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Holding Back the Waters: Land Development and the Origins of Levees on the Mississippi, 1720-1845.

Jeffrey Alan Owens

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HOLDING BACK THE WATERS: LAND DEVELOPMENT
AND THE ORIGINS OF
LEVEES ON THE MISSISSIPPI, 1720-1845

VOLUME I

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of History

by

Jeffrey Alan Owens
B.F.A., North Texas State University, 1983
M.A., The University of Texas at Tyler, 1990
May, 1999
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## VOLUME I

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acknowledgements</th>
<th>iii</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables</td>
<td>xiv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>xv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>xvi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Chapter One

- Levees in French Louisiana, 1720-1762: The Origins of Levee-Building Communities on the Mississippi  
  14

### Chapter Two

- Levees in Spanish Louisiana, 1763-1803: Expansion and Enforcement  
  140

### Chapter Three

- New Crops, New Governments, New Laws: Louisiana Levees, 1795-1820, with a Look at Local Administration in the Parish of St. John the Baptist  
  233

## VOLUME II

### Chapter Four

- Levees as Physical Objects and the Genesis of "American" Levee-Building Communities, Particularly Flood Control in Concordia Parish, Prior to 1820  
  319

### Chapter Five

- The Maturing Levee System: Louisiana's Levee Laws of 1816 and 1829  
  403

### Chapter Six

- Land Without Levees on the Middle Mississippi: Hunters Versus Developers in the Arkansas Delta, Before the War of 1812  
  513

### Chapter Seven

- Preconditions for Levee Expansion: The Migration of Planters to Chicot County, Arkansas, and the Flood of 1840  
  591

## VOLUME III

### Chapter Eight

- The Zenith of Local Levee Systems: Levee Building in Chicot County, Arkansas, 1841-1850  
  707

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conclusion</th>
<th>823</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Afterword</td>
<td>841</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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### LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1.</td>
<td>HOUSEHOLD SLAVEHOLDINGS IN THE LOUISIANA RIVER PARISHES, 1810</td>
<td>279</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1.</td>
<td>CONCORDIA'S POPULATION, 1810-1830</td>
<td>360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.</td>
<td>POPULATION TRENDS IN CONCORDIA PARISH, LA.</td>
<td>361</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3.</td>
<td>13 LARGEST SLAVEHOLDINGS OF CONCORDIA PARISH, 1810 &amp; 1830</td>
<td>362</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4.</td>
<td>CONCORDIA PLANTERS, WITH TWENTY OR MORE SLAVES</td>
<td>365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5.</td>
<td>COMPOSITION OF CONCORDIA PARISH POLICE JURY, AUGUST 1813</td>
<td>376</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6.</td>
<td>LANDOWNERS IN THE &quot;O&quot; DISTRICT, CONCORDIA PARISH, OBLIGED TO RAISE $1,272.60 FOR LEVEE BUILDING ON PUBLIC LAND</td>
<td>386</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7.</td>
<td>COTTON PRICE DATA FROM THE CORRESPONDENCE OF WILLIAM KENNER &amp; CO., OF NEW ORLEANS, TO STEPHEN AND JOHN MINOR, OF NATCHEZ AND CONCORDIA, 1809 TO 1818</td>
<td>390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1.</td>
<td>SLAVEHOLDINGS IN CHICOT COUNTY, ARKANSAS, 1830-1840</td>
<td>632</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2.</td>
<td>SOME NON-RESIDENT SPECULATORS IN CHICOT COUNTY LANDS, 1840</td>
<td>647</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3.</td>
<td>CHICOT COUNTY OVERSEERS AS HOUSEHOLD HEADS, 1840</td>
<td>662</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.1.</td>
<td>SLAVEOWNING PATTERNS IN THE ARKANSAS DELTA, 1840</td>
<td>713</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2.</td>
<td>CHICOT COUNTY PROPRIETORS WHO RECEIVED LEVEE ORDERS</td>
<td>759</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3.</td>
<td>LEVEE CONTRACTORS OF CHICOT COUNTY, ARKANSAS, 1841-44</td>
<td>772</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF FIGURES

1.1. THE DRAINAGE BASIN OF THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER ............................................... 15
1.2. NEW ORLEANS IN 1722, BASED ON A SKETCH BY DUMONT DE MONTIGNY, SHOWING THE FIRST LEVEE ON THE MISSISSIPPI ......................................................... 16
2.1. MISSISSIPPI RIVER SETTLEMENTS OF COLONIAL LOWER LOUISIANA ................................. 141
3.1. THE PARISHES OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST AND ST. CHARLES, SHOWING BONNET CARRE AND THE EFFECTS OF A CREVASSE, BY MEANS OF CROP DATA FROM 1849-50, AFTER AN OVERFLOW ........................................... 234
4.1. CONCORDIA PARISH IN 1845, EXTRACTED FROM JOHN LA TOURETTE'S REFERENCE MAP OF THE STATE OF LOUISIANA (NEW ORLEANS, 1845) WITH ITS LEADING PLANTERS OF 1850 AND THEIR SLAVEHOLDINGS ............................................. 320
5.1. HOUSEHOLD AND PLANTATION STATISTICS FOR ALLUVIAL PARISHES OF LOUISIANA, 1820; SHOWING THE NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDS AND PLANTERS (MEN WITH TWENTY OR MORE HANDS IN AGRICULTURE); OR, OF PLANTATIONS (HOUSEHOLDS WITH TWENTY OR MORE SLAVES, WHERE THE NUMBER ENGAGED IN AGRICULTURE WAS UNAVAILABLE) ............................................. 404
7.1. STATE TAXES COLLECTED IN 1840 FROM ARKANSAS COUNTIES, ON THE BASIS OF PROPERTY ASSESSED IN 1839; AS EXPENSIVE, EFFICIENT PLOW ANIMALS, MULES ARE MORE NUMEROUS IN AREAS WITH WIDE FIELDS, VALUABLE CROPS, AND COMMERCIAL TRANSPORT ............................................. 592
8.1. COTTON PRODUCTION IN ARKANSAS IN 1850, BY COUNTIES ............................................. 708
8.2. CHICOT COUNTY, ARKANSAS, SHOWING ITS WATERWAYS, ROADS, AND PLANTATIONS AS THEY EXISTED AROUND 1860 ............................................. 709
ABSTRACT

Man's efforts to control flooding on the Mississippi began about 280 years ago, but the first 130 years has been neglected in scholarly literature. In spite of abundant primary sources, most histories of flood control on the Mississippi revolve around hydraulic engineering and the contributions of state and federal levee bureaucracies—factors which had almost no impact on the creation of the levee system. Engineers did install the first levee at New Orleans and levees on their own plantations in the 1720s, but the extension of the levee line thereafter was almost entirely the work of private land developers supervised at the local level, first by commandants, then by parish and county governments.

The soil of the floodplain accumulated over centuries as sediment deposited by overflows. Its fertility laid the basis for plantation agriculture, with the Mississippi as a means of transport, but overflows destroyed farmers' improvements. Native American "hunting farmers" who moved in concert with overflows were able to coexist with flooding, but did not conceive of land as property. When European kings began to convert swampland into property by means of grants, the prevention of flooding through levees
was made a condition of title. Persons who wanted swampland as property built levees to acquire it. People who did not value land, or lacked the means to levee it, moved on and did not become part of the levee-building community. Since levees must be continuous to be effective, developers of the riverside had to submit to regimentation, coercion, and continuous oversight. Liberty was tempered by the demands of the environment.

The records of the era 1720 to 1845 tell a story of levee history quite different from that of the engineers' and post-bellum levee bureaucracies. Sources which reveal the levees' origins are various: letters of commandants, parish police jury and county board of police minutes, state levee laws for local bodies, newspaper accounts of floods, travel journals, tax and census records, and private papers. They tell of a vibrant community of land developers who domesticated the swamps with levees in the interest of survival and prosperity.
INTRODUCTION

The history of the levees is, in the broadest sense, the history of people who built and used them, and of the environment they inhabited. Rivers like the Mississippi which overflow their banks leave sedimentary deposits of great fertility in the floodplain. Farmers prize the alluvial soil, but continuing overflows endanger crops and improvements. Hence, tension exists between the source of the resource and its value for agricultural purposes. Native Americans occupied the Mississippi's banks without controlling its overflows, but they did not conceive of the floodplain as property. They hunted in the swamp, gathered native plants and animals, and farmed on natural alluvial ridges. Since their goods as "hunting farmers" were portable rather than fixed, they moved as necessary to escape flood damage. However, beginning with the first levee built on the Mississippi in 1720, people of European and African descent reshaped the swamps by sealing the river's channel from its floodplain in the interest of real estate development. In the European value system, swampland became a commodity and a personal possession, worthy of improvement and protection in and of itself.
Levee building on the Mississippi began shortly after the founding of New Orleans, when the Company of the West employed military engineers to supervise levee construction at its new company town. Soon, the king of France bestowed swampland on farmers outside the city and ordered grantees to build levees as a condition of title. Settlers who experienced floods learned that levee building was not simply a legal requirement, but an environmental imperative. Without levees, European colonists could not furnish lasting protection for their own forms of property: real estate, domestic livestock, and field crops.

The colonial property system and manner of land use contrasted strongly with that of the Native American hunters, and so did their political concepts. As land developers, rather than users of portable resources, colonial levee builders soon realized that social regimentation and continuous governmental oversight were necessary to keep a line of artificial "river-fences" intact. They relied on legal authority to coerce fellow grantees into compliance with levee regulations; otherwise, all would flood. Thus, while landless "hunting farmers" inhabited swampland without levees and largely free from governmental interference, landowning farmers built levees, cleared land, and drained it under the immediate supervision of military commandants who acted under royal authority. Both groups occupied the same landscape, but with different objectives. One became a levee-building
community; the other did not. The outcome of this social and geographic evolution gives evidence against the concept of environmental determinism. Conditions in the swamp did influence people and their culture, but (within their means) humans had a choice in the way they engaged wetlands resources. Values within the mind responded to the "natural" swamp and made a judgment about what was environmentally tolerable and what was not. Levee builders refused to countenance rhythms of seasonal overflow and bent their collective resources to the river's subjugation. Slaves, as agents of the masters, participated in the change and supplied much of the labor.

Since slaveowning proprietors held the largest labor forces to effect improvements for leveed agriculture, they became the prime developers of the levee-building community. Poor men with little labor had fewer opportunities to profitably develop the swamp, but virtually all swamp farmers participated in the market economy to some degree (as did hunters, but with different goods). For farmers, the pace of land development moved in concert with markets for agrarian products. Therefore, resources for swamp planting varied in price with the value of, and demand for, staples grown on leveed land. When markets permitted plantation expansion, the geographic extent of the levees spread to new frontiers in unison with demands for new land, and private investment supplied levees as "public works" built through private labor. Government
supervision kept levee-building communities "up to code," meanwhile expelling non-conformists and those who lacked the means to participate in construction and upkeep. Therefore, a levee-building community is defined as a group of people who had adequate means to build levees and the will to do so as a group, independent of outside aid, while submitting to legal, bureaucratic structures for coercion and oversight. These communities expanded over time to include larger areas, populations, and powers.

Historians of Mississippi River flood control divide levee building into three periods according to which level of government was most involved. The first phase, called the era of local efforts, extended from the founding of New Orleans until the passage of Congressional Swamp Land Acts in 1849 and 1850. The second era, that of state-sponsored levees, began with Swamp Land Act bureaucracies under state auspices and concluded with the creation of a national Mississippi River Commission in 1879. The last phase, that of national levees, gained momentum through the passage of federal Flood Control Acts in 1917 and 1928 which placed the United States Army Corps of Engineers in charge of levee construction. Writers have dealt extensively with the second and third phases of Mississippi River flood control, but the first phase, the formative era of levee-building communities, has never been written about in a systematic way. It is the object of the present study.¹
Chapter One covers levees in French Louisiana, during which time the city levee at New Orleans furnished a prototype of flood control technology for land developers who settled the "Indigo" and "German" Coasts, near the city, as well as for waterfront proprietors at Pointe Coupee. After 1762, Spain controlled Louisiana and granted land to Acadians on the condition that they build household levees, thereby essentially completing the levee line to Pointe Coupee on the west bank and Baton Rouge on the east bank. Spanish levees are the topic of Chapter Two, in which British West Florida also joins the Spanish levee system, through conquest, in 1779-83. As seen in Chapter Three, the purchase of Louisiana by the United States in 1803 did not immediately change the governance or extent of Louisiana's levees. Most levee builders were still French-speaking creoles who lived on colonial grants. Chapter Three's discussion of local levee administration in the creole-German-Acadian parish of St. John the Baptist shows how colonial grantees adapted to new forms of government in the American regime within a long-established community. The critical factor for further expansion, into non-leveed regions north of Red River, lay in the United States' survival of the War of 1812, which guaranteed its peaceable possession of the Mississippi Valley at the same time that world demands for cotton and sugar were drawing new levee builders to the swamps. Novice swamp planters who came to the riverside after the Battle of New Orleans
seldom spoke French, but needed guidance in the execution of levee duties. Chapter Four describes the founding of a purely "American" levee building community north of Red River in the parish of Concordia. By 1816, the state of Louisiana ventured to commit the levee-building community's knowledge of flood control to paper, through a definition of correct levee practices. Chapter Five examines the maturing levee system, as evidenced through Louisiana's state levee laws of 1816 and 1829. In spite of state laws, however, levee administration continued as the task of individual proprietors and local governments. Therefore, particular attention is paid to local administration. Chapters Six through Eight reveal the process of community formation beginning anew in the Delta of Arkansas, with a detailed examination of the absence of land development in land without levees, the economic factors which stimulated a new swamp migration, and the founding of a new, local levee system in the plantation county of Chicot.

Throughout the dissertation, the relationship between private interests and public works is stressed because levees did not originate as a feat of engineering, but as an answer to the needs of individuals to protect their investments. As a matter of fact, in landed agricultural swamp societies, levee protection formed the very basis for human life. Thus, the most notable thing about the early levees on the Mississippi was not necessarily their technical excellence, but the fact that diverse communities
could construct and maintain hundreds of miles of embankments in an active floodplain, household by household, at a time when earth-moving equipment, professional aid, and public funding were virtually unavailable. As alluvial frontiersmen, these swamp planters and levee-builders were practical people doing practical things in an amazing economic landscape. Their willingness and ability to build levees, and their command of slave labor to make the reclaimed swampland profitable, allowed them to prosper, even in so adverse an environment.

As to genre, "Holding Back the Waters" is difficult to classify. Its emphasis on household levees built by non-professionals sets it apart from institutional histories which revolve around the contributions of mid-nineteenth-century, and later, hydraulic engineers and levee-building government bureaucracies. As a work of environmental history and historical geography, it resembles the writings of social historians who have described land development through water management in the American Southeast and West, as well as similar studies from other countries, such as England, Burma, China, and Haiti. Environmental history, by definition, shows relationships between forms of land use and environmental impact. While that is not the primary focus of this study, much can be learned from the environmental results of the levee builders' agenda. Some new studies of wetlands agriculture, particularly those that recount the history of rice cultivation in the
South Carolina and Georgia Low Country, such as Peter Coclanis's *The Shadow of a Dream*, give explicit attention to the contributions of African-Americans in the technology of swamp reclamation. There, the slaves' experience with seasonally regulated overflows in African rice culture equipped them to generate methods of water management as well as supplying the labor. Attempts were made to discover similar contributions in Mississippi Valley flood control, but it appears that, however central their labor was to the completion of the works, slaves did not design the levee system. French military engineers built the prototypical levee at New Orleans in the 1720s, and subsequent settlers incorporated improvements over time through trial and error. White Acadians and refugees from Saint Domingue (including a few slaves) knew of levees in their native lands, but by the time of their arrival, levees on the Mississippi had already been installed for between fifty and eighty years.

