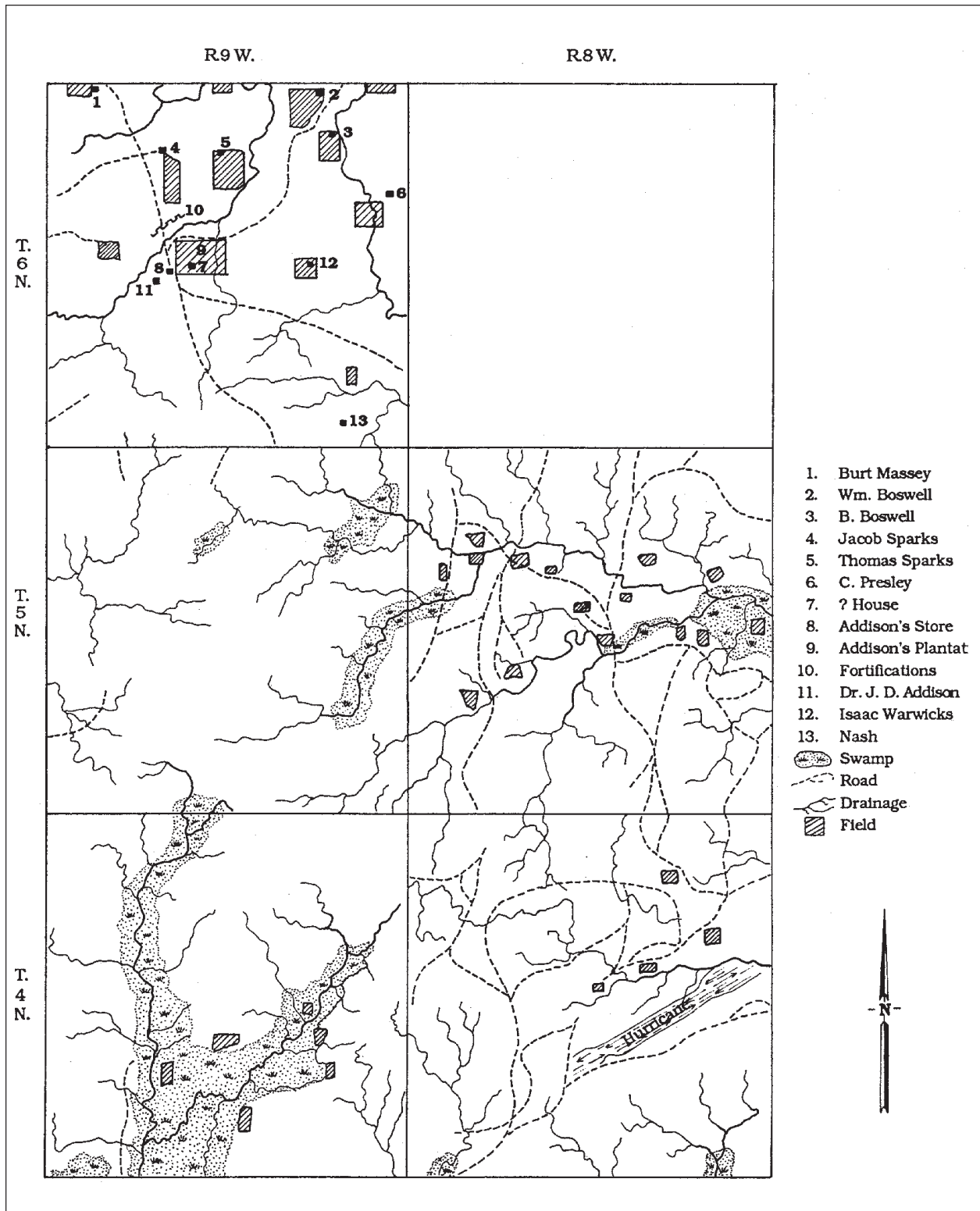


Figure 62 — Compilation of Peason Ridge plat maps, 1880–1883 (from Anderson et al. 1988:258).

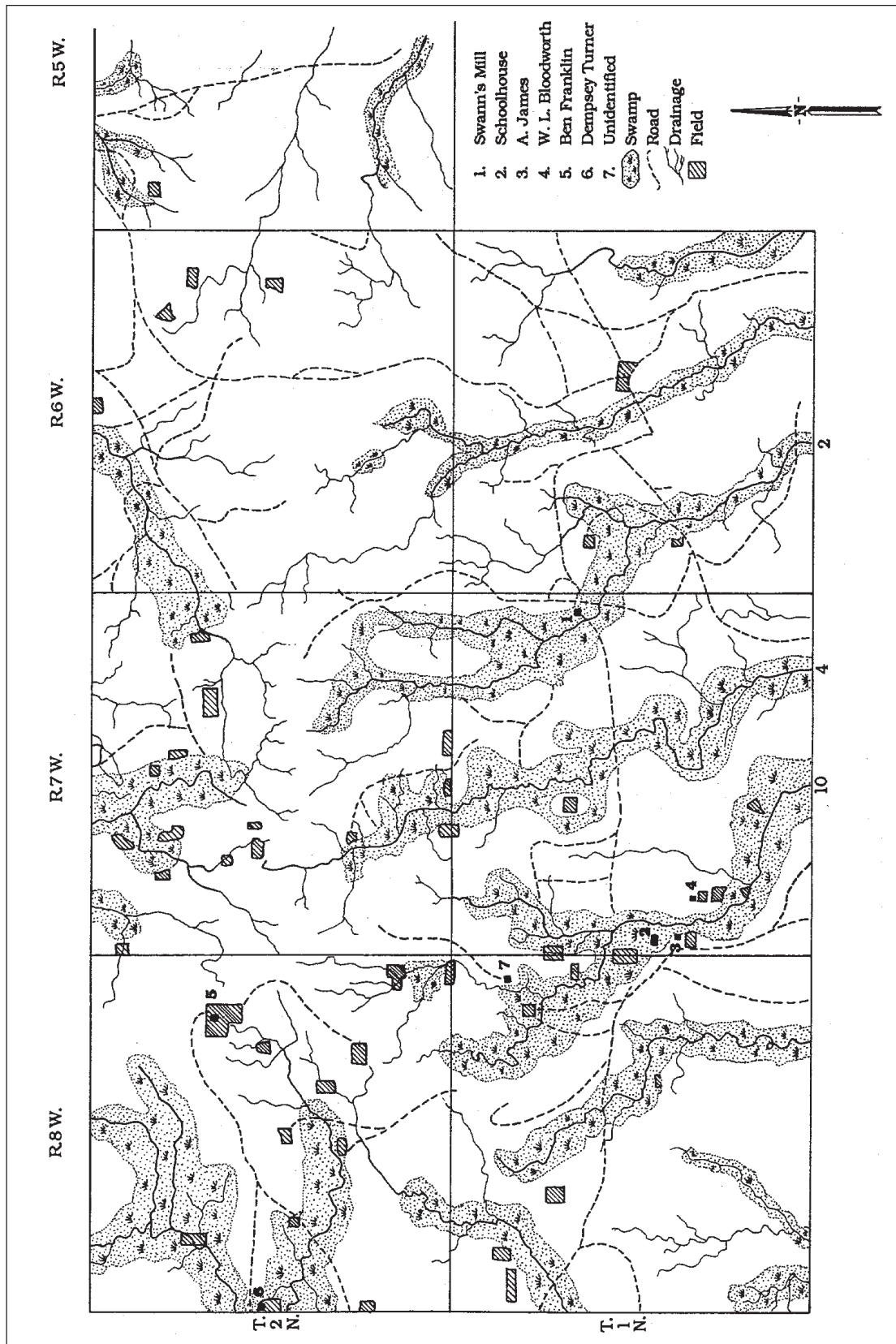


Figure 63 — Compilation of Main Fort plat maps, 1880–1883 (from Anderson et al. 1988:261).