"Holding Back the Waters" more directly relates to the new frontier history of the United States which emphasizes community development through socio-economic, political, and environmental transformation. Beginning with Frederick Jackson Turner, historians of the American frontier have tried to determine whether or not it actually provided a means for upward mobility. Ironically, the royal levee system, administered through the swampland grant policies of France and Spain, gave landless, free settlers the
ability to become landowners through the performance of levee and road duties, while the government of the United States discontinued the policy. The Louisiana Purchase ended most colonial restrictions in regard to religion, character tests, and public works, but it also removed the opportunity for free persons to acquire land simply through labor on levees and roads. When flooding demonstrated the absolute necessity of levees in the Louisiana Purchase floodplains, the United States required the same public works as the colonial regimes, but without reinstating the same incentives for new proprietors. Thus, if the agricultural economics of swampland reclamation had not been so favorable to early nineteenth-century slaveowners who grew plantation crops on the Delta land, levee building under the terms of the United States would not have sustained its value in the eyes of the riparian community. The value of the crops gave value to the land and slaves, and, simultaneously, to the levees.

ENDNOTES

1Robert Wilmot Harrison, Alluvial Empire: A Study of State and Local Efforts Toward Land Development in the Alluvial Valley of the Lower Mississippi River (n.p.: Delta Fund, in cooperation with Economic Research Service, U. S. Department of Agriculture, 1961), 67. Emancipation caused a great transformation in levee building, arguably more significant than the founding of the Mississippi River Commission in marking a new era of flood control. Basic references by Harrison include: "Levee Building in Mississippi Before the Civil War," Journal of Mississippi History 7 (April 1950); with W. M. Kollmorgen, "Land Reclamation in Arkansas under the Swamp Land Grant of 1850," Arkansas Historical Quarterly 6 (Winter 1947): 369-418; Swampland Reclamation in Louisiana, 1849-1879 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University and Bureau of Agricultural Economics, 1951); Levee Districts and Levee Building in Mississippi: A

Water management histories of the United States' West include: Michael C. Meyer, Water in the Hispanic Southwest: A Social and Legal History, 1550-1850 (Tuscon: University of Arizona Press, 1984); Donald J. Pisani, From the Family Farm to Agri-business: The Irrigation Crusade in California and the West, 1850-1931 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); Margaret Zonlight, Land, Water and Settlement
in Kern County, California, 1850-1890 (New York: Arno Press, 1979); W. H. Irwin, Augusta Bixler Farms: A California Delta Farm from Reclamation to the Fourth Generation of Owners (Brookdale, Cal.: n.p., 1973); and James B. Smallwood, Jr., ed. Water in the West (Manhattan, Kn.: Sunflower University Press, 1983). Denizens of Western areas in the latter nineteenth century would not have considered the level of coercion and regimentation experienced by levee builders to be oppressive or strange, for they all depended on continuous public works, whether levees, railroads, or irrigation networks. However, for persons accustomed to the relative freedom from public works which was typical of the colonial and antebellum South, levee builders' lives were quite restricted.


Classic environmental histories which show how the genre is practiced include: William Cronon, Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983); Donald Worster, Rivers of


CHAPTER ONE

LEVEES IN FRENCH LOUISIANA, 1720-1762: THE ORIGINS OF LEVEE-BUILDING COMMUNITIES ON THE MISSISSIPPI

Lower Louisiana... is only an earth accumulated by ooze. (Le Page du Pratz, 1754)

The first object of the settler has always been to secure himself from inundation. The history of the levees is, therefore, intimately connected with that of the settlement of the country. (Humphreys and Abbot, 1861)

Without the land, there would be no levees. Without the levees, there would be no land. (Dr. Cooke, Stoneville, Miss., 1993)

The story of levee building on the Mississippi River began with the French in colonial Louisiana. They claimed Louisiana in 1682, settled the Mississippi in 1718, and controlled the colony until 1763. Levee building commenced at New Orleans in 1720, and the first levee protected the town. Then, as settlement spread on the riverbanks beyond New Orleans, levees extended into the countryside. The French set the basic pattern of levee building which subsequent regimes followed well into the nineteenth century.

Native Americans had lived in the floodplain of the Mississippi for centuries without attempting to control the river, but settlers of European origin devised levees as tools for permanent change. With levees, Europeans altered the environment and domesticated the swamp; they formed a
FIGURE 1.1
THE DRAINAGE BASIN OF THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER

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FIGURE 1.2

NEW ORLEANS IN 1722, BASED ON A SKETCH BY DUMONT DE MONTIGNY, SHOWING THE FIRST LEVEE ON THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER

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habitat suitable for urban life and commercial farming. For them, levees and land development were inseparable.

"Holding back the waters" by means of levees required cooperation between neighbors. It would do no good to build a levee if the land next door was not similarly protected. Generally speaking, levee building was a public work achieved through private labor. This being true, the need for a continuous levee line meant that settlers had a choice to make. If they chose to be proprietors on the Mississippi, they must accept the necessity of levee building and submit to regulations for control. Therefore, the necessity for levees led to the creation of levee-building communities. These social groups consisted of committed people with the will, ability, and incentive to build levees. Communities evolved over time, according to economic opportunities, and the task of levee building became ever more complex. In the French period, levees arose on the Mississippi in their simplest form, yet became essential components of Louisiana's most important commercial activities.

The word "levee" comes from the French verb lever, meaning to lift or raise. In military terminology, the word described embankments or causeways which were raised above the natural surface of the ground. Engineers in the French army placed "leved" structures, such as ramparts, bastions, moles, and causeys, at the perimeter of defense installations in order to withstand siege attacks. The
word "levee" could also refer to getting up in the morning, or even to the sunrise. At Versailles, the Sun King, Louis XIV, made social levees fashionable. Within his household, 350 nobles served in the Department of the Bedchamber at the daily levee—his rising from bed.2

Crowned heads inspired awe at their "levees," but people in French New Orleans paid as much attention to the Mississippi River as courtiers did to the monarch in France. Beyond the levee flowed the waterway personified as "Old Man River," the "Father of Waters," the "Mighty Mississippi. Tracing its main channel up the Missouri, the Mississippi measures approximately four thousand miles in length. With its tributaries, it drains about one-and-a-quarter million square miles in what are now thirty one of the United States and two Canadian provinces. The drainage basin contains enough acreage to cover France six times over. At its western edge, it extends to the border between Idaho and Montana. On the east, the basin reaches to western New York. This enormous drainage region—41 percent of the land surface of the continental United States—can be subdivided into six river systems: the Upper Mississippi, Missouri, Ohio, Arkansas/White, Red/Ouachita, and Lower Mississippi. Altogether, the systems contain 45 navigable rivers which access 15,000 miles of riverbank. Waters from all the upper five pass into the Lower Mississippi, which swells in the spring with melted snow, rainwater, and eroded topsoil.3
In the period of French colonial settlement, farmers on the Mississippi concentrated their efforts on the district between the Gulf of Mexico and Pointe Coupee, below the mouth of Red River. This region laid entirely within the Lower Mississippi system, and most of these settlers' improvements sat directly upon the river's banks. The swampy terrain of the surrounding floodplain precluded the construction of roads in the interior, and military necessity demanded that colonists be able to reach each other. Since water travel provided the only practical means of communication, officials of French Louisiana often restricted settlement to the banks of the Mississippi through the colony's land laws.

Riverfront settlement afforded many advantages. The problem was that in its natural state the Lower Mississippi often overflowed its banks and spread across a wide, alluvial floodplain. In fact, about 38,700 square miles of French Louisiana, contiguous to the Mississippi and south of what is now Cape Girardeau, Missouri, could overflow when the river rose each spring. This represented the same land area as the combined provinces of Normandy, Brittany, Burgundy, Alsace, and Artois--regions of France that had been coveted and fought over for centuries.

The first recorded glimpses of the Mississippi in historic literature indicate the scale of flooding that might occur. The Spanish explorer Hernando de Soto first sighted the Mississippi on May 8, 1541. His men said that
while they journeyed near the Mississippi in March of 1543, the river overflowed its banks and began to pour into the Native Americans' cultivated fields. On Palm Sunday, while Spaniards paraded through the streets of Aminoya (a Native American town), water started to wash through the city gates. Within three days, one could travel its streets by canoe. At the flood's peak, water overspread the land for a width of sixty miles, leaving nothing visible in some spots but the tops of tall trees. Yet, by the end of May, the water had receded into its banks.6

Native Americans in the valley knew the habits of the Mississippi. Even though flood heights varied from year to year according to rainfall and temperatures in the various drainage basins, they arranged to accommodate to the flooding. For example, they sometimes raised mounds, with a temple and chief's house upon them, which were used as a refuge during flooding. It was also typical for Native Americans on the Lower Mississippi to make seasonal migrations from the floodplains to nearby hills. In the floodplain, Native American women tended vegetables in plots above normal overflow, while men hunted the swamps which abounded in game. Mounds and natural ridgelands preserved wildlife by leaving areas for animals to rest and feed upon, but also allowed them to be slaughtered when they congregated on high ground during overflows. When cultivated, the ridges produced fine crops of corn, pumpkins, squash, beans, and tobacco.7
Clearly the floodplain sufficed for a people not numerous who were content to live under prevailing conditions. Native Americans in the floodplain of the Mississippi did not endeavor to prepare large fields for cash crop agriculture, nor did they try to prevent overflows with levees. On the other hand, many settlers of European origin were not attracted to a subsistence lifestyle, nor would their royal sponsors support it.

Spanish conquistadors had no interest in founding an agricultural settlement on the Mississippi. Therefore, after De Soto, they avoided the Valley because it lacked portable wealth. Meanwhile, the French developed an interest tied chiefly to a traffic in furs with Native American tribes. Jacques Cartier claimed the St. Lawrence River for France in 1534, and Samuel de Champlain occupied its banks in 1608. Canada, or "New France," soon became a source of pelts for French hatters and furriers. When trapping depleted the eastern supply, Frenchmen moved west where Native Americans told them about the Mississippi as a source for furs. Explorers Marquette and Joliet located the Mississippi in 1673 and learned that it led to the Caribbean where France owned prosperous agricultural islands, such as Martinique, Guadaloupe, and St. Domingue.

The ambitious Sieur de La Salle, a Canadian fur trader, convinced the French Court to make a formal claim to the Mississippi. Possession would link Canada to the Caribbean, exclude competitors from the fur trade, and give
France a base in the western Caribbean. Therefore, La Salle claimed the Mississippi and its drainage basin for Louis XIV in 1682. A colonization effort for "Louisiana" landed in 1699 under Pierre Le Moyne, Sieur d'Iberville, who founded military posts on the Gulf. Iberville remained near coastal harbors to obtain supplies from France, but beachfront settlements at Biloxi, Mobile, and Dauphin Island lacked the resources to sustain themselves. Sterile soil and erratic weather, combined with colonists who disliked farming, almost destroyed the colony, and Louis wearied of freighting goods over the ocean to feed them. In 1712, he divested Louisiana to Antoine Crozat, who lost more than a million livres as the colony's proprietor. After Louis's death, the Regent Phillippe, Duke of Orleans, granted Louisiana to the Company of the West. At that time, 1717, there were no levees in Louisiana, nor settlements which required them. This situation changed during the new proprietorship.

To detail the hopes and intrigues of Phillippe of Orleans, John Law, the Bank of France, and the Company of the West is beyond the scope of this discussion. In regard to levees, their contributions were twofold: the movement of the colony's principal settlement to the banks of the Mississippi, and the transformation of Louisiana from a military post to a colony based on agriculture and commerce. Indeed, the founding of New Orleans as a trade mart
and headquarters of the Company of the West led directly to the building of the first levees on the Mississippi.

From the beginning, controversy surrounded the site selection for Louisiana's capitol. Biloxi, Mobile, Natchez, and Baton Rouge each had supporters, who were generally men with commercial interests or real estate to develop. Those who most valued swift communications favored Biloxi and Mobile, yet these were unhealthy settlements, surrounded by poor soil, and were subject to hurricanes. On the other hand, Natchez and Baton Rouge had elevated, healthy sites, fertile soil, and river communication with the Gulf, but were deep in the colony's interior, exposed to Indian attack and too far from the coast to deter invasion.

In 1699, Commandant Iberville and his nineteen-year-old brother, Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne, Sieur de Bienville, made an exploration of the Mississippi to investigate its resources and defensible sites. On the return voyage, Iberville took a shortcut through Bayou Manchac and Lake Pontchartrain. He concluded that Bayou Manchac could be cleared of brush to make a short route from the Gulf settlements to the Mississippi. Therefore, Iberville wanted the capitol to stay on the coast. Bienville, on the other hand, sailed down the Mississippi. He noted a place where Lake Pontchartrain approached near to a bend of the river and a bayou from the lake almost led to the river-bank. Native Americans used the site as a portage from the
lake to the river. Bienville concluded that this was a natural place to put a commercial city, well-situated to both waterways, hence useful for trade with the Gulf and Canada. In addition, the site could be fortified for defense. Moreover, the steepness and depth of the riverbed at the crescent bend formed a natural harbor. Land at the river's edge, though low in elevation, was very fertile, and colonists could plant crops there for subsistence, perhaps for export. Bienville immediately became an enthusiast for this discovery as the site of Louisiana's capitol. Iberville continued to favor the Gulf sites with navigation improvements at Bayou Manchac.⁹

When Iberville left for France, Bienville made a second trip to the Mississippi and surprised a ship from Carolina which had come to spy out locations for an English settlement. This convinced Bienville that the French must concentrate on the river. If Louisiana was supposed to secure the Mississippi for France, why fortify the Gulf ports and leave the river defenceless?

Bienville never reliniquished the belief that his "beau croissant" (beautiful crescent) was the ideal spot for Louisiana's chief city. His dogged determination for this location led to the building of levees because the area was a swamp. Bienville knew about the Mississippi's overflows before he chose the site, but he judged that the city would either escape them or they would be of no consequence. It was, after all, the highest ground on the riverfront for
many miles from the Gulf. Therefore, at the close of Crozat's proprietorship in 1717, Bienville sent plans of his project to France. The Company of the West approved the founding and suggested it be named "New Orleans," in honor of Philippe of Orleans.