Many house sites within Fort Polk were indeed located on high ground near water, as expected, but others were quite a distance from the nearest stream. The explanation is seen in the local topography. Many of the water sources within the fort contain wide, sometime swampy bottoms. Likely, the farmsteads were located on the first dry terrace, as close to water as possible without exposing the farm to flooding or unhealthy standing water. These farms did not rely on the streams for water, but rather used nearby springs. Wells, of course, were a much later phenomena (probably dating to the 1920s or 1930s). Wells eventually allowed people to move their houses away from the creeks and closer to main transportation routes.

The lack of farm structures illustrated on the GLO maps drew Anderson and his cowriters to conclude that the farmers of Fort Polk lived outside the region and commuted to the fields. But the information just discussed provides a better explanation for the lack of structures. Multiple fields were worked by one farmer. Some farmers may have settled in the uplands and commuted a short distance to fields in the lowlands where the land was fertile. But commuting for any distance would have been impossible. The roads were too poorly maintained for commuting—any rain would have made them impassable. A long commute simply would not have been practical until, maybe, the 1920s. Another likely explanation is that the GLO surveys did not depict all the structures (farmsteads) that actually existed at the time. Remember, the only archaeological site matching a cultural feature on the GLO maps was an agricultural field. In reality, structures were probably present after all, but perhaps not labeled on the maps or abandoned at the time. Also, a characteristic of the early Upland South stockman-hunter was to settle for a few years and move on. This same settlement pattern is explained in the words of an east Texas resident:

*Very few of the descendants of the old settlers own any land. For the last forty years they have been in the habit of settling upon any land fit for cultivation. After finding a good, rich land*

*(hammock) the pine woods settler will commence felling and cutting trees and underbrush away from where he expects to have his field... After working some one else's land for two or three years, he sells the improvements and his squatter's claim to one of his neighbors, and then hunts up another piece of land to improve and sell in a like manner. The consequence of this way of living is that they are always moving, and their children grow up without knowing the pleasures and comforts of a home that could be made comfortable and beautiful if the land was their own... The people have been in the habit of using every man's land as their own for so many years that they believe the land has no owners. Most of the timbered lands in East Texas are owned in large tracts by non-residents and their agents who pay their taxes seldom know where the land is situated; hence the squatter has it all his own way. (Caplen in Wright 1942:158–159)*

Upland South subsistence farmers knew that hardwoods were an indicator of fertility and that pinelands were poor for farming. They cleared the land where hardwoods grew. Thus, most of the fields depicted on the GLO maps were located in low areas near water (Otto and Anderson 1982:91–93). Upland South farmers would use the fields for a few years and then turn them to pasture land and open up new fields. Thus, the GLO maps are probably depicting both contemporary and abandoned fields over the course of some ten to twenty years. All this helps explain why there was not a structure for every field. Finally, no historical support has been found for the conclusion that the fields were farmed by commuting farmers.

Recent studies by archaeologists Franks and Yakubik (1990), argue for a much earlier influx of settlers in the Fort Polk area than historical sources might indicate. Their study of antebellum land claims even indicate that settlement might not have been as sparse as this author claims. In their study of land claims within Townships T2N R8W, and T1N R8W, they found more claims than expected (Franks and Yakubik 1990:77–83; Yakubik and Franks 1990:29). Some of the claims are surpris-

ingly early (1845 for example). Their parcel maps indicate that 1,520 acres out of 9,600 possible acres were claimed, or, interestingly, about 16 percent of the land. For this reason, Franks and Yakubik also dismiss Anderson's hypothesis of commuting farmers (Anderson et al. 1988:281).

Yes, the antebellum claims are indeed higher than one might expect. However, land claims do not equate with actual settlement. Traditionally, a high number of the earliest and first land claims by private citizens across the South were speculative. Probably the large 160-acre plats seen by Franks and Yakubik were land speculations. Census data supports this. Even if the claims all represent settlers, 16 percent of the land does not necessarily represent a dense settlement pattern, although it does represent a higher than expected number of land claims, especially for the antebellum period. The Franks and Yakubik figure is interesting in one sense. It indicates that if the previously noted estimates are correct that only about 15 percent of the land was *ever* in private hands, the settlement pattern was in place very early in the history of the Fort Polk area.

One more archaeological finding regarding the settlement pattern at Fort Polk is that, to date, while most of the installation has been surveyed, only 360 historic sites and isolated finds have been discovered (Anderson et al. 1999:347). Thomas and his colleagues also pointed out that despite twenty years of survey on Fort Polk, evidence of antebellum settlement remains scarce (Thomas et al. 1993:192). Clearly Fort Polk homesteads fit the Upland South intersite settlement pattern from the perspectives of historical data, geographical data, and archaeological data.

The dispersed settlement pattern of central-place locales—trading centers, hamlets, churches, schools, post stops—is also appropriate in describing Vernon Parish and Fort Polk. These locales were widely dispersed across the landscape from the parish's initial settlement up until the army's arrival and even today. Characteristically, just as soon as a handful of people settled within reasonable proximity, they would establish a church, school, or public building serving both functions. The people who built the church or school became

a community that could be identified by place name. Post offices often helped define the community, and the place name might be the surname of the postmaster or the first settler. Post office/general stores might become hamlets consisting of no more than the store and the postmaster's house. Mills, on the other hand, could become community locales. However, being dependant on streams, mills were more often isolated while still serving the farm community. Occasionally, mills would also become hamlets.

*At strategic points, such as bluffs overlooking streams, or where several ridge or valley roads converged at a likely mill site...a number of buildings might form the nucleus of a crossroads hamlet; around the crossroads might be a mill, store, post office, church, or cemetery and several houses, although these were seldom located very close together. (Newton 1974:151)*

Yet another indication of the sparse homesteading in the Fort Polk area is the scarcity of evidence for community centers or hamlets. The historic record indicates that towns and villages and even moderate-sized hamlets simply did not exist within the fort. The only exception was Fullerton, in effect a special-function town. The only hamlets or community centers that survived in southeastern Vernon Parish were those not severely impacted by the departure of the large lumber companies or by the arrival of the Forest Service and U.S. Army. Place names like Front, probably a rail terminal, and Pringles, known only from maps, can be found in the documentation. However, only the Whiskachitta school and post office and the Six Mile school, post office, and nearby Swain's Mill are known to have existed within the Main Fort. The thirteen cemeteries in the Main Fort and two within the Peason Ridge and Horsehead Training areas indicate, of course, some level of settlement. The only known hamlet in Peason Ridge was Peason, another mill town or special-function site.

Kin-based settlement, another Upland South settlement pattern, is difficult to determine. However, Jetertown is an excellent example within Fort

Polk. Jetertown (archaeological site 16VN1070) is located in Section 35 of T2N R6W. It consists of four structures clustered within approximately five hundred meters. First occupied by Henry Jeter around the late 1880s, the site also housed the families of his sons, Charles and John. Occupation by the Jeter family continued through the early twentieth century. Henry Jeter, in keeping with the settlement pattern proposed herein, arrived as a squatter and attempted to claim the land beginning around 1904 (Franks 1990a:47–50). Land-ownership became embroiled in continuing filings and cross-filings due not only to earlier claims by lumber companies but also to a family dispute when Henry's wife died. Locally, the area became known as Jetertown, although it never appeared on maps (one important reason being that it never became a post stop).

In the Peason Ridge area, kin-based settlement is seen at two historic farms—archaeological sites 16VN138 and 16VN139—owned by the Owers families. One study goes so far as to state that “kinship may have played a very strong role in historic settlement decisions. In fact, in some cases, kinship may have been the primary reason for selecting one plot of land over another” (Morehead et al. 1994:24). This is no doubt true both in the Fort Polk area and the rest of Vernon Parish.

### ***Transportation Routes***

Tied closely to intersite settlement patterns is the development of transportation routes. In a study of another Upland South region, Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, it was noted that Upland South routes were initially influenced indirectly by the quality of soils and directly by water transportation (Smith 1993:77). Later settlement was affected by established transportation routes. As already noted, most people bypassed the region, traveling up the Red River to Natchitoches and then west along the Camino Real. The planter class avoided the area because of poor soil. But, eventually, beginning around the late 1820s, the Upland South subsistence hunter-stockmen arrived.

Interestingly, once migration and settlement began in Vernon Parish, the transportation routes ran mostly east-west in keeping with the westward

flow of most migrants. The waterways were not used because most of the major streams flowed north-south, the opposite direction of migration. Sometime around the 1860s, roads began to trend toward Huddleston, the largest hamlet in the area at the time. All major routes eventually led to Huddleston. This changed dramatically when the parish was established. Quickly all major routes shifted slightly to converge on the centrally located parish seat of Leesville. The transportation pattern in Vernon Parish typifies the Upland South.

Another interesting aspect of the macrotransportation system within the parish is the railroads. Again, Smith (1994) has shown that railroads had a major impact on Upland South transportation and settlement patterns, changing the course of settlement merely by their placement on the landscape. At Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, and Fort Bragg, North Carolina, prior to the arrival of the army, Upland South settlement was impacted not by the arrival of the railroad but by its bypassing both areas. At Fort Leonard Wood, for instance, the pre-Civil War planned railroad near the region was never built. After the war, the route was shifted north of the installation, which also shifted settlement toward the railroad and isolated the Fort Leonard Wood region. At Fort Bragg, the development of Fayetteville was severely thwarted by the railroad bypassing the town and the adjacent Upland South community (Clement et al. 1997). In Vernon Parish, the railroad was centrally located and development, once again, shifted along its route halting the development of western Vernon Parish.

Newton mentions several other distinctive traits of Upland South transportation patterns.

*Roads, their importance determined by their directness to the courthouse, conformed to the land—in the valleys in mountainous areas, on ridges in plain or hilly regions. Under the open-range custom and law of the Upland South, roads developed freely as the demands of users and the terrain indicated.*

*The old roads, before the automobile, were the marshaling yards of the peasantry. Time and*

*time again, older farmsteads were bisected by roads....The newer faster roads bypassed many old farmsteads, often bypassing much of the country as well. But wherever later roads were built, Upland people built new houses on high ground next to the road, if land was available. (Newton 1974:151)*

As stated, by the turn of the twentieth century, all major roads in Vernon Parish led to Leesville. The 1880 transportation routes within Fort Polk have been described as chaotic, “exhibit[ing] no clear hierarchy. Again, roads appear to either cross streams or parallel them. One purpose of the roads is to access fields” (Anderson et al. 1988:260). Anderson and his coauthors saw a snapshot example of Newton’s description of the effects of the open-range system whereby roads were simply trails cut across the landscape as directly as possible to whatever central-place hamlet, agricultural field, or farmstead provided a common enough objective for reuse. Within Fort Polk, this never changed. Major roads, unlike farm roads, probably never numbered more than one or two routes leading to Leesville and, for a short while, Fullerton or Pitkin.

#### **INTRASITE SETTLEMENT**

Upland South farmstead settlement patterns are also distinctive at the intrasite level and include: (1) hilltop farmsteads as a seemingly disordered cluster of buildings with barns and outbuildings arranged around the house in an “order determined by the owner’s changing conceptions of convenience” (Newton 1974:151); (2) separate house and outbuildings (smokehouse, barns, cribs, pens, food storage buildings) serving multiple functions (Jurney and Moir 1987:230; Smith et al. 1982:10–11); (3) “house(s) facing the probable path of human approach...” (Weaver and Doster 1982:64); (4) dwellings shaded by trees (Weaver and Doster 1982:64); and (5) fields and pastures irregularly arranged, often following topographic features (Hart 1977).

Actually, while the arrangement of buildings on the Upland South farmstead looks “disordered,” there is a pattern (Glassie 1975; Jurney and Moir

1987; Newton 1974; Pillsbury 1983; Smith 1993; Smith et al. 1982; Weaver and Doster 1982). Outbuildings are often arranged around the main dwelling with the well, privy, storage shed, chicken house, and smokehouse nearby and the large animal pens, barns, and equipment sheds beyond the central core (Weaver and Doster 1982:63–64). This arrangement is often clearly defined by a farm road or alley between the inner and outer rings of buildings (Smith et al. 1982:241). Newton (1974:151) adds that early Upland South farmsteads bisected roads with buildings on either side, and the road simply widening to form a “stomp.” Later, the farmstead was set beside the road, with the house facing the road or probable direction of approach.

Glassie was the first of many to remark that the outbuilding arrangement was associated with traditional sexual divisions of labor. Women’s activities generally included household chores and care of the chickens, all performed within the inner circle of the farmstead. Men attended to the planting and the maintenance of the crops and large animals—duties associated with the outer ring of buildings (Glassie 1975:144). As always, scholarly observations must be refined and qualified. Smith and his colleagues (1982:240) and Adams (1990) have countered that this division was not necessarily hard and fast. Women occasionally worked in the fields, and men often repaired equipment in the inner yards. This is supported by other archaeologists who propose that the male/female roles were not absolute (Joseph et al. 1991:160–165; Stine 1989). For example, children tended the chickens. The division could also be viewed along the general lines of farm economics. “The outer circle of outbuildings at Bay Springs [Mississippi] was oriented toward the production and storage of income related activities like cash crops and animal husbandry...with lesser amounts going to the households. The inner circle of outbuildings was oriented mainly around the production and storage of subsistence products...for household consumption” (Smith et al. 1982:240–241).

Both explanations have relevance and weaknesses. Glassie’s male/female spheres generally hold if one recognizes that under special circumstances lines were easily and quickly crossed. For



instance, at harvest time, everyone worked in the fields. Likewise, Smith and Adams are generally correct in saying that the animals and crops of the outer circle were sold for cash or traded in barter—but so were eggs from the chicken coops in the inner circle and hams from the smokehouse. Regardless of the explanatory thesis, the arrangement of Upland South farmsteads is clearly patterned.

In a study of Upland South farmsteads at Bay Springs, Mississippi, a clear pattern is found in which the main house was centrally located on the highest ground, with a well in close proximity (Smith et al. 1982:240–243). Beyond the house, a ring of outbuildings were found, including smokehouse, chicken coop, privy, and storm cellars. Also found in this area was a place where odds and ends were stored outside (Smith et al. 1982:226). A road or trash accumulation from sweeping often helped distinguish this area from the outer ring of buildings, which consisted of animal pens, barns, and sheds. Sheds could also be found in the fields.