As regent, Philippe gave financier John Law permission to invest assets from the Bank of France in Louisiana's development. They created a new company in 1719 called the Company of the Indies, which absorbed the Company of the West, the Bank of France, and the Louisiana proprietorship. Louisiana soon became collateral for large issues of paper money through the Bank, and promoters from the Company misrepresented the colony to get specie payments for paper shares. Phillipe and John Law believed that resource development would create wealth, and that Louisiana would someday be a prize possession of the French empire. Meanwhile, they convinced the French that Louisiana was already developed. Posters and propaganda said it was highly productive and blessed with precious metals like the colonies of Spain. Louisiana's actual condition was quite the reverse, so circumstances demanded that projects be swiftly undertaken to help the reality match the image. For example, advertisements depicted New Orleans as a well-built city. In reality, it did not yet exist.\textsuperscript{10}

Bienville took a work party and personally chose the site for New Orleans in the spring of 1718. Overflow lightly covered some of its vicinity, but a sizeable tract
for the townsite remained dry. Bienville contemplated a canal between the Mississippi and Lake Pontchartrain for drainage. Unfortunately, available workers were too few to attempt such a project. Indeed, the matted undergrowth, huge trees, and dense cane presented a daunting prospect, and Bienville wished for a hundred times the number of workmen he actually commanded. A witness to the founding, Benard de La Harpe, wrote negative impressions of the site, primarily regarding the overabundance of water. According to La Harpe, the flat, swampy ground where crayfish flourished was unfit for anything but rice growing. He thought the soil much too damp for tobacco or vegetables, since seepage from the river kept the ground wet. Further, the dense fogs, feverish air, gloomy forests, and thick canebrakes depressed the writer's spirits.11

Foes of the New Orleans site attributed Bienville's partiality to the fact that he had large land grants immediately upriver; hence, that he hoped to profit from real estate speculation. Therefore, owners of grants at other locations, and advocates for rival townsites, waged a relentless campaign against New Orleans. For instance, they diverted potential settlers, wrote hostile reports to the Company headquarters, and exaggerated the site's difficulties. Naysayers discouraged investment and delayed development. When the concessionaire Antoine Simon le Page Du Pratz arrived at "New Orleans" in January of 1719, he found nothing but Bienville's own palmetto-thatched hut.
Moreover, the area was so wild that cook fires attracted fascinated alligators. Nevertheless, by April of 1719, Bienville managed to secure a branch office of the Company for New Orleans. His workmen were building four dwellings to house soldiers and clerks, and twelve concessionaires accepted agricultural grants in the vicinity. Further clearings were underway when the flood of 1719 arrived and overflowed the site.\textsuperscript{12}

Indians said they had never seen the water so high as in 1719. Even Bienville became discouraged. He wrote, "It may be difficult to maintain a town at New Orleans." Water stood on the highest ground three to six inches deep, not enough to cause drowning or major property damage, but enough to show that even this could overflow. According to Bienville, "The sole remedy will be to build levees and dig the projected canal from the Mississippi to Lake Pontchartrain." Not surprisingly, foes of New Orleans milked Bienville's discomfort and gleefully exaggerated the effects of the flood. Some reported that it had submerged the town for six months and forced inhabitants to flee to Natchez. Yet, when a flood on the Mobile River caused far greater damage in 1721, hardly a murmur reached Paris. Partisans of Mobile suppressed the information. Actually, the New Orleans flood of 1719 was rather tame. Du Pratz, who lived less than two miles from New Orleans on Bayou St. John in 1719, did not mention the flood in his book. Du Pratz did move to Natchez that year, but cited personal
reasons for doing so: namely, his doctor was going, a friend owned the chief Natchez concession, and his Indian companion wanted to be nearer her family. As to criticisms of New Orleans's unhealthiness, Du Pratz commented that dampness probably did make his bayou concession unhealthy, but "this cause of an unwholesome air does not exist at present, since they have cleared the ground, and made a bank [a levee] before the town." For Du Pratz, life on Bayou St. John in 1719 had been a positive experience. "The soil was very good, and I was happy on my plantation." Indeed, its fertility was remarkable. When Du Pratz planted peach pits in the spring, the saplings stood four feet high by autumn.13

Meanwhile, at Company headquarters in France, reports about the flood brought a lapse of support for New Orleans. In spite of this, Bienville and other colonists continued to execute improvements. If the townsite was to retain credibility as a choice for the capitol, people had to find workable solutions to the flood problem. Three suggestions for protection gained currency at the settlement: to build a levee or dyke on the riverbank in front of the city, to build a causeway to the bayou ridge, and to dig a drainage ditch that could also pass freight from Lake Pontchartrain to the river. Ideally, the levee would stop water from pouring onto the townsite, the causeway would provide a dry path to Bayou St. John (thence to the Lake), and the ditch
would open a channel for rainwater and overflows to backswamps behind the city.14

An observer in 1720 wrote, probably in August, that a large number of Guinea slaves were then at work on flood control projects to make New Orleans habitable. They were building a levee, the first such structure in the Mississippi Valley. In reference to the slaves, the term "large" must be considered relative. An official report from June of 1720 showed that New Orleans by that point contained about fifty troops and seventy civilians, including clerks, hired hands, and transported convicts. The forty concession holders who lived near the city owned eighty slaves altogether. Bienville, the largest slave-holder, had but twenty slaves (negro and Indian) at his plantation "Bel Air." At best, this was not a huge workforce for taming the Mississippi. Claude Joseph Villars Du Breuil is said to have superintended the building of the 1720 levee. He came to Louisiana in March of 1719 with a sizeable household and received land above and below the New Orleans townsite. Du Breuil witnessed the flooding first-hand and naturally grew concerned about the two feet of water that stood in the crude houses. Because Du Breuil controlled a large workforce of slaves and indentured servants, the Company officials asked him to help with the levee. Du Breuil took charge of the task using his own crew and built two thirds of the first levee at his own expense. It is thought to have stood about two
feet high, extending along the water's edge from the general area of what is now Conti Street as far east as St. Anne Street—about five blocks. Du Breuil is known to have been a public-spirited citizen, but his generosity was not unmixed with self-interest. As a leading landowner in the city's vicinity, he knew that a New Orleans free from overflow stood a much better chance of succeeding as a commercial center. Its success would enhance his own.15

The young city this first levee shielded consisted of Company buildings, a hospital, dwellings for the governor and Company director, and rude huts for the rest. The building of the levee demonstrated (they hoped) that New Orleans could be taken seriously as a viable capitol. Also, levee building had great and immediate practical value. If flooding damaged the flimsy buildings, work had to be redone. Overflow might ruin scarce supplies. It delayed the planting of crops, and in this fledgling colony, food was too precious to risk. As a result of flooding in 1719, only two concessionaires expected a harvest, and they were planting rice. The other thirty eight either had not been able to clear their fields in time or were caught in the overflow. Settlers could not even turn to livestock for sustenance, since forty concessionaires had only thirty cattle between them. The cattle had been shipped across the Atlantic and arrived in less than peak condition. Unfamiliar plants and terrain, as well as flooding, made it difficult for them to subsist.
Overall, the June of 1720 report from New Orleans stated that the Mississippi's overflows caused "inconvenience and damage" to colonists. The writer recommended that Louisiana's capitol be moved to Natchez because "the ground is always dry there."16

Acting on reports of this type, the Company intercepted a large group of concessionaires who went to New Orleans and rerouted them to Biloxi. Some officials even pushed for a capitol at Pensacola if the Spanish could be removed. Obviously, the flood control initiatives underway at New Orleans in August of 1720 were critical to the city's survival. With enemies determined to discredit it, something had to be done at the Crescent City to allay the Company's misgivings. After all, the Company could hardly justify the expense of putting a colonial capitol in a swamp just to grow rice, and the 1720 report expressed the conviction that the river would continue to overflow almost every year.17

Ironically, two disasters for France served to enhance New Orleans' prospects and to promote further efforts at levee construction on the Mississippi: the Spanish recovered Pensacola and the French learned how the Company of the Indies had misrepresented Louisiana. The Spanish reoccupation of Pensacola promoted New Orleans because their presence endangered French posts on the Gulf. Spaniards actually sacked Dauphin Island, so places such as Biloxi, Mobile, and the shores of Lake Pontchartrain became
vulnerable. As for revelations about the "Mississippi Bubble," by the end of 1720 the overheated market for Company of the Indies stock had collapsed. Stock values reverted to more realistic levels, John Law fled in disgrace, mobs threatened the Regent, the Company underwent a complete overhaul, and Louisiana became so tarnished by association that mothers threatened to send bad children there. Now that the reorganized Company lacked money to embark on grandiose plans such as the clearing of Bayou Manchac, more modest projects gained in appeal. Administrators saved what they could from the Company's wreckage. Some came to believe they should deemphasize the coastal ports and concentrate their efforts on the Mississippi. There the natural harbor at New Orleans, its command of trade from two waterways, and the potential for commercial crops were important assets. Too, the geopolitical importance of controlling the river gained renewed attention when the Spanish became more aggressive.\(^\text{18}\)

During this time of reappraisal, Bienville secured the services of a military engineer named Adrien de Pauger, whose education and experience had earned him the title of Chevalier and promotion into the Order of St. Louis. Pauger worked for the Company of the Indies, under the general supervision of the engineer-in-chief at Biloxi, and was detailed to New Orleans in order to lay out streets and superintend other public works, such as the city levee. His tenure, however, was far from serene. Biloxi partisans
continued to connive against New Orleans. The more Pauger achieved, the more virulent their objections became. Even in the city itself, factions, jealousies, and bureaucratic pettiness served to retard his work.19

Upon arrival at New Orleans in the spring of 1721, Pauger and his assistant engineer Franquet de Chaville found a city of scattered huts placed at random in little clearings. Elsewhere, trees and cane covered the earth as "thick as the hair on a man's head," according to Chaville. Pauger's surveying instruments would not function due to the lack of light and space. Pauger quickly comprehended what was necessary. Land had to be cleared before he could lay out the streets or the sites for the levee and drainage ditch. He went to the Company clerk for workmen and obtained some convict laborers who drew Company rations, but the head clerk in Biloxi rescinded the arrangement. Pauger then went to the commandant at New Orleans, who gave him ten soldiers with an officer as supervisor. Enticed with brandy, these worked vigorously and made great progress. They cleared practically all the trees from the immediate riverfront in just two weeks. Chaville claimed that "we lost no time about it, exposing ourselves to the ardour of the sun and the onslaught of insects from daybreak until nightfall." Then, after half a month in the woods, the clerk refused to honor the brandy agreement and insulted officers who came to inquire about it. With that, the soldiers refused to work.20
Having lost the assistance of both branches of government, Pauger struck a barter-type agreement with the settlers. He proposed that the riverfront be reserved for those who controlled enough laborers to assist with the levee and to quickly clear the ground. Slaveowners were most useful because they were men of influence and could provide ready labor. After he obtained permission for the land-for-labor plan, it took less than three months to clear a quarter of a league for the city. Pauger's town lot arrangement gave prominent citizens the advantage of high ground at the banks, larger garden plots, docking facilities, and access to refreshing breezes. The move also diminished the need for a massive causeway to Bayou St. John which would have been difficult to build.²¹

Pauger agreed with Bienville about the merits of a capitol at New Orleans. Both men recognized the value of soil on the Mississippi as a resource for agricultural development. Like Bienville, Pauger requested a land grant for a plantation. Both detested what they viewed as parasitical attitudes at Biloxi. Pauger attributed stubborn self-centeredness to officials on the coast, who contrary to the good of Louisiana, forced Company ships to halt at Biloxi rather than proceed to the Mississippi. Yet the river was "the subject and keystone of the country's establishment." Supplies from France could be unloaded at New Orleans to help energetic settlers get on their feet. Instead, "all were landed . . . on a sandy shore [Biloxi],
where provisions were eaten and goods deteriorated, and many of the best workmen died." Biloxi bureaucrats would rather consume French goods than produce their own, so farming was of no significance to them. On the other hand, Bienville and Pauger could visualize Louisiana's needs and bitterly resented their opponents' indifference to agricultural development.22

At New Orleans, Pauger encouraged friendly rivalries among the settlers to see who could build most quickly on the house lots he assigned. Chaville wrote, "In a very short time everybody had shelter," but the head clerk at Biloxi annulled the grants and primly told Pauger that only the head clerk had authority to grant concessions. Pauger raged that his plan would have built the town without costing the Company a sou. Instead, "I am regarded today in New Orleans as a revoked employee!" Of the 108 free workmen on the Company payroll at New Orleans in November of 1721, Pauger was allowed four—two carpenters, a locksmith, and the mason's son.23

Many even in the Crescent City were too short-sighted to give Pauger their support. Madame Bonnaud, for example, tried to slap the engineer's face when his street plan knocked a corner off her clearing. When she called Pauger a rogue, he called her a tramp. The commandant's intervention precluded a duel. Madame Bonnaud's brother, Monsieur Dubuisson, disrespected Pauger's street markings and defiantly planned "a veritable gewgaw" of a house in
the middle of Rue Bienville. Bonnaud's employer, Diron D'Artaguette, the Company commissary and a devout anti-Bienvillist, told Paris officials about poor Traverse. This humble settler complained to the Colonial Board because Pauger demolished his hut for a street alignment. According to D'Artaguette, when Traverse petitioned for compensation, the engineer thrashed him about the head with a stick and threw him in jail. Obviously, tensions at New Orleans ran high in regard to public works.24

Others were more cooperative, such as Joseph Villars Du Breuil, whose slaves are known to have helped clear the site of New Orleans and also worked on the city's first levee. Du Breuil lived at Tchoupitoulas, west of the city. Because of his management skills and the large number of workers at his disposal, he was able to develop his own place and engage in public works as a contractor. At Tchoupitoulas, Du Breuil grazed livestock and farmed. There, he was said to be the first landowner to build a levee and the first to dig canals to take standing water to the swamps. The 1724 census shows the scale of Du Breuil's establishment--7 white laborers, 48 slaves, almost 50 cattle, 7 horses, and 2 operational indigo processors. The plantation contained 300 arpents of cultivated land and extended 26 arpents along the riverfront. By colonial standards, he was very wealthy and his habitation was viewed as Louisiana's finest house. As a contractor for the Company and the King, Du Breuil and his servants worked
on public structures such as the city levee, the Ursuline convent, and the fort at the Balize which guarded the mouth of the Mississippi. He also cut huge cypresses in digging a canal on the west bank of the river, two miles above New Orleans, which led from the Mississippi to Barataria Bay. The new outlet reduced flood heights and promoted commerce. At Tchoupitoulas, Du Breuil experimented with indigo; at Elysian Fields, he tried sugar, and other colonists eagerly watched the results. Indeed, many sectors of society benefited from Du Breuil's activities; he also became one of Louisiana's richest men. In difficulties, Du Breuil saw opportunities. Naturally, this man of enterprise complemented Pauger better than someone like Dubuisson, the "gewgaw" builder, who only meant to obstruct.25

By April of 1722, the New Orleans levee was underway in earnest. Pauger sent a notice about it to Le Blond de La Tour, who reported on the levee's progress to the Company headquarters in Paris. De La Tour related to them that the earthen dike under construction was neither tall enough nor wide enough as yet to provide complete security, but would prove adequate once its size had been increased. The building of the city levee seems to have been an ongoing task in these early years. Residents and engineers enlarged or repaired it as circumstance dictated or workers became available. Yet, an unforeseen rise of the Mississippi in September of 1722 endangered much of the progress made by New Orleans's residents. During a
hurricane that blew for fifteen hours, the primitive levee on the riverfront failed. Wind and rain whipped the Mississippi eight feet higher than before. It washed across the levee, and water rose in newly built houses alongside Pauger's streets to the depth of four feet. Much sickness resulted from the overflow, as well as extreme disgust for the damage that occurred. Residents resolved to re-barricade the river.26

In January of 1724, Pauger reported that Assistant Engineer Chaville had completed the "big levee" at New Orleans to the length of five hundred toises (about three thousand feet). The use of the term "big" suggests the existence of smaller ones, probably guard levees at the sides to channel water behind the town and a back levee next to the swamp to prevent an overflow from the rear.27

Expense reports from Louisiana's first engineers give interesting information about the cost of the New Orleans levee in comparison with other public works. In the period from July to December, 1722, the Company's engineers spent slightly more than 20,000 livres on improvements in the city. This included 1,143 livres at the Director's house, 544 livres at the Ursuline hospital, and 933 livres for four bark-covered guardhouses. From January 1, 1723, to May 1, 1724, the engineers spent nearly 27,000 livres. They completed the company store and officers' pavilion, started the church and barracks, and expanded the levee. Their report shows that the levee only consumed 391 livres
of the budget. Workmen's salaries in this period, for all projects, ran to nearly 24,000 livres. Purchases of building materials reached nearly 2,700 livres. The cash price of the levee comprised only 1.5 percent of the spending, yet the security of all other works depended upon it. What a bargain! The work done by Pauger's citizen contractors kept expenses low.28