One reason for the described arrangement was to provide sanitary drainage. Clearly the outer buildings, containing large farm animals, needed to be on a different drainage system than the dwellings. At Bay Springs, Mississippi, this was accomplished by building the house on the highest ground or, at the least, on a separate drainage from the barns. With some differences based on a prairie landscape, Journey and Moir (1987:234–236) found similar patterns in Texas. Another influence on the location of barns is the prevailing winds. Also, data indicates that wells and privies were later additions to the Upland South farmstead. Generally, prior to the twentieth century, the nearby woodlot or some other private place served as a privy, and springs were water sources.

Based on previous research at other Upland South farmsteads (Carlson 1990; Joseph et al. 1991; Journey and Moir 1987; Journey et al. 1988; Smith et al. 1982; Stine 1989), the archaeological expression of a farmstead is often a broad shallow artifact sheet midden with small areas of intense past activity seen in the remains of storm cellars, smokehouses, chicken coops, fireplace fire boxes, wells, cisterns, and artifact concentrations.

A number of archaeological test excavations at historic farmsteads within Fort Polk indicate that Vernon Parish Upland South farmsteads fall within the archaeological pattern seen elsewhere. Surface expressions of Fort Polk sites include artifact scatters, depressions, wells, ornamental trees, occasional fence lines, brick, and sandstone or other medium-sized stone used as ground supports for log structures (Campbell and Weed 1986; Campbell et al. 1987; Franks 1990a, 1990b, 1990c; Franks and Yakubik 1990; Largent et al. 1993a, 1993b; Morehead et al. 1994; Thomas et al. 1993, 1994; Yakubik and Franks 1990). Characteristically, the archaeological matrix of Fort Polk consists of sheet middens and clustered concentrations of artifacts assumed to be associated with activity areas. Twentieth-century sites sometimes have privies. Oral historical research conducted in conjunction with the archaeological testing indicates that wells were “generally close to the house,” that yard sweeping was a tradition in the Fort Polk area, and that the farmstead was laid out in the Upland South pattern just described (Franks and Yakubik 1990:38, 51–52).

Another aspect of Upland South rural life is considerable recycling of materials for multiple uses. Thus, trash accumulation is often limited. Old buildings (wood and nails) were especially prized for recycling into other structures over and over again. Furthermore, trash dumping is often off-site away from the farmsteads. At Fort Polk, it can be expected that dumping occurred in depressions and in intermittent streams near farmsteads.

A final indicator of inter- and intrasite settlement is the location of agricultural fields. In the Upland South farm model, local topography affects field arrangement. In the rolling uplands, fields can be expected to follow natural woodlines and ridgelines, and the road system. In river valleys, fields conform to river beds and hill slopes. The Peason Ridge GLO township maps illustrate what appears to be the archetypical example of Upland South fields (see Figure 62). In the illustration of open, rolling section T6N R9W, farms are arranged along roads. But in the more dissected topography of T5N R8W, fields are smaller, dispersed, and although the topographic features are

not clearly illustrated, appear to be conforming to the valleys and drainages. This is also true within the Main Fort.

### ***Architectural Features***

Cultural geographers (Meyer 1975; Newton 1974) discuss Upland South architecture within the overall framework of settlement patterns. Upland South folk architectural patterns include: (1) wide use of horizontal log construction (Kniffen and Glassie 1966:48); (2) universal modular (pen and crib) construction (Newton 1974:152), including single-pen, double-pen, dogtrot (Figure 64), and saddle-bag housing (Wilson 1974); (3) I-house as an indicator of economic attainment (Kniffen 1965:557); and (4) transverse crib barns (Meyer 1975:61). These construction techniques are ubiquitous across the Vernon Parish landscape. Sandel offers a detailed description of the building of log and board-and-batten homes in west-central Louisiana from pioneer times to the 1940s:

*The first thing to do was to clear a place to build the log cabin that would be home....The logs were notched to lock in place on the corners. Wood blocks were used as foundations, and logs were split and the flat side turned up to form the door. The roof was made of split boards or rived as it was called, they're about thirty inches long and each course covered the cracks in the course below. The fireplace and chimney was the last to be added....The chimney was made of mud and straw on a wooden frame. They would place four poles about three or four inches in diameter upright to form the chimney. At about twelve feet the poles would be cut off and from thereon up the chimney would be made smaller to form the hips to make it draw better.*

*In later years when lumber was available, the settlers built houses they called boxed houses. That simply meant the boards were nailed up-*



Figure 64 — General or diversified farmers typically lived in dogtrot houses (courtesy Museum of West Louisiana).

*right to form the walls. The boards would be twelve or fourteen feet long and would be nailed to the sills at the bottom and the plates at the top, very little framing was used in this kind of house. A narrow board would be nailed over the cracks between the wide ones and these were called bats. Usually there would be a wide hall [dogtrot] between the two or four large rooms with a wide porch across the front of the house. (Sandel 1982:17–18)*

There are no standing architectural remains of historic farms on Fort Polk, only small remnants of ruins or foundations. However, contemporary photographs show modular pen construction. Oral history also supports the presence of log dogtrot housing (Franks 1990a:56). Stone and brick also served as the base for fireplaces. As Goodspeed notes, in the Missouri Ozarks and most applicable at Fort Polk, “the hills furnished the stone fireplace, . . . chimney sticks and mud for the poorer, and stone for the more able” (Goodspeed 1889:108). Clearly, the people of Vernon Parish made traditional use of their vast woodland in the pattern of other Upland South people.

### UPLAND SOUTH ECONOMIC PATTERNS

Economic patterns are defined here as traditional methods of managing resources. As the Upland South is primarily a rural cultural tradition, its economy is largely agriculturally based. Three common economic patterns characterize the Upland South: (1) an adaptive food and feed complex, including a wide variety of such crops as peas, squash, collards, pumpkins, potatoes, cabbage, cucumbers, okra, and turnips, but most important corn, hogs, and cattle (Newton 1974:147); (2) hunting as an important contribution to the stockman farmers’ economy (Kniffen 1965); and, (3) an adaptable cash crop (Newton 1974:147). However, through time, the Upland South farm community developed a much more complex range of farm economies than Newton proposed in 1974. In fact, a wide range of farming economies were practiced across the Upland South. These econo-

mies had both common traits and unique aspects that, from a broad anthropological perspective might be described as an agricultural continuum. An agricultural continuum is useful in that it helps illuminate the developing trends and patterns in regional rural life and stresses the continuity rather than the differences between farm economies.

Within the Vernon Parish (Fort Polk) agricultural continuum (Figure 65) the different types or, perhaps, economic levels of farming are defined by the degree to which a farmer: (1) depended on hunting versus farming; (2) participated in the market economy; (3) devoted land to crops versus woodlands; (4) devoted time and land to a particular crop or animal; and (5) owned property and material goods. On one end of this continuum were those previously described as hunters-squatters, the earliest of the Upland South people. On the other end were farmers who specialized to a large degree in a single commercial crop, some of the last people to farm the land.

### VERNON PARISH FARM ECONOMIES

The agriculturists who settled in Vernon Parish and within the Fort Polk area can be loosely typed by the chronology of their arrival. Hunters-squatters were the first to arrive, followed by subsistence-squatters and pioneer farmers. They eventually developed into general (diversified) or specialized farmers, or became tenants with degrees of tenancy from full sharecroppers to full renters. It is important to stress that these are observable types or markers within the agricultural continuum. By definition, the farm types are generalized. A particular farm may be viewed along this continuum only through a comparison of all the criteria in relation to another farm. There was a great deal of mobility within this economic continuum—meaning that the individual farmer could change from one type to another based on good or bad fortune. Thus, these types do not represent a class system in any form, although they do represent different levels of economic and material wealth. While the chronology in Figure 65 is generalized—based on the historic research to date—the dates can perhaps be refined with further archaeological and historical research.

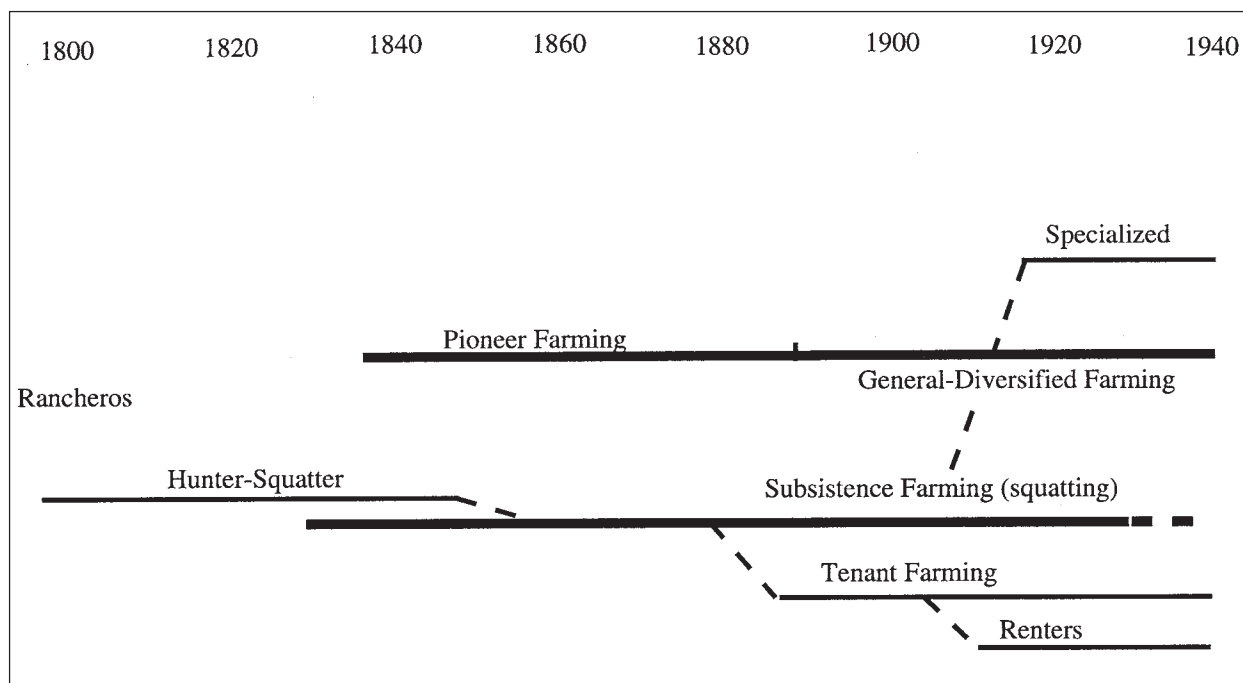


Figure 65 — Vernon Parish agricultural continuum.

### **Hunters-Squatters**

The development of Vernon Parish’s agricultural economy basically began with the hunter-squatter (from about 1800 to 1860 for the parish and from 1820 to 1870 within Fort Polk). Price and Price (1978:7) wrote that they were “highly mobile and subsistence was based on hunting, trapping, fishing, and trading with little emphasis, if any, on agriculture.” Many raised cattle and or pigs and, for this reason, were sometimes referred to as stockmen-farmers (Sitton 1995).

Essentially, these people were the vanguard of the Upland South migration into the region. They devoted the vast majority of their family subsistence effort to hunting and gathering, and most migrated west when the local game became scarce or neighbors settled too near. They raised only a few crops, such as corn, and did not participate in a market economy. They bartered for that which they could not get from the land. Probably many of these people migrated in and out of the region during the Neutral Ground period. Given the abundant forest resources in the region, this lifestyle may have persisted up to around the turn of the twentieth century, but more than likely most of

these people were either gone or had adapted to a more sedentary lifestyle by the time the Civil War began.

### **Subsistence Farmers**

Those hunters-squatters who did not move out of the area became subsistence farmers (from around 1830 to as late as 1940). As defined here, subsistence farmers were less mobile than the hunters-squatters, devoting more time to raising crops. They participated only marginally in the developing market economy and were, in the main, self-sufficient and highly independent. Subsistence farmers had an extremely flexible farm economy. They hunted, trapped, fished, bartered, grew a little cotton for clothing, let the pigs run in the woods, and grew corn for feeding both the family and their animals.

Subsistence farmers were among the first lumbermen in the area. During the late nineteenth century, they cut timber seasonally and sold it to mills downstream. More likely, they were hired by wealthier farmers to do this work. During the twentieth century, many sought temporary employment in the woods with the lumber companies.



Some subsistence farmers who had some economic success made the transition to pioneer and later general farming and eventually purchased their land free and clear. Small parcels of land would be cleared for farming, and, when depleted, more land would be cleared nearby. Other subsistence farmers were permanent squatters who lived their entire lives on unclaimed land, government land, or timberland. Like the hunter-squatter, the squatter would move if threatened by a landowner or if the land wore out, but usually would squat within a short distance. As we have seen in previous chapters, within Fort Polk the squatter lifestyle continued almost until the arrival of the U.S. Army. In fact, within Fort Polk, the majority of the farmers were subsistence farmers and squatters.

Again, the distinction between the hunter-squatter and the subsistence farmer (squatter) is subtle and largely dependent on the time frame. The hunter-squatter, the earliest subsistence farmer, relied much more on the forest for subsistence. As game grew scarce from exploitation, the early hunter-squatter could and did move farther west. As the land became settled, subsistence farmers had to become more flexible. They sometimes hired out their labor or turned to other means of procuring food or money. This led to a more sedentary life with a greater reliance on agriculture.

### ***Pioneer Farmers***

Pioneer farmers first arrived around the 1840s, and became more prevalent in the 1870s and 1880s. As defined here, pioneer farmers arrived with the full intention of farming as a full-time occupation, of raising a cash crop, and of creating and participating in a market economy. They settled along the Anacoco and Calcasieu and were likely or even strove to become community leaders. Though not absent in the Fort Polk region during the antebellum period, they more likely sought good farmland elsewhere in the parish in order to raise cash crops. Some arrived as squatters but successfully increased their landholdings and improved their economic means. When possible, they sought title to their lands from the government.

More likely these pioneers came with some wealth in hand and perhaps they also participated

in some land speculation. They purchased sections and quarter sections. They were entrepreneurs who, when possible, found other means of increasing their wealth besides through farming or hiring out as labor. So they built mills, established general stores, ferries, and hamlets, and generally provided the impetus for the formation of local government. They ran for local office when the parish was formed. They hired the squatter or subsistence farmer to help cut timber to sell downstream. Before the Civil War, they brought a few slaves into the region, but are in no way to be confused with plantation owners east of the parish. Pioneer farmers evolved into general farmers in the 1890s, the difference being that while pioneer farmers established the market economy, general farmers made it thrive. In short, pioneer farmers were those middle to upper class farmers of the mid-nineteenth century who created a local market, developed the sociopolitical community, and, in the 1870s, established a parish government.