Three and a half years later, in the fall of 1727, Governor Etienne de Perier announced the New Orleans levee's completion. According to Perier, the finished levee measured 5,400 feet, slightly more than a mile long. It centered on the axis of the Place d'Armes [now Jackson Square] opposite the Church of St. Louis and ran equal distances up and downriver from that point. The "big" levee defended sixty six blocks from overflow. This area, of course, is now the famed French Quarter, which composed the whole city during the French period.29

Caleb Forshey, an antebellum engineer who studied Creole levees, gave additional details about the first city levee. He states that engineers did not arrive at its dimensions arbitrarily; rather, prior to the clearing of the forest, they looked at water marks on the tree trunks at the riverside to determine what level the former floods had attained. From this evidence, they concluded that a levee four foot tall would suffice, the highest mark being three feet above the bank. In thickness, the New Orleans levee's dimensions were in excess of what was needed for
mere flood control. According to Forshey, the crown—the levee's flat top—had a width of 18 feet, and its base, where the levee met the ground, was probably 34 feet. The cross sectional area measured about 104 square feet. In other words, the New Orleans levee constituted a wide, elevated platform larger than was necessary just for "holding back the waters." Why? This levee performed special and diversified tasks. For example, the city levee provided New Orleans with docking facilities. Here, ships loaded and unloaded cargo. Also, it served as a commercial fixture where trading and warehousing occurred. In case of attack, the city levee could be fortified with parapets to shield artillery, and banquettes, or walking platforms, placed behind it for the protected movement of troops. Typically, vendors set up stalls and tables on the New Orleans levee—it was the first French Market—and it also furnished a breezy promenade, which was very welcome in south Louisiana's still and sultry air.30

To supplement the main levee, side levees coursed away from the river at right angles toward the swamps. These embankments measured four to six feet high, growing larger as the elevation of the land sloped toward Lake Pontchartrain. Behind the city, a rear levee six feet high prevented backswamps from flooding the city's northerly streets. In addition to these bulwarks, New Orleans's engineers equipped the perimeter with a stockade for defense against Indians and ditches for drainage. In
military terminology, the ensemble was a rampart and circumvallation. The back levee stood in proximity to Rampart Street, which took its name from this structure.31

New Orleans's career as the colonial capitol actually dated from May of 1722. Company officers in France gave up on Pensacola in December of 1721. Fearing for the safety of the Coast, they transferred the general office to New Orleans. News of the change reached Biloxi in May of 1722. Now that New Orleans had definitely prevailed, Biloxi partisans praised the decision, pointed fingers, and scrambled for land grants and jobs at the new site. A New Orleans historian, Baron Marc de Villiers du Terrage, found evidence that Engineer de La Tour backdated congratulatory letters to make it appear that he favored New Orleans before the news came from Paris.32

None of the Company engineers who stayed in New Orleans came to happy ends. Part of the problem was disease, and the building of levees did not entirely alleviate unhealthiness at the swamp metropolis. As a result, engineers, in common with less learned residents, often fell victim to maladies associated with the environment. In addition, they had the worries and frustrations of their job. De La Tour and Boispinbel, Pauger's superior and predecessor who died in 1723, were said by Pauger to have expired of "chagrin at the mortifications heaped upon us all." The exquisite Chaville, whom Bienville criticized for sketching too much,
resigned in 1724 and left New Orleans with the comment that Louisiana was bad for his complexion. In reality, the Company had just knocked five hundred livres off his salary. Devin, a fine draftsman, left in anger over a similar pay cut. The engineer Boispinel tried to escape, but his ship left while he was at Mass and carried his bags to the Carolinas. Actually, pay cuts discouraged many public employees in Louisiana at this period. For example, the same year that Chaville and Devin left, the garrison at the Balize hijacked a ship and fled to Havana. Pauger explained that they were almost dead with hunger, but returned the ship with a list of what they had eaten to stay alive.33

Sadly, those who worked hard for Louisiana's progress often received little appreciation. For instance, Pauger once expended 4,000 livres of his own money to finish projects at New Orleans, yet the Company hounded him at every turn. When he submitted a claim for land which he had cultivated for three years, the Company delayed approval and at the end of two more years evicted him. Other colonists' claims sailed through; however, they had not made as many enemies or such desirable improvements. Pauger barely secured title to the lot his house occupied. In the next year, 1726, he heard that the Company was to replace him with Ignace Broutin, who worked for less money. Of course, after he completed the most demanding tasks of his office, the Company resented Pauger's high salary.
Disgusted, Pauger resolved to leave for France and wrote to his brother before sailing. "Everything here is ablaze," he said, "each man yells and behaves according to his wont, and never has the country rushed along such an incline towards total loss." Pauger never arrived in France, but died at New Orleans in 1726 of malarial fever, a swamp malady that claimed many victims in the Lower Mississippi Valley. The bachelor devised professional books to Devin; religious books to the Capuchin monks, and his plantation and slaves to a Sieur Dreux. New Orleans historian Baron de Villiers du Terrage viewed Pauger as "the keystone for the foundation of New Orleans," and one can only concur with him that "if we have dealt rather lengthily with Pauger, it is because he ... the town owes as much gratitude to him [for its existence] as to Bienville."

Hence, Pauger was also greatly responsible for the founding of the levee system on the Mississippi. If colonists like Du Breuil supplied workers, it was Pauger and his staff who brought professional training to bear on the design problems involved. Prior to Pauger's arrival in the city, the levee of 1720 was of limited extent, amateur construction, and inadequate mass to perform its purpose.\textsuperscript{34}

Undeniably then, engineers who worked for the Company of the Indies played an important role in the creation of the New Orleans levee. Colonial documents prove that they supervised phases of its construction. Their military training is revealed in names used for the levee and in its
shape. The engineers applied principles from fortifications science to determine the levee's proper dimensions and slopes. Indeed, several who superintended at New Orleans belonged to the prestigious Order of St. Louis, a knighthood created by Louis XIV to honor army engineers. Had it not been for (1) Louisiana's value in John Law's financial schemes and (2) the demobilization of the French Army at the end of the War of the Spanish Succession, men of this calibre would not have been available.

In French Louisiana, the budget of the Company of the Indies sufficed at first to pay engineers. They superintended the work at the New Orleans levee as Company employees until the basic works were finished and corporate downsizing took place. Even in its heyday, however, the Company did not have the means to levee the whole Mississippi. For instance, the Company never paid engineers to supervise the building of private levees in the countryside, except perhaps at its own plantation across from New Orleans. Ordinary colonists outside the city had to find a way somehow to supply their own levees.

In contrast to the levee at New Orleans which was built by a corporate sponsor to protect its own urban headquarters, the rural levees sprang from a different origina and served a different purpose. Rural levees protected farms. True, the farms were partially subsidized by Louisiana's corporate sponsor, in that the Company supplied the land, but the farms operated under individual
management through the oversight of concession holders on the Mississippi. Rural levees were public works demanded as private obligations. The performance of such private works served the common welfare, but if landowners did not perform them, they suffered, both individually and collectively, from flooding and (in time) from confiscation.

Therefore, it is possible to view the levees of colonial French Louisiana as coming about in two phases. The first phase is that of the New Orleans levee, designed and executed by professionals for the corporate sponsor. The second phase is that of rural levees, provided by landowners for themselves and their neighbors as a public work. Two groups--French and German settlers--constructed rural levees in the French colonial period, and both of them did it without the assistance of engineers.

It has been emphasized that engineers confined their attentions as professionals to levees they were employed to construct. While this statement is true in regard to the city levee, it must be qualified somewhat when speaking of engineers who owned land and built rural levees of their own. Several engineers in French Louisiana--such as Pauger, Le Page du Pratz, and de La Tour--also farmed on the banks of the Mississippi. There they experienced the perils of floodplain agriculture first hand and learned the value of levees in a very immediate sense. 36

Engineers are trained to think logically. Hence, as a man of logic, Pauger valued Louisiana's agricultural
resources very highly. His outbursts against Biloxi complained of its sterile soil and meager crop yields. By contrast, the soil along the Mississippi was "bottomless" alluvium, composed of eroded topsoil that washed downriver from more than a million square miles. Each spring when the Mississippi overflowed, its water carried topsoil as sediment. The swollen river washed through canebrakes on its banks, and the dense vegetation acted as a screen or filter to slow the current. Large, heavy particles of soil dropped near the river's edge, while smaller particles continued inland. Over time, the large sediments built raised banks or ridges which surpassed all other North American soils in durable fertility. Admirers called them the "cream lands" of the Mississippi. Hydrologists referred to them as "natural levees," because they were the floodplain's most elevated landforms. Smaller soil particles fell further away from the river's edge. The lesser particles compacted more densely in interior swamps and created a low, thick soil called "gumbo" or "buckshot." Buckshot lay just beyond the cultivable cream lands. With proper drainage, buckshot was as fertile as the riverbank, but difficult to work and very prone to overflow. Settlers in the colonial period lacked the ability to cultivate buckshot, so they left it as cypress swamp, a valuable resource for lumbering, moss picking, and forage.37

In the area the French settled, swamps paralleled the river. Some lands were perpetually overflowed, others only
sank below water at certain seasons, depending on the height of the Mississippi. Yet, all that stood above water year-round was a thin ribbon of soil at the river's edge. The ribbon varied in width from a quarter of a mile to one and a half miles. The nature of the terrain prompted a linear settlement pattern on the banks. Here settlers built houses, roads, and levees. Here they farmed. In fall and winter, the river and swamp water receded, and swamps could be used as a "pasture" for stock grazing.38

Altogether, the natural resources on the banks of the Mississippi were well-integrated for human occupation. Unimproved buckshot land furnished wood, pasture, and game. Settlers cleared the creamland ridges of cane and trees to make fields and produce crops, both for themselves and for export. The usual riparian (riverfront) grant varied in width from two to four arpents, depending on the number in a grantee's household who could work to improve it. Grants faced the waterway and extended toward the swamp at right angles to the banks. The customary depth of forty to sixty arpents gave settlers access to the riverfront for shipping, high banks for farming, and swampland for auxiliary subsistence. Grants of this configuration were described in a royal edict from France, dated October 12, 1716, which served as French Louisiana's first land law. Although it originally applied to Gulf settlements, the law also adapted to conditions on the Mississippi and gave
settlers the right to make requests for land that would have to be leveed. 39

When settlers were starving at Mobile and Biloxi in 1721, they presented Head Clerk De Lorme and Commandant Bienville with two alternatives: give them provisions from the Company warehouses, or let them settle on the Mississippi to grow their own. Bienville, of course, claimed that they all preferred to go to the Mississippi and were each petitioning "for a little plot of six acres' frontage . . . near New Orleans." According to him, they had already sent workers to the site to start planting. The ability of settlers to provide for themselves pleased them, the Company, and the French nation, because it reduced hunger and administrative expense. It also encouraged production instead of consumption, and made Louisiana a potential trading partner in the French empire. Settlement on the Mississippi, therefore, promoted progress. 40

Levees were tools of progress, and progressive settlers like the engineer and levee-builder Pauger naturally chose the riverside as their residence. Pauger operated a farm at Pointe St. Anthony, on the riverbank opposite New Orleans, for several years prior to his death. In 1722, Pauger had ten acres in cultivation; a substantial house, barn, and four cabins; also four cattle, four hogs, eleven black slaves, and a young Indian. The scale of this establishment might not impress jaded scholars accustomed to "Oak Alley" or "Houmas House," but Pauger had only been
in the vicinity for a year. His buildings and improved
cropland represented considerable "sweat equity," and the
slaves and livestock had been imported at great expense.
His only major item to derive unaltered from the New World
was the Indian servant. Naturally, Pauger valued his
capital and wanted it preserved. The Company desired this
as well, because it invested in concessionaires to get them
established. Since the Company shared, in a sense, in
improvements a settler made, it also issued regulations to
enforce responsible conduct. For example, the Company
required new landowners to palisade their improvements with
cypress logs to protect gardens and scarce domestic
livestock. Why not also require the building of levees to
protect the newly domesticated landscape?41

After building a levee at New Orleans, Pauger would
realize the worth of a levee at Pointe St. Anthony. An
engineer with experience in the floodplain, he could also
drive the dimensions such a levee should have. Pauger
would have considered such factors as watermarks on the
trees, the type of soil that would compose the levee, and
the number of workers he could assign to it. Levees built
by engineers in the countryside, on their own properties,
would have been instructive to other colonists.

Another floodplain agriculturalist, Antoine Le Page du
Pratz, did not work for the Company of the Indies as an
engineer, but had trained to that occupation. His
published memoir states that he graduated from the cours de
mathematiques, garnered professional experience as an architect, and knew quite a bit about hydraulic engineering in the field of river improvements. Du Pratz had served in Louis XIV's dragoons in the War of the Spanish Succession. After the war, excited by the Mississippi Bubble, he joined a group of eight hundred adventurers to sail for Louisiana on behalf of John Law. In 1719, Du Pratz obtained a concession on Bayou St. John and grew foodstuffs with the help of two slaves and an Indian girl. His chief interest, however, was trade, so he moved to Natchez the next year in hopes of more income. In 1728, Du Pratz returned to New Orleans as manager of the Company of the Indies's plantation, across the river from New Orleans. This post he kept until Louisiana retroceded to the Crown in 1731.42

Du Pratz's observations on the environment are valuable because they are first-hand descriptions by an informed colonist who witnessed French Louisiana's condition before and after the building of levees. He fully recognized the importance of levees in the colony's development. In his memoir, Du Pratz wrote that:

The ground on which New Orleans is situated, being an earth accumulated by the ooze . . . is of a good quality for agriculture. This land being flat, and drowned by the inundations for several ages, cannot fail to be kept in moisture, there being, moreover, only a mole or bank [levee] to prevent the river from overflowing it; and would be even too moist, and incapable of cultivation, had not this mole been made, and ditches, close to each other, to facilitate the draining off the waters: by this means it has been put in a condition to be cultivated with success.43

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Du Pratz went on to say that the whole riverfront from below New Orleans to Manchac on the east bank, and to the mouth of Bayou La Fourche on the west bank, contained the same type of soil. Subject to overflow, it had to be leveed to be successfully farmed.44

Du Pratz observed that habitations stood close together on the ribbon of creamlands, "each [settler] making a causey to secure his ground from inundations." The "causey, or mole," as he called the levee, was coterminus with the region of dense settlement on both sides of the river. Here settlers enjoyed resources that made the floodplain habitable, as well as river transport, which allowed settlements to be militarily defensible and commercially feasible.45

A non-practicing engineer, Le Page du Pratz seemed confident that levees would provide security for the colonists. However, he did not live in the floodplain in years such as 1723 when overflows caused costly damages. The colony's engineer in chief, Le Blond de La Tour, did suffer the effects of flooding and is said to have died of vexation. De La Tour, of course, had opposed the site of New Orleans because of its tendency to flood. An observer described him "at the head of the malcontent" who persistently favored Biloxi. De La Tour complied with his transfer to the Mississippi when he had no alternative, but doubtless resented Bienville for making it necessary. Nevertheless, de La Tour acted for the Crescent City after
his arrival and took charge of its public works. In September of 1722 he endured the hurricane that blew across New Orleans for fifteen hours. It flooded the city, destroyed 34 huts, disabled ships, and sank flatboats loaded with provisions. Water rose so high over the banks that the arsenal's gunpowder was saved only by rushing it to the attic of Bienville's pigeoniere. Rain fell for a month and ruined the crops. Still, a hurricane could have happened at Biloxi. De La Tour resigned himself to the new environment, looked for money-making opportunities outside New Orleans, and became an indigo planter.46

Indigo planting more-or-less brought rural levees into existence in French Louisiana and created the "Indigo Coast" as the principal residence of the French levee-building community. Therefore, it is worthwhile to give a brief background of the product. Certain plants, when rotted in water, produce a blue dyestuff called indigo. Ancient peoples used a species from Egypt and India. The Muslim world controlled and exploited its supply in the Middle Ages, so Europeans considered indigo a prize in the Age of Exploration. Europeans bypassed the Muslims and invested in indigo production in Bengal, eastern India, Ceylon, and China, but heavy expenses occurred in transport and handling. Diplomatic factors affected availability, which in turn affected business. It was natural for nation-states involved in textile production and overseas trade to want their own indigo sources. The passion for
the color blue fueled colonial expansion and the development of plantation economies.