### ***General Farmers***

General farming was established around 1890 and continued until around 1940. It is defined as a system with full participation in the local agricultural economy whereby a cash crop or a number of cash crops are raised on at least sixty acres of land, but usually many more. General farmers are essentially the same as pioneer farmers, however they settled during a later period, when the railroad came into the parish and opened the parish to the world. Along with their crops, they raised pigs and cattle for market. Like all farmers in Vernon Parish, they were flexible, adapting to a changing market and environment. Crop diversity was their watchword. Corn remained the staple, but other grains were grown as well as fruits.

General farmers owned their land and were full participants in a growing community. They took over the social leadership roles from the pioneer farmers, establishing churches, fraternal organizations, and schools. The growth and development of general farming and the parish's progress is best represented by the Census of Agriculture statistics listed in previous chapters. General farmers did not participate as laborers in the lumber boom,

although some sons may have sought jobs in the woods. Instead, they sold the fruit of their woodlots to a local mill. Few general farmers lived within Fort Polk because of the poor farmland.

### ***Specialized Farmers***

The general farmer was an opportunist. Starting around 1920 and definitely by the 1930s some began to specialize in cattle and sheep raising. Specialized farming (1920 to 1940) is distinguished from general farming only in the degree to which farm labor and space was devoted to a single cash crop or commodity. Even specialized farmers were generalists to a degree; however, most of their efforts went towards developing a single marketable commodity. In the 1930s, besides cattle and sheep farming, Vernon Parish farmers focused on cotton farming with mixed success. Also, after the mills closed down, they tried fruit (satsuma oranges, for example) and truck farming. Not much information is available regarding the success of these farms. They were either few or absent within Fort Polk. Specialized farmers owned land and fully participated in community development and in the market economy.

### ***Tenants***

Due to various complex reasons, tenancy (from circa 1870 to 1940) increased dramatically across the South after the Civil War. The term “tenant” represents a separate complex continuum of landless people (Orser and Holland 1984). Briefly, the term tenancy covers a range of economic levels from full sharecropper (who owned almost nothing in the way of farm equipment and had only labor to offer) to full renters (who owned everything they needed to farm except land). In the agricultural continuum discussed herein, tenancy in Vernon Parish is thought to have been the result of unsuccessful subsistence farming. However, some of those called tenant farmers by the census definition were actually fairly well-off general farmers who owned their own farm but also rented other land to grow additional crops. Also, during the 1930s, some people who squatted on abandoned timberland may have been counted by census takers as tenants, for some paid a nominal one

dollar per year rent. Therefore, tenancy is a complex issue and one that can be practically eliminated from further consideration when speaking of the Fort Polk region because parishwide there were few “tenant farmers” in the classic southern sense of a landless Black or White cotton sharecropper.

### ***Rural Residents***

Finally, there was a type of tenant or squatter called a “rural resident” (circa 1920 to 1940) in similar studies (Smith 1993:121–124). These people were probably present in the parish in the late 1920s and through the Great Depression, victims of the agricultural hard times. They lived in the country but hired out, doing part-time work when they could find it. They did not farm as an occupation, not even at the subsistence level, although they may have tended small gardens. Some found jobs in the smaller lumber companies that formed in the parish after the large companies moved out. Others, better off, worked in town when the roads were finally improved enough to make a daily commute possible.

Obviously, not all the citizens of Vernon Parish were farmers, although the vast majority of those who did not work in the mills were. There were teachers, preachers, elected officials, blacksmiths, businessmen, and professionals, such as lawyers. In the twentieth century, there were also gas station attendants and mechanics, and a long list of people who worked in local businesses. Some of these people also lived on farms and often did some farming. These professional classes add to the complexity of the economic patterns in the area.

### ***Other Groups***

Two additional farm types existed very early in Vernon Parish (circa 1780 to 1810), but had no real influence on the development of regional agriculture. It has been recognized that the first European agriculturalists may have been a Spanish or French family who settled there before the first American hunter-squatter. Their farm(s) are labeled *rancheros* in Figure 65 to indicate settlement under Spanish authority, but these farms should

not be confused with the *rancheros* typical of west Texas. More likely they were small farms with houses constructed of logs, like those built by the Anglo-Americans soon to come. There is very little likelihood that such a farm would have existed within the boundaries of the Main Fort, but there is a very slight possibility of this type of farm in the Peason Ridge and Horsehead areas.

The other farm type is the plantation. Plantations, in the classic sense as seen along the Red River, where scores of slaves labored to produce a single cash crop, such as sugarcane or cotton, are not typical of the Vernon Parish region either. Still, one source states that there was at least one attempt to start a plantation in the parish and there might have been a few more.

Ford (n.d.) reports that Dr. John Gill began a plantation on four hundred acres of land, containing a sawmill, brick kiln, gin, and gristmill, all operated by 150 slaves. This plantation was located just a mile east of the southeastern corner of Leesville. Gill was born in 1796 and died in 1864, putting the plantation within the antebellum period. It is possible that a small farm with a few slaves was indeed settled by Gill during this time, but it stretches credibility that Gill was operating a large plantation. Gill would have been among the larger slave owners in Rapides Parish at that time and been considered “extremely wealthy” (Stamp 1956:30). And what would the plantation have produced? Neither sugarcane nor cotton would have been commercially viable in the hogwallow lands. Both products, or any plantation product for that matter, would have had to have been shipped an incredible distance overland to market via the mere trails of the time. Thus, although Gill obviously was a successful farmer, locally gaining the title and status of a “plantation” owner, he could not have been operating a large plantation estate with 150 slaves.



Other authors have defined a whole range of traditional agricultural practices that can be included under the theme of Upland South economic adaptation. Upland South farmland often was initially

cleared using slash and burn practices to open small plots for growing corn, peas, cotton, tobacco, and potatoes (Otto 1985; Otto and Anderson 1982:92; Otto and Burns 1981:173). Between the rows of corn and on the borders of the fields, squash and gourds could be grown. Trees were girded with an ax and left to die. Eventually, they would be cut down. Furrows were plowed around the stumps. Fencing was placed around the fields to keep out animals, for the open-range system of allowing cattle and pigs to roam freely was a strongly held tradition across the South and, as has been demonstrated, in the parish and the Fort Polk region. In the early days, after a field was no longer productive, more land was cleared and the old field was abandoned. This is probably evidenced in the study of GLO maps in the region (Anderson et al. 1988). Burning the woodlands was common and is typical of Upland South agricultural practices. Farm activities were synchronized in an “annual round” to plant crops at different times, repair housing and equipment, and harvest products (Newton 1971).

Once determined to settle down, Upland South subsistence farmers eventually turned to generalized farming with less reliance on hunting, gathering, and fishing as part of their economy. They still were flexible with the types of crops grown, although corn and peas remained the main and most important crops. However, one characteristic of the Fort Polk area that has been stressed repeatedly is that squatting, and thus subsistence-based agricultural practices, survived far into the twentieth century.

#### **TIMBER AND NAVAL STORES INDUSTRY**

Cultural geographers like Newton (1974) have not recognized any industry-related traits associated with Upland South culture, which is predominately agriculturally based. However, the Upland South was covered with timber and the culture thrived in it (Figure 66). Thus, while the colonial naval stores industry developed in the eastern part of the United States and the timber industry of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries cut the great southern forests, the forest people of the Upland South adapted the industry to their eco-



*Figure 66 — A Vernon Parish mill town. The timber industry brought prosperity for some (courtesy Museum of West Louisiana).*

conomic strategy. Naval stores and timber represented a cottage industry to them—another method for earning more income within their flexible agricultural-hunting, forest-dwelling lifestyle.

Upland South people participated in the timber industry in several ways. The most common was to cut timber and float it downstream at seasonal flood times to sell it to a mill. This was common in Vernon Parish beginning after the Civil War. In some Upland South areas, tie-hacking of hardwoods for railroad ties was a common way to earn cash from the earliest days of the railroads until the 1940s (Smith 1993). Because the best railroad crossties came from hardwoods, this was not prevalent in Vernon Parish, but it was done (see Wright 1942). In addition, Upland South people turned to the industrial mills for temporary employment. They were also familiar with the naval stores industry, and in other areas of the Upland South, like North Carolina, turpentine, tar, and pitch production was a common way to supplement income (Clement et al. 1997). The naval stores industry came to Vernon Parish too late to become a cottage industry, nevertheless naval stores were important to the local economy.

## **SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PATTERNS**

Political, religious, and educational patterns, along with traditional folkways, have been grouped herein under social and political patterns. Newton (1974:152) confines Upland South social patterns to: (1) evangelical, atomistic Protestantism, coupled with antifederalism; (2) an open class system; (3) kin-structured settlement; and (4) a county-courthouse political system. (Remember, all important roads led to the courthouse.)

These patterns are clearly evident throughout the history presented in Chapters 2 through 6. Without doubt, the people who settled in Vernon Parish and Fort Polk ordered their lives as Newton described. Their religious orientation included evangelical Protestant denominations, dominated by Baptists with a moderate Methodist presence to practically the exclusion of other religious groups. Fundamental religious beliefs dominated their doctrine.

Antifederalism, meaning a distrust of centralized government, is especially evident in Vernon Parish stemming from the federal government's authority over local affairs. If one can stretch this



to include an anti-authoritarian attitude, then surely Vernon Parish fits this description. Beginning around the 1880s, the parish was a hotbed of agrarian populism, labor unrest, and anti-establishment political movements. In Vernon Parish, socialist experiments, like the Newllano movement, found sympathetic support. Furthermore, Vernon Parish folks strongly supported Huey Long, who was seen as the champion of the common man. Clearly, these people fit the Upland South model of fundamentalism and antifederalism quite well.

At Bay Springs, Mississippi, another area of the Upland South, Smith found that although the settlement was kin-based, people often defined their own community by church affiliation (Smith et al. 1982:213). In other words, people within geographic proximity but not necessarily kin may or may not define themselves as all being part of the same “community.” However, people who attended the same church considered themselves a community. This was different from in the more mountainous regions of the South, where valleys and rivers restricted travel and helped to define the community. At Bay Springs, topographic restraints were nonexistent. Creeks and hills were easily traversed. Given the similar rolling topography at Fort Polk, albeit with poorer roads, it is possible that church affiliation was very important in defining communities there also. There is evidence that schools also became important community identifiers, especially after the 1900s when high schools competed in various sports. These competitions helped define community loyalties and borders.

Exactly how church affiliation as a community identifier corresponded to kin-structured settlement, another community link, is not clearly understood. Surely, “the traditionalist places strong emphasis on knowing family genealogy” (Rafferty 1980:240), and who you were related to was as important as who you were. In Vernon Parish, settlement was indeed kin-structured. Certainly people in kin-based communities, like the Jeters at Fort Polk, all attended the same church.

Whatever the makeup of the community, be it church affiliation, kin, or physical proximity (neighbors), the community was extremely impor-

tant in Upland South culture and formed the basis for local societal organization. The community was a support network. While early hunters-squatters liked a lot of distance between them and their neighbors, later pioneer farmers linked together to complete a support network for both work and play. In fact, Sitton (1995:75) points out that the “modern dichotomy between work and play was alien to the social world of the communities along the Neches” in the Big Thicket across the Sabine. He provides a long list of community projects that traditionally included socializing along with hard work, including house raising, fence building, barn raising, nut gathering, spinning and quilting bees, salt and syrup making, woods burning, hog killing, corn shucking, and hunting. Crossroads in life—births, marriages, injuries, deaths—also were celebrated and mourned in community settings. These activities and community supports were common throughout the South and certainly pertained to the people of Vernon Parish.

Discussion of the region’s courthouse system seems unnecessary as this system was evident throughout the country. However, it should be noted that there is clear evidence in Vernon Parish of the conscious planning that went into the location of the courthouse and parish (county) seat. Clearly Leesville’s central location was a consideration, along with Dr. Smart’s influence. Furthermore, the development of the transportation system indicates that, as noted by Newton, most if not all important state-maintained roads in the parish led to Leesville. These roads were improved as Leesville became central and the roads became major parish arteries. Roads not leading to the parish seat languished.

With unreliable roads characteristic of Vernon Parish’s history, both community and market development were hindered. The solution was local central-place nodes that served local market, information, and communication needs, and again helped define communities at least by name. These nodes included sawmills and gristmills, general stores, gas stations, post offices (often combined with general stores), schools and public assembly areas (often combined), churches (and associated cemeteries). Within Fort Polk, known locales in-

clude hamlets (Six Mile, Front, Pringles, Whisky Chitto), schools (Whiskachitto, Six Mile), cemeteries (Zion Hill, Mill Creek, Holy Springs, Smith, Watson, and various numbered cemeteries), churches (Gravel Hill, Oak Grove, Johnsonville), and mills (Swain's mill near Six Mile).

At the turn of the century, Vernon Parish was transformed from a pioneer community to a more modern general-farm community. This modernization brought increased opportunities for social and political organization. Fraternal organizations became more prominent in social organization. Social groups included the Masons, Orange Lodge, and the Sons and Daughters of the Confederacy. Exactly what role these organizations played in the community and to what degree they influenced behavior is simply unknown. Certainly it has been demonstrated that prominent members of the community were members of these organizations early in the development of the parish. Later, timber organizations, like the Woodmen of the World, must have had a presence in the region as they still have lodges today. However, it is not known when these organizations were founded locally. They served the business and farm community by increasing the opportunity for business contacts and charitable programs.

One area of social interaction that is almost unknown, except to older Vernon Parish natives, are regional folkways and traditions. Almost nothing has been written specifically about parish folktales, music, social gatherings, and social organization. Upland South folkways and traditions are better known elsewhere. For instance, stories

and music from the Ozarks and the Appalachians are well covered in the literature and other media. During research for this project, only glimpses of regional traditions were seen. Most prominent were stories of famous brawls, like the Rawhide Fight, or infamous highwaymen, like John Murrel. No doubt the region is rich in folktales and legends, and this would be a fruitful area of research for a future historian.

### **A FINAL STATEMENT**

This book began with an assertion that the pineland landscape influenced Vernon Parish's culture and history even as the culture that settled there modified and impacted the landscape. Across Vernon Parish and Fort Polk grew pine as thick and tall as any in North America. It was a landscape to be avoided by some. But it drew an independent-minded, self-sustaining people who knew how to extract the forest's abundant natural resources and grub up a few crops from its infertile hogwallow soils. The pines brought not only the Upland South farmer but also land speculators and timber barons. In less than thirty years the landscape was transformed. While we look back and mourn the devastation, we must temper our lament with the realization that much of this timber found its way into the comfortable homes we may still own and cherish today. It is hoped that this history of Vernon Parish and Fort Polk helps demonstrate the important role that the Vernon Parish pineland and its people played in our American story.