In the West Indies, Europeans noticed a new species of indigo. Iberian colonists began producing it in Brazil, Mexico, Venezuela, and Guatemala. The British in southeastern North America grew indigo in Carolina, and the French produced it in the Antilles.

In Louisiana, Frenchmen discovered another indigo species, but had difficulty assessing its worth. A Caribbean planter named Marigny de Mandeville believed that Louisiana indigo would prove to be commercially important. His notes on indigo in a "Memoir on Louisiana," written in 1709, gave guarded economic hope to a colony whose sickly population had dropped to 85 persons by 1706. In 1712 another observer, Tivas de Gourville, wrote the French marine minister, Jerome Phelypeaux, Comte de Pontchartrain, about Louisiana indigo. De Gourville said that since neither the settlers nor the Indians knew how to process it, the government should send men to demonstrate its proper cultivation and manufacture. The exportation of such skills would benefit Louisiana, but the King cared nothing for the project and washed his hands of the colony that same year.47

Crozat's governor, Antoine de La Mothe Cadillac, forced Louisiana colonists to plant corn and raise cattle for food, and recommended indigo as their cash crop. They gathered the wild indigo for export, but its quality and
quantity disappointed Crozat. The Company of the Indies also desired indigo production in Louisiana; however, the colonial Council replied in January of 1723 that indigo was unthinkable for most Louisianians. They lacked labor and capital to make it. After all, a man could only tend two acres of indigo as his full-time commercial employment, and two or more crops a year were needed for profits comparable to those in the Caribbean. The ability to make multiple crops, or even one, would depend on the containment of the Mississippi. Indigo could not grow in wet soil. Therefore, levees and ditches were needed to produce proper growing conditions. The Company built an embankment at New Orleans, but would not do so on individually owned plantations. Further adding to the cost of production, settlers would have to build a processing plant called an *indigoterie* on each plantation to turn the raw plant into a saleable commodity. Processing involved three vats, special equipment, and the labor of experienced dyemakers. Historians have dubbed establishments of this type "agroindustrial" because of the complexity of the operations. Like the vats and the slaves, levees and ditches were essential elements of indigo production.  

According to the Louisiana census of November 1721, the rural areas around New Orleans—Bayou St. John, Gentilly, the Colapissas, Tchoupitoulas (Carrollton), Cannes-Brulees (Kenner), Petit-Desert, and English Turn—contained fewer than 300 European farmers and less than 750...
laborers, which included black slaves, indentured servants, and Indian squaws. Given the high labor requirements for indigo, and the scarcity of slaves, few Louisiana colonists had the resources to produce it. Since the Company controlled the shipping of slaves, it would have to sell them on terms colonists could afford. Census data suggests that as late as 1724 only seven colonists in Louisiana had the means to produce indigo for export.49

Access to slaves meant access to wealth, so it was advantageous in colonial Louisiana for aspiring planters to have connections to the colony's administrators. Company officials and army officers had the best opportunity to acquire slaves because their social connections and regular salaries made them attractive credit risks. As Louisiana's chief engineer, de La Tour enjoyed advantages for indigo planting. For example, he had the intelligence to understand indigo production and the clout to acquire the means of production. When Louisiana's indigo species proved inferior, de La Tour and Bienville sent for three quarts of fine indigo seed from Cape Francois in St. Domingue. They obtained it through their own influence and that of De Lorme, the Company's head clerk. De La Tour and Bienville planted the Caribbean indigo. Jacques de la Chaise, the Company director at New Orleans, reported the experiment's outcome in September of 1723. "It grows marvellously here," he said, "in spite of the floods that lasted until the beginning of July." The colony proudly forwarded sixty
pounds of Bienville's finished dyestuff to France as a way to vindicate Louisiana's worth. "As for that which Mr. de La Tour had planted," de La Chaise remarked, "it was entirely destroyed by the flood which overflowed his lands from the rear." Poor de La Tour, thwarted by Bienville in the battle of the capitols, then having his precious seedlings drowned by the overflows he had warned against all along--and him in charge of the city's levee! No wonder the Chief Engineer died of "mortification" and "chagrin" in October.50

De La Tour's brief encounter with indigo production proved that levee building was essential to a planter's success. Planting was a gamble, but also presented a chance at prosperity. Levees acted as basic flood insurance against a planter's financial ruin. According to Bienville's "Memoir on Louisiana" of 1726, the colony's planters learned well from he and de La Tour's experience. Those with enough capital to invest quickly installed levees and indigo vats at their cultivated fields, and colonists made three thousand pounds of indigo in 1724. In a rather extraordinary "Declaration of the Inhabitants," signed at New Orleans in April of 1725, the planters admonished each other "to employ the best and most considerable part of their strength in this common cause." It was, of course, a very materialistic cause, namely to grow "as much indigo as they can."51
This Declaration of the Inhabitants signals the recognition among the larger slaveowners of their common interests and the need to cooperate amongst themselves. The task of protection through levee building was beyond the capacity of any individual--it must be done as a group. This recognition cemented the realization that they formed a community of interests, a levee-building community which had to cooperate for its own preservation. Imagine how little good it would do for Bienville, Pauger, and de La Tour to raise levees on their land if, interspersed among them, neighbors such as d'Artagnan, St. Rayne, and Chautreau de Beaumont, did not build levees. The Mississippi would pour through the gaps and push with greater force against whatever levees existed. Partial embankments would wash away or crumble. The construction of a continuous levee line was, therefore, an integral part of the planters' "common cause."

De La Tour's failure in indigo also demonstrated the need for back levees. Not that he was planting in swampy buckshot, but because of the low terrain, overflows from the swamp often stood on the fields when the river rose, even if front levees held. Whatever its source, standing water would cost the proprietor his growing time and reduce the number of cuttings (or harvestings) of indigo that planters could make. Drainage ditches and back levees soon proved to be as necessary as the levee line on the river.
Bienville pointedly summarized and reiterated the importance of levees and drains in his memoir of 1726:

"It can no longer be doubted now that indigo will succeed in Louisiana. The repeated experiments . . . show that if we continue to take the precautions necessary to protect ourselves against the overflows from the river and . . . the heavy rains, this plant will run no other risk and we shall easily have three cuttings of it every year." 52

In other words, economic success bore a direct relation to the building of levees and ditches. Indigo would not flourish or survive unless planters excluded the river and drained the fields. And their success depended entirely on building levees as a group. Each planter would build his own section of levee in front of his own land, but all the levees had to be finished before the river rose. Did the agenda betray a certain political incorrectness by modern standards? Materialism, peer pressure, social regimentation, and indifference to environmental impact? So be it. In the pursuit of security and wealth, Louisiana's first rural levee line took shape.

The "Indigo Coast" of the French planters surrounded New Orleans, east and west of the Vieux Carre. It lined the banks of the Mississippi in what are now the parishes of St. Bernard, Orleans, and Jefferson. Frenchmen who became indigo planters typically came to Louisiana as adventurous bachelors in the military or in colonial administration. They had professional training, family connections to tap for loans, and influence with the
government. They spoke French and knew the manners of polite society. Slave merchants viewed them as good credit risks, and they enjoyed numerous advantages as capitalists. According to a French historian of the 1830s, they were not particularly attached to Louisiana. He wrote of his countrymen that "the peasant never emigrates, and others do not emigrate in families." When French bachelors went abroad they imagined themselves in exile and chiefly labored to go back to France in style. In the colonies, they preferred coastal residences, "clinging to the shore and the sight of that ocean, which at least touched their native land." They even called the banks of the Mississippi "the Coast." 53

To the northwest, in the present-day parishes of St. Charles and St. John the Baptist, a second leveed region developed, which became known as the "German Coast." If French indigo planters united to pursue wealth through the prudent use of levees, crops, and social advantage, the German Coast shared in a no less gripping ambition--the pursuit of survival. In fact, these two levee-building communities sprang from very different origins. Unlike the French indigo elite, German peasants came to Louisiana without capital, prestige, or influence. Also, unlike the Frenchmen, Germans frequently left Europe in family groups and attached themselves to new homes. A Louisiana census official who interviewed them in 1724 said that German colonists were more contented than the French. Several
reasons could be given for the difference. In Europe, the Germans' lives had been complicated by religious wars and lack of economic opportunity. Their social mobility was thwarted by the guild system in town and by the subjection of tenants to landowners in the country. German commoners endured military levies, heavy taxes, and oppressive feudal dues, so emigrants did not look back with overpowering nostalgia. Too, Germany's political fragmentation did not promote in them a strong sense of national identity. The Louisiana censustaker found that Germans liked this colony "where they are free from burdensome taxation and from the rule of the master of their land."^4

In 1719 and 1720, John Law's advertisements persuaded more than a thousand Germans to volunteer for residence in Louisiana. Posters said each household would receive its own land and the supplies to begin cultivation. The Company told them of gold and silver mines, herbs to cure lovesickness, and foodstuffs that would sprout from the soil almost without effort. In short, colonists would live luxuriously—a marked contrast to what they were accustomed. For example, in Europe few could legally hunt or fish because nobles jealously guarded their fishing and game preserves as marks of high status. Louisiana's settlers, on the other hand, were promised free fishing rights and forests of venison and wild duck.^5

Several of these promises did come to pass. For instance, the letters of an Ursuline nun at New Orleans to
her father, written in 1727, describe a mouth-watering variety of game dishes, including buffalo, "deer, swans, geese and wild turkeys, rabbits, chickens, [and] ducks." But peasants who had never hunted might have trouble acquiring the wilderness skills to provision themselves. The very journey to the colony was not, for them, without much effort and sorrow. Of the four shiploads of Germans who sailed to Louisiana in January of 1721, many died of disease and malnutrition before arrival. Still others perished while waiting to be transported to their concessions. A second group arrived with news of the Company's collapse. As a result, Law could not provision settlers as he had advertised, and many died. Bienville took pity on the Germans. In 1722, he arranged for survivors to move to the site of a Ouacha Indian village which was located on the banks of the Mississippi, between the present-day towns of Lucy and Hahnville. There the Germans quickly founded villages called Marienthal, Hoffen, and Augsburg, under the supervision of Karl Freidrich D'Arensbourg, the commandant of the German Coast.56

D'Arensbourg, who had distinguished himself in the service of King Charles XII of Sweden, led the second group of Germans to Louisiana and obtained a sizeable riverfront grant, which he called Karlstein in his own honor. D'Arensbourg provided valuable leadership for the German community. For instance, he was able to act as a liason on their behalf with French officials, because his social and
military status resembled their own. Nevertheless, Germans endured severe hardships on the Mississippi at first. Their lack of capital meant that they would not be able to produce goods the Company desired. Therefore, slaves and draft animals initially went to the French who would grow export crops. The Company was only willing to supply German households with an axe, hoe, and shovel, but no slaves, horses, or oxen for plowing and draft labor. With axes and hoes, Germans cleared and cultivated the riverbanks amid stumps and tree trunks. The soil actually sprouted weeds constantly, not foodstuffs. Under these conditions, it took a worker a year to prepare one arpent for cultivation. Meanwhile, how would they eat? Well-to-do settlers in Louisiana could hire Indian hunters or send slaves to the swamp for game. German Coast settlers could not afford to do either, and at the end of a day could not risk the chance of catching nothing. Instead, after chopping and hoeing, they went immediately to the pestle and pounding trough to the back-breaking work of beating rice and grinding corn. If overflows destroyed the crops, their main sustenance would be lost. The third implement of Company issue—the shovel—served them to build a levee.57

The French colonial census of 1724 describes their plight in detail, relating much personal information about the Germans' resources and achievements. The census shows that the flood of 1723, which embarrassed Engineer de La Tour, threatened to obliterate the Germans. Again in 1724,
they were injured by flooding when a tropical storm blew water from Lac des Allemandes into their new fields. Unlike de La Tour, they had no salary or Company rations to fall back on. Consider the situation of Bernhard Anton of Wurtemberg, a thirty-year-old Lutheran with a wife and ten-year-old son. In 1724 the Antons had been on the riverfront for two years, had four arpents cleared, and two pigs. They made twenty barrels of rice, but would also have made sixty barrels of corn "if there had been no inundation." Jacob Oubre from Suevia was a hard-working Catholic aged forty five, but "made no crop on account of inundation." Observe Johann Jacob Folse of the Palatinate, a Catholic aged twenty six with a wife and one-year-old son. A shoemaker by trade, Folse and his wife had lived on the Mississippi two years, had four arpents cleared, and one pig. Climate and work took their toll, and Folse was sick all summer. Overflows in 1724 killed the corn crop, so they harvested only seven barrels of rice "after much labor." Since a short crop one year meant food shortages the next, Folse begged the Company in 1725 for an advance of rice against the next year's harvest. The Folses were starving. The wonder is that more settlers were not depicted like thirty-nine-year-old Este Kistenmach of Cologne, who after two years on the Mississippi became "sick, had a nervous breakdown."58

In spite of the hardships, Louisiana's Germans were not the sort to give up. They came to stay, and the census
report of 1724 praised their industry. It noted that they raised beans, vegetables, and livestock. "They also work to build levees in front of their places." Several Germans were described as levee builders in the 1724 census, particularly those who had suffered crop failures from flooding after the hurricane. Some experienced such damage that they relocated to Bienville's concession near New Orleans, where, as his tenants, they undertook improvements. Bienville, who knew the value of levees, doubtless encouraged this, because levees would protect their property and his own. One of the storm victims, Caspar Hegli, a Catholic Swiss from near Lucerne, had been two years in residence on the river. He, his wife, daughter, and two orphan boys had planted two and a half barrels of seed rice, but only harvested three barrels because of the flooding. Hegli was fortunate to own three cattle and three pigs. The census said, "He has made a good levee and is a good worker. He deserves a negro." Besides building a levee, Hegli enclosed his garden with palisades. Thus excluded, livestock would graze on the levee when water rose in the swamps. Another German, Andreas Krestmann of Augsburg, had six arpents on the river. Krestmann, a wheelwright by trade, his wife, and two orphan girls had been in residence two years. The Krestmanns had three cattle and three pigs, were fencing cleared land, and deserved a negro. "He made a good levee," the census taker remarked, "and paid in advance the workmen who made it for
him at a cost of 100 pistoles." Simon Kuhn, late of Bavaria, was less fortunate. On account of flooding, his household had been compelled to change residences twice, forfeiting a finished cabin and improvements. Kuhn was a "good worker," but had no crops. The family had only been in their latest home one year. Of thirteen German households on Bienville's property in 1724, three were said to have finished good levees. For the other ten, no such designation was made at that time.  

After they were established, the Germans flourished in Louisiana. Their enterprise and zeal for money-making resembled that of French planters near New Orleans. Too poor to grow indigo, they concentrated instead on foodstuffs and poultry which they carried to market in New Orleans. Their produce helped to feed the inhabitants of the city and provisioned outgoing ships. It was recommended in 1724 that Germans should also supply the large planters with produce. This arrangement would benefit both parties. Division of labor would allow the wealthy proprietors to concentrate on export goods such as indigo and lumber, for shipment to France and the sugar islands. At the same time, the market for foodstuffs would provide much needed capital for the Germans.  