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## APPENDIX — VERNON PARISH OFFICIALS

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### *Representatives from Vernon Parish*

J. I. Kirk	1882–1886
John Franklin	1886–1893
John W. Williams	1893–1898
C. K. Oaks	1898–1900
M. A. Cavanaugh	1900–1906
W. B. Williamson	1906–1912
Isaac Boyd	1912–1916
S. S. McCullough	1916–1917
Roland Smith	1917–1921
F. O. Bolgino	1921–1923
D. H. Turner	1923–1925
S. S. McCullough	1925–1929
A. C. Williams	1929–1933
J. J. Beason	1933–1940
R. S. Copeland	1940–1945

### *Judges Serving in Vernon Parish*

J. Backman Lee	1900–1908
Don E. Sorrell	1908–1912
James G. Palmer	1912–1916
John R. Boone	1916–1924
Hal A. Burgess	1924–1928
John B. Hill	1928–1936
William H. Ponder	1936–1950
Edwin R. Frasier	1937–1950

### *Clerks of Court for Vernon Parish*

I. A. Winfrey	1871–1888
W. H. Smart	1888–1896
H. L. Sanders	1896–1900
I. O. Winfree	1900–1904
D. F. Craft	1904–1912
J. J. Hicks	1912–1920
A. G. Winfree	1920–1928
D. F. Turner	1928–1932
T. J. Bullock	1932–1944
A. J. Hadnot	1944–1956

### *District Attorneys in Vernon Parish*

Daniel C. Scarborough	1898–1900
James G. Palmer	1900–1908
James G. Palmer	1908–1916
William Lyles	1916–1920
John B. Hill	1920–1924
John B. Hill	1924–1932
A. V. Cavanaugh	1932–1940
Edwin M. Frasier	1940–1947

### *Sheriffs in Vernon Parish*

John I. Kirk	1871–1874
Miles Parker	1874–1876
W. H. Moore	1876–1880
Cullin Conley	1880–1887
Parish Coronor [ <i>sic</i> ]	1887–1888
Lee M. Alpine*	1888–1896
Thomas J. Davis	1896–1908
Thomas C. Wingate	1908–1912
B. H. Lyons	1912–1916
Dr. T. P. Jones	1916–1920
D. T. Turner	1920–1934
Dr. Thomas B. Ward	1934–1936
Dr. W. E. Reed	1936–1940
Thomas J. Bullock	1940–1944

### *Mayors of the Town of Leesville*

R. Lee Richardson	1900–1902
Dr. W. R. Lee	1902–1904
Thomas W. Wintle	1904–1906
H. T. Booker	1906–1910
T. W. Harris	1910–1912
Dr. F. C. Watson	1912–1916
Isaac Boyd	1916–1919
Thomas J. Davis	1919–1922
O. E. Morris	1922–1928
L. D. Woosley	1928–1930
O. E. Morris	1930–1934
John W. King	1934–1942
O. E. Morris	1942–1950

\* The correct spelling is probably “McAlpin,” but the name is spelled with an “e” on the original document.

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Some future, more talented historian or archaeologist will undoubtedly want to know where and how I obtained the sources used in this history. The short answer is through the assistance of a great number of very generous and kind people.

Overall, the research was conducted as an intensive document search at Louisiana and national archives, libraries, museums, agencies, and other historical document repositories. This effort was ongoing throughout the project, with four field visits to Louisiana libraries and archives. Prior to these field trips, I had visited Fort Polk twice during 1993–1994 while completing projects involving the archaeological survey and revision of the Fort Polk and Joint Readiness Training Center's (JRTC) Historic Preservation Plan. During these trips, I had an opportunity to become familiar with the area and its resources.

Three formal searches were conducted in 1995 from February 6 to 10, May 1 to 5, and July 17 to 21. The express goal of the research was to gather documents pertaining to Fort Polk and the JRTC's pre-installation history. The first trip included visits to local Fort Polk and Leesville repositories and others in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. The second involved research at Northwestern Louisiana State University, Rapides Parish repositories, and another visit to the Leesville area. The final consisted of a revisit to the Baton Rouge Archives.

A short one-day visit was also made to the National Archives in Washington, D.C., to answer a very specific research question. Finally, in September 1997, I returned to western Louisiana to obtain photographs of the region. The following locations were visited, some several times.

- Conservation Branch, Directorate of Engineering and Housing, Environmental and Natural Resources Management Division, Fort Polk/JRTC
- Fort Polk Museum
- Fort Polk Allen Library
- Fort Polk, Real Property Offices
- Vernon Parish Library, Leesville
- Vernon Parish Courthouse, Leesville (assessor's office and clerk of court)
- Museum of West Louisiana, Leesville
- United States Forest Service Branch Office, New Llano, Louisiana
- Rapides Parish Library, Alexandria
- Rapides Parish Courthouse, Alexandria
- Sabine Parish Library, Many, Louisiana
- Watson Library, Northwestern State University, Natchitoches
- Cammie G. Henry Research Center, Northwestern State University Library, Natchitoches
- Louisiana State Library, Baton Rouge
- State Land Office, Baton Rouge
- Middleton Library, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge
- Hill Memorial Library, Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge
- Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge
- Division of Archaeology, Louisiana State Historic Preservation Office, Baton Rouge
- Thomas Cooper Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia



- South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia
- South Carolina State Library, Columbia
- National Archives, Main Branch, Washington
- National Archives, College Park Branch, College Park, Maryland

Archival, library, and other research was directed toward discovery of information about the Fort Polk region using, as a general guide, the following key search words and phrases:

- *Louisiana, Vernon Parish, Western Louisiana:* history, settlement, exploration, vegetation, geology, rivers (Whiskey Chitto, Calcasieu), statistics, industry, villages, churches, schools, travel, archaeology, railroads, roads, forests, culture, geography, newspapers, maps, historic photographs, gazetteers, agriculture, settlers and pioneers, Nolan's Trace and Philip Nolan, historic sites, Civil War, turpentine, pine, naval stores, CCC, Forest Service, WPA, Fort Polk, settlement patterns, Vernon Parish records (census, deeds, abstracts, plats, church records, school records, court records), Kisatchie Forest, Vernon Parish genealogy, specific villages of: Leesville, New Llano, Fullerton (and Lumber Company), Neame, Kurthwood, Pitkin, Pickering, Cravens, Hicks, Hineston, Slagle, Kisatchie.
- *Rapides, Natchitoches, Sabine Parishes:* history, settlement, exploration, vegetation, geology, rivers (Sabine, Rio Hondo), statistics, industry, villages, churches, schools,

travel, archaeology, railroads, roads, forests, culture, geography, newspapers, maps, historic photographs, gazetteers, agriculture, settlers and pioneers, Philip Nolan, El Camino Real, historic sites, Civil War, CCC, Forest Service, WPA, Fort Polk, settlement patterns, Rapides, Natchitoches, and Sabine Parish records (census, deeds, abstracts, plats, church records, school records, court records).

Although there were four field efforts, archival research continued concurrently with writing until the final draft was submitted. Using the key words just mentioned, the Internet was extensively used to search library catalogs across the nation, including those of the Library of Congress, University of Chicago, and several Texas universities. As these topics were researched, previously unknown sources became apparent and led to other topics and directions. Potential sources of information were, where possible, obtained through interlibrary loan. Research within a particular topic was deemed complete when no new major sources were discovered, or where it was felt that further efforts would produce diminishing returns. For instance, the local newspapers were only sampled. No doubt some useful information would have turned up had they been reviewed issue by issue from their origins in the late nineteenth century until 1940. However, this task could not be completed within the constraints of the contract's time frame. (Note that Wise [1971] had culled articles from local newspapers and compiled them into his history of Vernon Parish entitled *Tall Pines*. His work was a valuable resource for this book.) Although it is always possible to miss a document, it is believed that the majority of critical documentary sources have been found.



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