Within a couple of generations, some German Coast settlers had become well-to-do slaveowners with cash-crop plantations like the French elite. The German language ceased to be heard. German names transmogrified, and
German families became integrated into Creole French culture. Wichners became Vicknairs; Hubers, Oubres; Troxlers, Trosclairs; and Zehringers, Zeringues. But flooding presented a much more immediate problem than the niceties of cultural assimilation, and the two levee-building communities shared a pressing interest in holding back the waters. German levees quickly united with those of the French, and levees that guarded vegetables on the German Coast simply continued a line of embankments that protected the Indigo Coast further down.  

By November of 1727, Louisiana's Governor Etienne Perier was able to state that the New Orleans levee had been finished to the length of 5,400 feet. Within a year, he said, rural levees would be completed in a continuous line that extended eighteen miles above and below the city. The area he described included the French indigo region and the lower German Coast. According to Perier, by the end of 1728 the various proprietors would have finished their task of embanking the river.  

Perier took office after Bienville's recall to France and served from 1727 to 1733. How was Bienville's successor able to state the prospect of the levee's completion in 1728 with such assurance? It is because Perier was not relying entirely on public spirit and Declarations of the Inhabitants to get the levees built. His advisory body and quasi-executive/judicial counterpart, the Superior Council of Louisiana, decreed that in 1728 colonists would be
responsible for thirty days of corvee duty each year. Corvees were well-known in France as a legacy of manorial obligations to one's landlord, and they compelled tenants to labor on works for the community. Louisiana's land law of 1716 did not require corvee duty from grantees, but neither did it exclude the possibility that corvees might be instituted in the future. One imagines that freedom from corvees served in the colony's early years as an inducement to settlement, rather like a tax abatement, but the need for public works proved too strong for such exemptions to last. Travel writer Louis Francois Dumont de Montigny said that by 1728 there were riverfront settlements on the Mississippi as high as thirty miles above New Orleans whose inhabitants were "obliged" to build levees for protection. Each landowner on the river was to build a levee at the front of his own concession. The degree of coercion involved in this obligation is not, however, clear. Perier and Company Director Jacques de La Chaise, resident in New Orleans, told the Company that Louisiana colonists often neglected the required tasks and observed corvees quite carelessly. Workable mechanisms for enforcing compliance had not as yet been arranged. Still, it is obvious that by 1728 a complete levee line was a tangible goal for the regions of contiguous settlement, especially in the areas with the most slaves. Colonists subject to corvee duty could supply slaves as substitutes—if they owned slaves.63
In addition to complaining about the poor observance of the corvee, Director de La Chaise had been one of Bienville's severest critics. He led the movement for Bienville's dismissal and reported to Company headquarters about Bienville's profiteering and land speculation. By 1727, the disgraced Bienville owned almost 215 arpents of riverfront immediately west of the Vieux Carre. This was the land he made available to the Germans, Jesuits, and Canadians. During its investigation, the royal government annulled what it viewed as overly lavish grants on the Mississippi. A Council of State at Versailles revoked Bienville's concession. Furthermore, the King ordered the Company of the Indies to institute a new land grant policy. This edict, dated 10 August 1728, replaced the land law of 1716 which had proved open to abuses.64

The new colonial policies of 1728 ordered the Company of the Indies to grant or regrant concessions on the Mississippi to actual settlers--families, workmen, and soldiers--who would develop properties, reside on them, and form a pool of manpower reserves for militia duty in case of invasion or emergency. Colonial officials were not to make remote and indefensible grants, but to distribute land on the banks of the Mississippi as high as Bayou Manchac. Each concession was to measure two or three arpents on the riverfront with a depth of sixty arpents. This gave settlers the usual slice of high banks, buckshot, and swamp in contiguous plots. An arpent is .85 of an acre, and
about 192 feet, so dwellings would be approximately 600 feet apart. Neighbors, therefore, could help each other, shout news from porch to porch, and gather quickly in emergencies. Lands in larger concessions, or unimproved tracts where owners did not even pasture cattle, would be forfeited for re-granting. At this time, the obligation to build levees did not constitute a condition of title, but levee building would prove to royal officials that the proprietor had made serious efforts to meet his settlement requirements. Thus, if not an outright demand in 1728, levee building was an improvement which could save one's lands from confiscation. Forfeited land would go to new settlers who satisfied the law.65

Perier's Louisiana census of 1727 reveals that the colony contained slightly more than five thousand non-Indian persons, almost equally divided between whites and black slaves. For this small outpost, administrative costs for the year exceeded 450,000 livres. Louisiana was still far from profitable, and its continued existence precarious. Then, in 1729, Natchez Indians massacred French colonists and the garrison at Fort Rosalie. Exhausted by profitless expenses in Louisiana and now facing the prospect of Indian war, the Company of the Indies relinquished Louisiana to the Crown in 1731.66

Colonists hoped Louis XV would show an interest in Louisiana. Through the management of Cardinal Fleury, the twenty-one-year-old King was enjoying peace in Europe, and

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conditions seemed propitious for colonial investment. Unfortunately, Indian campaigns devoured funds and by 1734, the colony's expenses mounted to almost 900,000 livres. To recoup such losses, the colony needed resource development. Raymond Amyault D'Ausseville, a probate attorney and member of Louisiana's Superior Council, wrote Louis XV soon after the colony's 1731 reversion to acquaint him with its condition and prospects. In the narrative, D'Ausseville clearly emphasized the importance of levees. If colonists built levees and drainage ditches, he said, they could harvest indigo, tobacco, corn, cotton, flax, small grains, and sweet potatoes. Without levees, the only dependable field crop was rice, which fed settlers but had little commercial value for the French Empire. Besides, Louisiana lacked running streams to power rice mills, and the removal of husks entailed fatiguing labor at the pestle. D'Ausseville remarked that some inhabitants built mills over the levee to remove the husks. To do this, they cut sluices in the levee and placed a mill wheel where water poured down a wooden flume into the field. He warned that such mills could not be relied on in Louisiana, for several reasons. The river only rose at certain seasons, driftwood in the river often wrecked the apparatus, and cutting the levee might damage other crops, such as indigo and corn. D'Ausseville asked Louis to send wind mills, as well as model cotton gins and indigo processors. He also stressed the need for more slaves. D'Ausseville claimed that
settlers with fewer than seven slaves could scarcely subsist, and that only a dozen men in the colony had enough laborers to adequately improve their concessions.\textsuperscript{67} Governor Perier more or less concurred with D'Ausseville's analysis. Perier believed levee-building and other requisite tasks were so onerous that none but slaveowners could effectively develop the concessions. In his opinion, the riverbank, from 168 miles above New Orleans down to the Gulf, could only be farmed profitably with levees and was best farmed by slaves. Slaveowners commanded a larger work force to carry out difficult improvements and were better equipped to survive floods and crop failures without the risk of starvation.\textsuperscript{68}

The settlers' labor duties became even more arduous in 1732, when proprietors learned that they had to clear a section of road, or "chemin," at their riverfronts. The King ordered this duty from grantees in Louisiana as a public work. Each landowner would cut a piece of the Chemin Royal, now known as River Road, along the Mississippi, inside the levee. Regulations created the cleared swath as an easement for public use. The roadway measured forty eight feet wide, but settlers cleared a total of sixty six feet from the river's edge, which suggests that sixteen feet, between the roadway and the river, constituted the site for the levee. They also had to install wooden bridges over lateral drainage ditches in fields where such ditches intersected the road.\textsuperscript{69}
In all likelihood, the obligation to build a road was instituted to save wear and tear on the levees because the crowns of Louisiana's levees were serving as foot and riding paths. Indeed, Le Page du Pratz described the Louisiana levees prior to 1734 as thoroughfares "which may be travelled in a coach or on horseback, on a bottom as smooth as a table." Rural levees around 1731 generally measured at least two feet tall and six feet wide. The width probably referred to the crown, rather than to its base. A levee of these dimensions practically was a road. They may have been smooth when first constructed, but the combination of wagon ruts, galloping horses, tramping livestock, foot abrasion, and rain—not to mention high water, driftwood, or boring animals—would quickly cause such modest structures to deteriorate.

Notice should be paid to the small levee setback indicated by the above dimensions. A levee six feet wide in a sixteen foot easement cannot have been more than ten feet from the edge of the river. Narrow setbacks appealed to grantees who had cleared the arpents with difficulty and now wanted space to grow crops. They sacrificed as little improved land as possible. Yet where the river bends, its current runs with great force against the bank, causing the soil to cave in. The current then carries off sections of ground and the levee with it. Thus, building levees too near the river to save land could be short-sighted, if
overflows cost a proprietor his crop and his levee. But such lessons were learned with experience.\textsuperscript{71}

Le Page du Pratz left Louisiana in 1734; his memoir portrayed the level of development in the colony at that time. He reported that the "causey, or mole" ran on both sides of the river from English Turn "quite to the town, and about ten leagues beyond." In other words, levees protected about forty five miles, or ninety miles of riverfront if one counts both banks. Fortunately for the settlers, flood heights usually stayed rather low in this region. If just forty five miles were leveed, of approximately six hundred that flowed through the floodplain south of Cape Girardeau, then the bulk of the water disported itself in swamps and forests elsewhere in the valley. Too, there were natural outlets such as the Atchafalaya River, Bayou Plaquemine, Bayou Manchac, and Bayou Lafourche which drained off water before it reached the French colonial settlements.\textsuperscript{72}

Judging from du Pratz's memoirs, the leveed districts were developed and productive, whereas unleveed areas in the floodplain remained wild, unsuitable for urban life and commercial agriculture. He noted, for example, that a voyager going upriver from the Gulf would pass through unleveed, uninhabitable marshes which contributed little to the economic life of the colony. In contrast, leveed settlements began at English Turn where the topography permitted improvement. Here, du Pratz wrote, "both sides
of the river are lined with houses" making "a beautiful prospect." Also, he observed the density of settlement which caused the riverfront to seem like a village street: "many habitations . . . close together; each [owner] making a causey to secure his ground from inundations."^3

About fifteen miles from the Turn, one came to New Orleans, whose levee had been finished about seven years. There, a visitor would see the Place d'Armes in the center of the waterfront. The Church of St. Louis occupied middle ground at the plaza's edge. Capuchin monks officiated, and their house lay to the left of the church. A prison and guardhouse stood to the right, and barracks lined both sides. The city levee extended across eleven blocks at the waterfront. Ursuline nuns tended a hospital and ran a school on the east side. The Jesuits' plantation lay to the west. New Orleans's streets, as laid out by Pauger, formed a grid of sixty six blocks, each subdivided into twelve lots. For drainage and defense, a moat and stockade defined the city's perimeter. For internal drainage, ditches surrounded each block and house lot. The historian Gyarre, who added florid details, commented that "mosquitoes buzzed, and enormous frogs croaked incessantly." Tall reeds and grass which grew in ditches, streets, and yards, concealed "venomous reptiles, wild beasts, and malefactors." Houses stood a foot off the ground as protection from clogged ditches. By the 1760s, the city's inhabitants had learned to raise their houses eight feet in the air.
The streets often overflowed, and Gayarre remarked that New Orleans sometimes resembled "a microscopic caricature of Venice." Governor Perier meant to provide additional drainage by means of a canal from the city to Bayou St. John. He arranged for slave labor, but the plan stalled. Nevertheless, the city remained habitable, which could not have been the case had no levee been built.74

West of New Orleans the village-like appearance of the riverfront resumed. Large and well-improved plantations, like that of the Jesuits, sat closest to the city; smaller concessions were further off. Levees ended about thirty miles above New Orleans at the upper limits of the German Coast. Beyond that, clusters of settlement on elevated soil were scattered at great distances from each other in the wilderness. Many remote concessions, abandoned in the Natchez War of 1729, were not revived because of the pro-British Chickasaws. Settlers who remained in the interior either farmed tobacco on high ground—such as at Natchitoches and Pointe Coupee—or based their livelihood on hunting, corn, and the Indian trade—like at Arkansas Post, the mouth of St. Francis, or the outposts of Illinois. At the mouth of St. Francis, for example, the French had a small fort from which hunters departed each winter in search of the bears' oil, tallow, and salt they sold in New Orleans. At Arkansas Post, the French adopted Indian lifestyles and were said to live with them almost as brothers. In the Illinois country, many Frenchmen came
from Canadian fur-trade origins. Their villages and voyageur-based pursuits sharply distinguished them from levee-building planters downriver. Other Illinois French grew wheat to grind and ship downriver. While some of the wheat fields bordered the Mississippi and could overflow, the villages themselves were generally on bluffs. Topography dictated that the Upper Mississippi would not require levee construction to the same degree as near New Orleans, and the climate upriver precluded the growing of plantation crops. The Illinois settlements did not become levee-building communities in the colonial era, and most upriver colonists resided on nearby bluffs, rather than in the floodplain. At any rate, Du Pratz's survey of river settlements shows that French Louisiana was relatively unpopulated outside the leved region. Levees secured Louisiana's principal population centers and guarded the colony's most progressive sectors of development.\textsuperscript{75}

On the other hand, not long after du Pratz's departure, the Mississippi besmirched his roseate image of the leved settlements. By Christmas of 1734, the river had attained heights normally reached in March. The Mississippi rose throughout April to levels previously unknown, and water remained on the fields until late June. Flooding on this scale totally deranged the crop schedule and threatened planters with ruin. Abrasion severely damaged levees that withstood the water. Many levees broke, even the city levee at New Orleans. According to
Bienville, now royal governor, and Edme Salmon, the colonial commissary, "we were very near abandoning our houses and taking lodgings in boats." In the countryside, where colonists usually made the first indigo planting in February, they could not plant at all. Some had borrowed money for slaves to grow indigo, but had nothing to sell. To make matters worse, this was the third crop failure in as many years. The flood of 1735 also affected Louisiana's food supply. At levee breaks, the river washed rice plants right out of the fields. Seedlings could not be replaced because reserved rice in the storehouses had already been loaned for planting. The floodwater carried bugs, probably caterpillars, that ate the corn. In addition, according to Bienville, "such hot weather has never been known since the foundation of the colony." Four months of drought and suffocating heat destroyed field crops that survived the flood, and Bienville said that "the mortality of cattle is frightful." New Orleans then experienced a weird epidemic of mad dogs. Inhabitants "could hardly venture out of their houses without being bit." If Louisiana seemed cursed in 1735, the colony got a repeat performance in 1737. Levees broke above and below New Orleans, city and plantations flooded, and crops failed again.76

Obviously, the levees which had been built on the Mississippi prior to 1735 proved insufficient against major floods. Discouraged colonists wondered if there was any use in rebuilding the levees. They could not face doing...
their work over every two or three years. Words from Gayarre could describe Louisiana at this period: "the existence of the colony was nothing but a prolonged agony. The principle of life seemed to be wanting in it."77

In their despair, settlers added a new word to their vocabulary: "crevasse!" In ordinary French, it meant a crevice, split, or chink. In French Louisiana, it indicated a frightening rush of water pouring through a broken levee. On one side stood the colonist, his family, slaves, cultivated fields, house, sheds, crops, and livestock; his neighbors and all their possessions. On the other side surged the river, perhaps a mile wide, swollen with rainwater and snow, with groves of fallen trees tumbling in the current. Across that torrent stood the opposite bank with another levee and human improvements, equally frail, yet precious to those whose future hung upon the levees' preservation. A break on one side reduced pressure at the opposite bank, so colonists patrolled levees in dangerous periods to prevent vandalism from across the river. If neighbors on the same bank neglected the levees, they risked the wrath of adjacent proprietors because the ruin of one might mean the ruin of all. Water poured through the crevasse either until it was repaired or the water rose as high on land as in the river. Then the flood water would stand, sometimes for months, until the river receded. Meanwhile, one must find fodder for
domestic animals, keep food on the table, and perform household tasks by walking from shed to shed on catwalks.78

Fortunately Louisiana's prospects brightened after the floods of 1735 and 1737. An economic upswing nourished the value of the crops grown on Louisiana's riverfront, which translated into a renewed concern for the rebuilding and upkeep of levees. And lumbering continued in spite of the floods. In fact, high water made lumbering easier because the logs could be floated to the river rather than hauled. Louisiana's imperial trading partners, the French islands in the Caribbean, purchased vast amounts of wood for barrel staves, fuel, and building materials. Ship captains at New Orleans also bought processed pitch and tar from Louisiana forests. An income from lumber helped many riverfront proprietors to stay solvent and even expand their activities, because slaves who cut wood made money for the owner and simultaneously cleared his fields. He sold the wood, they planted the fields, and he bought more slaves. Together, they cultivated whichever crop seemed most profitable, protecting it with levees and ditches as best they could.79

In the late 1730s, the French government encouraged indigo production by offering planters free seed and price supports. Indigo seemed to be Louisiana's best chance for long-term economic growth, but the high up-front investment, uncertain harvests, and hazards from overflow discouraged most from attempting it. Yet, fifteen men near
New Orleans took the risk in 1738 and made 70,000 pounds of dyestuff. Thus encouraged, they projected a crop of 150,000 pounds in 1739. Unfortunately, dry weather killed the plants, and they only harvested 17,000 pounds. *C'est la vie.* Still, subsidies sustained them, and price increases in the 1740s attracted more planters to the crop. Indigo that sold for four livres a pound in 1741 brought nine livres in 1743. From 1743 to 1746, Louisiana planters shipped more than 240,000 pounds worth about 600,000 livres. They bought more slaves and Louisiana's black population doubled. The demand for Louisiana indigo stayed high even with increased production because planters in St. Domingue, who had been the leading suppliers for France, converted their own plantations to sugar. This left a gap in the market that Louisiana could fill. In 1747, the British began another price support at six shillings a pound, thereby hoping to lure Louisiana's indigo planters to sell outside the French market, which in turn would weaken Louis XV's empire. Some smuggling probably did take place, with Louisiana producers pocketing the rewards. During the 1750s, indigo accounted for one-fifth of the colony's legal exports. While 20 percent may not seem vastly significant, the number of producers remained quite small—only 47 indigo planters in 1752. These were the wealthiest, best-connected, and most influential people in Louisiana. They were profiting, and what mattered to them, mattered to Louisiana, since the colony's success
mattered to the government of Louis XV. And if levees were necessary to protect indigo, and sales of the crop supported the "ruling class," then levees mattered politically as well as economically. Levees, land, and cash crops (money): their value varied hand in hand.80

Comparatively few colonists shared in the indigo boom, but all landowners had to keep levees repaired to protect their own improvements. However, after the large-scale levee failures of 1735 and 1737, some of the less-motivated colonists mistrusted the worth of levees and neglected general maintenance. Low-water years that followed lulled them into indifference. The threat of flooding in 1743, on the other hand, raised the specter of crop failure in the midst of the highest indigo prices ever known. Louisiana needed 1743 to be a banner crop year. Therefore, well-bred and ambitious settlers--especially the indigo elite--insisted on the immediate repair of the levee line. Louis XV's government responded with a new land ordinance for Louisiana. It stated that inhabitants had until January 1, 1744, to complete levees in front of their properties on pain of forfeiture to the Crown. Where the 1728 edict could be construed to authorize levee construction, the 1743 ordinance made the connection explicit--build the levee or lose the land. With variations, this principle was imbedded in the practice of levee building on the Mississippi for the next century.81
Land owners in French Louisiana did not pay a tax, per se, on their real estate. Rather, they held it in a quasi-feudal arrangement that included some labor obligations. As in France, land ownership did not divorce a proprietor from duties owed to the lord from whom he received it. In fact, before the Crown annulled Bienville's large concessions in 1728, he had behaved rather like a manorial lord. Germans, Jesuits, and Canadians "bought" pieces of Bienville's land and received titles, but were still obliged to pay him six to eight livres annually per arpent and to perform two days of corvee duty per arpent, as well as to bring him two capons per year. (These, by the way, are roosters which had been castrated to improve the quality of the meat). Even the wealthy planter Nicholas Chauvin de la Freniere, who settled at Tchoupitoulas in 1719, accepted feudal terms from Bienville for a grazing pasture and timber stand of seventeen arpents on the Mississippi. Chauvin was Bienville's social equal, but he entered a dependent legal relationship by accepting land on these conditions. Seeing medieval terms of land tenure in a colonial property conveyance makes it easier to understand how a servitude or obligation to build levees could be a condition of title. When the French Council of State dispossessed Bienville in 1728, it not only took a swipe at land speculators, but also removed a would-be manorial lord from setting up claims that rivaled the King's. Thus, the attack on Bienville was entirely in
keeping with the French political heritage of centralization under the Crown. Louis XV may not have required his "tenants"—the riparian grantees of Louisiana—to ship capons to Versailles, but their duty to build levees was attached to the soil. And this duty lay well within the French tradition of the royal corvee. Levee building, road maintenance, and militia duty were all forms of public service owed to the high seigneur—the King of France—from whom proprietors received their land. The fact that such duties were in the interest of the levee-building society made them easier to enforce. One imagines that with effective lobbying from the right sort of people, the King could be prompted to command whatever those right people wanted. In 1743, the well-bred wanted money, and the King wanted indigo. Voila! An edict to build levees on the Mississippi. Proprietors who would not comply—whether from stubbornness, indifference, or incapacity—faced eviction. Proprietors most likely to comply were those who both needed levees and possessed the capital and labor resources to build them; namely, those whose slaves were farming cash crops on the riverfront. To state it bluntly: money, power, and coercion brought the French colonial levee line to its completion.82

As an example of how the levee-building requirement of 1743 could affect individuals, observe the case of Jacques Roquiny, the overseer of the King's plantation, who founded a plantation of his own at English Turn in 1743. On
December 23, 1745, Roquiny died, leaving four minor children. He left instructions for the children to remain on his plantation under the care of a friend, Jean Baptiste Provenche. Provenche, however, declined to accept this responsibility and explained to the colony's probate court, the Superior Council, that the eldest child was too young to serve as guardian for the others. More importantly, they did not have the capacity to perform required public duties, such as the levee repairs. Thus, the heirs' ability to retain the property was endangered. To prevent foreclosure and an outright re-granting, Provenche asked the Council for permission to lease the estate—"plantation and slaves . . . as promptly as possible, as they are perishable goods"—to someone who could manage the place and get its levees repaired in time to satisfy the duties of ownership. Otherwise, the Roquiny orphans must forfeit the land. If this seems harsh, bear in mind that without levee repair, the property would suffer damage as well as injure those around it. The Council allowed a Sieur Darby to lease the plantation for 1,550 livres per year. Terms included the use of ten slaves, six cows, and two bulls. As tenant, Darby had to maintain its levees and drainage ditches, keep the front cleared for the passage of pedestrians, and send the Roquiny negroes to do "their duty in the public work to which the plantation is subject."83

The wording in Darby's contract makes it appear as if the ancient corvee obligation of feudal tenants to lords
was becoming a public work. That is, a duty of citizen­ship which landowners and slaveowners owed to the royal government. It is ironic, perhaps, that proprietors met their civic duties by supplying slaves as proxies, but such was the system that evolved on the lower Mississippi. In building levees on orders from the King, slaveowners resembled vassals with troops to do his will. The King's civil representatives, the colonial governor and intendant, administered the edict; his military lieutenants, the local commandants, could evict delinquents; and the Superior Council acted as a court of appeal to negotiate compromises or issue judgments.®4

After 1743, little innovation occurred in the practice of levee building under the French. The pattern was set. Nor did initiative for change come from higher up; Louis XV evidently cared more for his amusements and mistresses than for colonial improvements. Also, his government prosecuted the War of the Austrian Succession and the Seven Year's War. As a result, Louisiana's budget was little more than crumbs. For example, the post of engineer-in-chief in Louisiana was allowed to lapse for a time. In the early 1750s, a second-rate engineer, Bernard De Verges, received the appointment with a salary of less than 4,000 livres per annum, although the same position had paid 8,000 livres in 1726 under the Company of the Indies. A study of De Verges's duties up to his death in 1766 indicates that he was not assigned to levee projects, but worked in mapping
and reconnaissance, fortifications, surveying, public buildings, and Indian expeditions. Like many officers in Louisiana, De Verges used profitable sidelines to supplement his paycheck, and these must have influenced his decision to stay in Louisiana. For instance, De Verges had a two-thirds interest in a seventeen-arpent indigo plantation called "Trianon," located three miles upriver from New Orleans on the west bank. His estate inventory shows that the house measured fifty feet long, with eleven rooms and front and rear galleries. In addition, De Verges's townhouse on Rue Bienville near Rue Chartres may have doubled as a cabaret. How else to explain the presence of three card tables, 92 china plates, 120 drinking glasses, and 291 empty bottles? Whatever his sources of income, the gilded, glazed, and damask-upholstered chaise in which he traveled must have marked De Verges as a leading citizen. Yet his contribution to levee construction was limited to the river frontage at "Trianon." 85

No, it was not engineers, but private persons who built Louisiana's rural levees. Landowners might copy the shape of the New Orleans levee or the embankments designed by planter-engineers for their own estates, but rural proprietors bore sole legal responsibility for the levees on their own land. In this way, small grants close together provided continuous levee coverage. Notwithstanding, the principal settled area remained confined to about forty five miles of riverfront until the 1760s. Leveed
Louisiana developed intensively, rather than extensively, for the last thirty years of the French colonial era.\textsuperscript{86}

Two levee-building communities were in place—French and German. Both had a material interest in the building and maintenance of levees, but the French contribution was of greater social significance. Their input led to the development of a framework for coercion in public works. French elites were in the best position to profit from levees and to pressure the government to require their construction. French planters, as military officers and civil or corporate bureaucrats, understood the importance of coercion. Germans built levees for themselves, but were not in a position to force others to do the same. Apart from Commandant Karl D'Arensbourg, Louisiana's Germans lacked authority and apparently had no training in the organization of public works. On the other hand, French officials did possess management skills, were familiar with the corvee tradition from France, and exercised authority as executors of royal law in the levee-building community.

As for the black slaves, although they did much levee building for the French, they were not full participants in the levee-building community because they had no choice but to follow orders. Of course, all colonial settlers were subjects who ultimately took orders from the King of France, but white settlers did have mobility. They could leave the riverside or stay. By their very presence as continuing landowners, they chose to build levees and to be
part of a community which depended upon regimentation for its survival. All of them either had to perform the allotted tasks, or relinquish their property, thereby resigning from full participation in the community.

Without doubt, the goals and interests of elite French colonists brought leveed Louisiana into existence, particularly those settlers who prospered from agriculture and land development. Sketches of individuals such as Pauger, Du Breuil, and de La Tour provide glimpses of motives which led them to levee the Mississippi. But each of these men was somewhat extraordinary in terms of their high degree of involvement in levee building. For most colonists, once the requirements were established, the building of levees was simply one duty among many in their normal routine.

To represent a more typical member of the French levee-building community, one turns to the example of Jean Charles La Maze de Pradel. This gentleman was neither intellectually distinguished, nor heroic, but his career illustrated many characteristics of the Frenchmen who originally caused the building of levees. Most importantly, his personal letters to French relatives survive. These private documents chronicle de Pradel's goals and priorities in detail, thus revealing the variety of his pursuits and his constant scrambling for wealth through the use of floodplain resources. Although de Pradel aimed primarily at self-promotion, his activities and those of
his peers led, ultimately, to the development of leveed Louisiana. Too, de Pradel is "typical" in that his career strategies were utterly conventional by the standards of the levee-building planter class. Like many of them, he started out in Louisiana as a low-ranking military officer, poor in his own right, but ended his life as a wealthy indigo planter. De Pradel's letters show a sequential progression of fortune-building through the use of military privilege, family loans, credit purchases of land and slaves, social climbing through friendship and marriage, and a heady variety of money-making efforts, including trade, manufacturing, and commercial agriculture.87

A background study of Jean Charles de Pradel reveals that he came into the world in 1692 as the third son of the mayor of Uzerche, in Limousin, France. His family, the La Maze, were unremarkable nobles of the robe. The three sons attended the College St. Michel in Paris. The eldest (b. 1684) inherited the family's title and estate, the second entered the priesthood, and the third, Jean Charles de Pradel, joined the military. Their uncle earned promotions in the Marines during the War of the Spanish Succession, so de Pradel attached himself to that branch of service. And, since the Marine Minister administered French colonies, when de Pradel became an ensign he was assigned for duty in Louisiana. De Pradel arrived in the colony in 1715, aged about twenty-three. As an ensign, he earned 40 livres per month, plus rations, shelter, and clothing. In addition,
officers could draw excess rations from the commissary and sell them as a pay supplement. De Pradel seems to have abused the privilege because in July of 1719, the company director in Louisiana had him arrested for illegal merchandising. His goods were confiscated, he forfeited almost a year's salary, and returned to France in disgrace.  

Soon after de Pradel's retreat to France, the Mississippi Bubble collapsed. He feared the Company of the Indies would be suppressed. Instead, officials were instructed to function until the Company paid its debts. By early summer of 1722, de Pradel was back in Louisiana chasing Swiss deserters who had fled their posts for lack of food. Around 1723 the colony endured terrible shortages of provisions, and De Pradel again profitted by his access to the commissary. Now a captain, he drew larger rations. Also, he established a friendship with de La Chaise, the company director, whose influence helped his career. For instance, when Bienville curtailed Captain de Pradel's entry to the commissary, de La Chaise took his friend's part. De Pradel moved from Bienville's orbit into the circle of de La Chaise.  

In 1724, Captain de Pradel led a detail of men to the Lower Missouri River to build a French fort. He was assigned to this because he, like so many others in early Louisiana, had an engineering background and had studied a curriculum of mathematics and architecture in France. Before his departure, de Pradel bought a slave, his first
known slave purchase, for 1,500 livres on credit. In Upper Louisiana, it turned out that the Lower Missouri outpost was ill-sited for "defense." Officials had planned the fort as a base for cultivating the Osage tribe with liquor, guns, and trade goods. Instead, the French learned that they needed to repel the British at Fort Chartres in the Illinois country, where foreign interlopers were pushing Jamaica rum and Sheffield cutlery. The enemy's activities threatened to draw Native Americans into a British alliance through a more vigorous distribution network. De Pradel soon became commandant at Fort Chartres and set up his serving woman as a saloon keeper. Meanwhile, the locals bitterly complained of de Pradel for monopolizing the Indian trade. The 1725 census of Fort Chartres shows de Pradel with two slaves. At the close of this tour of duty, Captain de Pradel returned to France, where in 1727 he rejoiced to learn that the Company of the Indies was changing its commercial policy. The Company would forgo monopolistic privileges and let private persons trade in Louisiana! In 1728 when his father died, the eldest brother paid de Pradel 800 livres of his inheritance and loaned him money to buy five slaves. Again, de Pradel returned to New Orleans, full of charm and news from home, thereby securing the favor of Governor Perier and Director de La Chaise. Perier decided it was excellent for officers to put down roots at New Orleans. In a major policy statement, he arranged that officers who bought land would
no longer be detailed away to serve in the wilderness. Officers like de Pradel who engaged in business would be allowed to pursue their activities undisturbed, as long as they bought land and improved it according to the law. Perier explained that the officers had formerly viewed their residence in Louisiana as exile, but he expected that the new policy would cause them to identify their interests with that of the colony. In consequence, the officers would dedicate their capital and enterprise to local improvements. In Perier's words, this "will be the true way to be tranquil."90

De Pradel's letters to his family in France in the fall of 1729 reveal how this ambitious young man used every opportunity to improve his fortune and status. By this time, he owned seven slaves and a land grant two miles below New Orleans. He told his family he would put two slaves and a white man on the land to cut trees, then sell the wood, plant the land, and grow crops. It would produce rice and also corn in abundance if he could prevent overflows. He did not mention levees specifically in the letter, but the new land law of 1728 made it prudent to construct them. Surely it was through levees that de Pradel would try to prevent the overflows he dreaded. De Pradel intended to grow foodstuffs for his own household and sell the surplus in New Orleans. Some of the wood would be converted to barrel staves, and de Pradel claimed that his people could make 100,000 staves on the place at
140 livres a thousand. To save rent, he bought a house in town which doubled as a cabaret for dispensing wines and liquor. The woman from Fort Chartres would tend bar, and the well-heeled Nicholas Chauvin de la Freniere joined as a partner. Furthermore, De Pradel asked his eldest brother for a loan of 2,000 livres to open a shop. He already peddled wine, cheese, lace, and sundries, presumably at the levee, but it would be more respectable and efficient to have a regular store. Since approximately 3,500 slaves and many poor people in Louisiana needed shoes, de Pradel saw another avenue for increasing his income. To make it even better, Perier and de La Chaise were interested in wooden shoes as a service to the poor and the planters. De Pradel naturally wanted to oblige them. De Pradel asked his brother to send two reliable wooden shoe makers as indentured servants from Uzerche. Of course, de Pradel still drew a salary and rations as an officer, but thanks to Perier's notions of social progress, did not now have to fear the inconvenience of leaving his businesses to go on expeditions. His fortunes seemed to prosper.91

Yet, around 1730, de Pradel's letters tell of bad news and setbacks. For example, De Pradel's business agent died in the massacre at Fort Rosalie and some of the scalped victims owed him 3,000 livres. De Pradel's champion, Director de La Chaise, also died, in New Orleans. However, this was not all bad news. Before dying, de La Chaise sent for his daughter Alexandrine to be the Captain's bride, and
with his death, she inherited a considerable fortune. After the marriage, the de Pradels visited France, where de Pradel estimated his worth at 20,000 livres and borrowed 3,000 livres against his inheritance to finance further activities. They kept Alexandrine's legacy intact as collateral. Nevertheless, more setbacks were in store. During their sojourn, the power structure in Louisiana underwent a major shift. The Company of the Indies gave up its charter, Perier was recalled, and Bienville returned to Louisiana as royal governor. Alexandrine's father had led the movement to get Bienville investigated and to have his land grants annulled. Suddenly career moves which had been so beneficial started working to de Pradel's disadvantage. On his return to Louisiana, he found that he had been assigned to command the skeleton of Fort Rosalie! Fortunately, de Pradel found competent associates to run his businesses. The store did well, and his partner also kept an outdoor stall. They had two slaves as shop assistants and conducted financial transactions for a 5 percent commission. De Pradel now estimated his worth at 60,000 livres. He also had ten slaves at work on his plantation, growing food for sale in New Orleans and cutting timber for cash sale and export.92

Governors Bienville and Perier had differing opinions about officers who put down roots in the community, at least where de Pradel was concerned. In 1733, Bienville interpreted de Pradel's behavior as dereliction of duty and
complained to the Marine Minister that he refused to be detailed for service in the Illinois country. The Captain claimed to be sick, but Bienville commented that his malady was money-making. De Pradel did not want to leave a profitable liquor store.  

De Pradel must have worried about flooding as soon as he became a farmer in the floodplain in 1729. However, although his first land purchase had been an inexpensive timbered tract without improvements, his interest in levees and overflows escalated to new heights in 1736. He joined with Guillaume de Lange to buy Perier's plantation, "Mon Plaisir," which was located across the river from New Orleans. The purchase of this highly improved plantation involved high risks and deep pockets. De Pradel and de Lange agreed to pay Perier 85,000 livres for "Mon Plaisir," which included livestock and slaves, in six annual installments from 1737 to 1742. Unfortunately, setbacks like the flood of 1737, the general disrepair of Louisiana's levees, and rock-bottom indigo prices at the start of the 1740s interrupted the partners' cashflow. By the due date of 1742, they had paid little or nothing of what they owed Perier. The ex-Governor complained against his friend to the French government, and the Marine Minister wrote the colonial Commissary-General to pressure the partners to come to terms. Seventy to eighty thousand livres remained outstanding. The Minister insisted on a 4 percent penalty and a refinance to terminate in July of 1745. As it turned
out, de Pradel had to borrow money in 1750 from his eldest brother to finish the payments eight years later and had to pay part of de Lange's debt, as well. A letter from May of 1751 mentioned that de Pradel was sending 1,635 pounds of de Lange's indigo worth 6,500 livres, but the proceeds went on de Pradel's account. Apparently de Lange grew it, but could not pay his share of "Mon Plaisir." Hence, he now worked for de Pradel.94

Convulsed with worry over his financial commitments, De Pradel fretted, could not sleep, could eat nothing but rice, endured chronic fever, and complained of dysentery, but he continued as enterprising as ever. Business activities described in letters from the early 1750s included a sawmill, ship provisioning, brick making, and money lending. The spring of 1753 brought a fine crop of 1,000 artichokes which his vegetable vendors in the city sold for six sous, three derniers apiece. De Pradel also raised cattle. Since too much of last year's lumber remained in his warehouse, he said he was cutting prices to move it out for cash— a colonial "over-stocked" sale. De Pradel had much lumber on hand because of the canal he dug in 1751. Like many plantation owners on the Mississippi, de Pradel cut a canal five feet deep, ten feet wide, and sixty arpents long, leading from the swamp to his sawmill at the riverside. Sawmills operated at the levee just like rice mills, with water pouring through a sluice in the levee to turn the wheel and power the saw. De Pradel said
the timber canal had been an excellent investment. Otherwise, he would have to wait until water rose 2 1/2 feet deep over the ground each year to haul the logs. Crops would not grow on a flooded field, but could grow on the sides of a canal. Without a canal, he would also lose some milling time. The sawmill could only run when the river was high and pressing against the levee. But if he waited till high water to bring the wood to the mill, sawing time would go to waste. It was better to stockpile during the dry season and saw in flood season. Many activities on de Pradel's plantation were planned with an eye to flow-technology and efficient process engineering.  

Another money maker for de Pradel was the boiling of candle wax. Numerous colonial officials promoted this industry, and de Pradel enjoyed considerable success with it. In one letter, he wrote that he had eight negresses who had been boiling bayberries for almost a month to render the wax. As soon as other slaves had gathered and stored his food crops, de Pradel would assign twenty five more negresses and two male drivers to the boiling. By February, they should have manufactured ten thousand pounds of candles for sale.  

Obviously slaves were critical tools in de Pradel's operations. In the mid-1750s, he told his brother that his slaves were getting old and that he needed a dozen to restock. He also meant to start growing indigo. It may come as a surprise that this paragon of enterprise had
delayed so long before moving into indigo production. His partner de Lange had grown the dyestuff, but de Pradel concentrated on other activities. Why switch to indigo? De Pradel said that lumber prices had dropped because a dozen sawmills now competed for business, the price of candle wax varied too much, and his brick factory was overstocked. "I must, therefore, make some indigo." De Pradel estimated that he would need twenty more slaves to break new ground on the plantation and cultivate fifty arpents. To secure these slaves, de Pradel and his family exploited social connections for favors from the government. During the 1750s, Alexandrine de Pradel lived in New Orleans, but Jean Charles at "Mon Plaisir." One might say that he worked the plantation, while she worked the capitol, because in 1755 his wife and son were very thick with Governor and Madame Kerlerec. At their invitation, de Pradel entertained a party of twenty five elite ladies and gentlemen at "Mon Plaisir." On visits to the city, Kerlerec "overwhelmed" de Pradel with "many courtesies." Colonial governors in Louisiana enjoyed mercantile privileges that made them popular companions for a planter, including the first choice of slaves from every new cargo and automatic credit terms for slave purchases. De Pradel's son mentioned his father's needs and plans to Kerlerec, and the obliging Governor insisted that de Pradel use his first choice privilege and easy credit to obtain the number of slaves he wished. Needless to say, plain
people like the German Coast farmers never got a chance at favors of this type. Rich and well-connected colonists, on the other hand, took full advantage of such opportunities as their social status and influence peddling allowed.  

De Pradel's indigo project at "Mon Plaisir" proceeded all through 1755. By mid-April his slaves had cleared and fenced more than eighty arpents of land "as black as compost." Naturally the plantation was protected by levees and ditches to ensure proper growing conditions. De Pradel expected the cleared fields would yield 4,000 pounds of indigo the next year. At the time he wrote, the price for indigo stood at seven to eight livres per pound, and he could not conceive it dropping below five. Therefore, he confidently expected that eighty arpents to yield 20,000 to 32,000 livres in one crop year, provided the river and rainfall cooperated. By late November of 1755, de Pradel had bought twenty three new slaves and was finishing six indigo processing units. Also, he had largely completed the mansion at "Mon Plaisir," one of the colony's finest houses, which reputable engineers had appraised at 125,000 livres. Governor Kerlerrec compared it to the hotels of Parisian tax-farmers. De Pradel said that if he had not supplied the lumber, bricks, and labor himself, the sum they named would not have built it, much less paid for the chandeliers, oil paintings, tapestries, mirrors, and formal gardens with which it was adorned. No better name could have been chosen for the place than "Mon Plaisir"--My
Pleasure. In letter after letter, de Pradel lovingly detailed his plans for further embellishments. "Mon Plaisir" seemed to culminate his dream of attaining status of the type his eldest brother had inherited at their family estate in France. Of course, the dwelling stood well off the ground on piers. De Pradel built levees, but why risk one's most precious possessions? A levee break next door would flood him even if his own embankments held, so an elevated main floor was simply a wise thing to do. As de Pradel remarked to his brother, "although we are in a different world than France, we like our ease, and we look after our comforts as well as we can."98

Poor de Pradel. As soon as he got his indigo facilities ready, the Seven Years' War deranged shipping and brought maritime insurance rates to up as high as 50 percent of the value of the cargo. He did not relish paying insurance on a projected six thousand pounds of indigo at these rates. Instead, he would concentrate on vegetables and other goods that did not involve shipping.99

Conditions worsened in Louisiana, completely beyond de Pradel's control. For example, the war interrupted payment schedules on bills of exchange. Letters of exchange drafted in 1758 were not paid until 1769 and 1770, and exchange letters from 1759 were simply canceled. Louisiana also suffered a monetary collapse with rampant inflation and scarcities of specie. Attempts to save the public credit proved ruinous to individuals. De Pradel wrote his
brother in 1763 that the only thing to do with depreciating currency was to spend it quickly. He, for instance, bought a farm near the city where he put cattle, sheep, poultry, and three gardeners. De Pradel reasoned that groceries would sell no matter what happened.100

The worst news de Pradel received was of a personal nature. His only son, a marine officer "amiable and generally loved by all," bought the Jesuits' plantation after the Order's expulsion from the colony in 1763, but then died of yellow fever. At this tragedy, the senior de Pradel's spirit was crushed. He told his brother, the Abbe La Maze, of upcoming business ventures but admitted: "Here are my plans; God will make his own." Financial turmoil plus the loss of his son exacerbated chronic digestive problems. De Pradel wrote that the mere thought of chewing sickened him. He sometimes consumed nothing but water and vomited that. All seemed lost. De Pradel now saw no future in Louisiana's enterprises. He wrote the Abbe that he planned to tear down the Jesuits' buildings--their scientific-farming facilities, brick-making sheds, craft shops, and indigo installations, perhaps even their chapel--in order to salvage and sell the lumber and bricks. At the plantation, the Jesuits had run a model farm where they demonstrated techniques of processing and cultivating cash crops. They were, in fact, like a colonial Peace Corps, putting Christian charity to work in the community through the application of science to everyday life. De Pradel,
disgusted by the failure of his dreams, mentally attacked their skills and the tools of a civilization which now seemed to betray him. After tearing the buildings away, he meant to turn the model plantation into a cow pasture, as if returning the ungrateful swamp to its natural state. Cattle could graze in a swamp, yet here was one of the most highly developed properties in Louisiana being judged as unfit for cattle because the ground was "encumbered" by the Jesuits' improvements. But what good were cash-crop plantation exports that could not be sold? In times like these it was better to make groceries than indigo. As for his own business affairs, de Pradel feared he would have to sell land, slaves, and cherished furnishings to pay pressing debts. Instead, amid his troubles, de Pradel himself died on March 28, 1764.\textsuperscript{101}

An obvious analogy can be drawn between de Pradel's desperation and that of a planter suffering loss in a devastating flood. De Pradel's frantic state of mind, his rejection of hope, and despair of future progress, were the results of materialism and of material wealth destroyed by events beyond his control. The thoughts were not prompted by a physical crevasse--his letters from major flood years have not survived--but from de Pradel's feelings one can imagine the terror of men whose levees were actually breaking. His thoughts represent the plight of a flood victim overwhelmed by water, debts, and a sudden loss of income. The ruin, not only of goods, but of dreams, lives,
and fortunes, could easily follow an overflow in a planters' world based on credit. Cargos at least could be insured, but who would insure a crop? Planters did not like uncertainty and attacked variables in their lives. Levees were one tactic for reducing risk. Nor would an active, enterprising man like Jean Charles de Pradel let a river stand between him and his goals, if he could help it. Sadly, some things were beyond his control. De Pradel could but build the levees, keep them repaired, plant his fields, and pester neighbors to keep their own levees intact. And he could pray.

As to the dimensions of Louisiana's levees at the end of the French colonial period, levee expert Caleb Forshey concluded that late French levees measured three to four feet high, with smaller crowns than in 1734, but wider bases. The two foot high, six foot wide proportions of the early 1730s proved inadequate in 1735 and 1737. Experience with flooding and levee failure in these years led to an upgrade in height and base. The new dimensions caused levees to be stronger and more stable, shaped more like a rampart and less like a road. Nevertheless, levees continued as multi-purpose structures which did not simply exclude water but also provided water power for mills, channels for irrigation, and footpaths for travel.

Flood heights remained rather low during the French period for several reasons. Relatively little of the Mississippi's drainage basin had been cleared for
cultivation at this time, so runoff water flowed gradually into the upper river systems and did not normally descend on Louisiana's leveed settlements in overwhelming quantities. Much of the floodplain remained unleveed, which allowed the water to spread over a wide area rather than run constricted in a single, narrow channel. The natural outlets of the Mississippi were open, and they carried floodwaters out of the main channel into the bayous and backswamps. Too, the levees themselves did not aim at the total exclusion of water, but left many channels for it to run through the levee, across the field, and to the swamps behind the concessions. All of these factors meant that levees built under the French did not have to withstand enormous water pressure. Their small dimensions sufficed to control average overflows and, though not easy to build, the construction was not absolutely beyond the capacity of most households on the riverfront.

Overall, the French contribution to levee building on the Mississippi was a remarkable achievement. In less than forty five years, colonists and slaves under the rule of France built the first Mississippi River levee and the first rural levee lines. The French government issued the first land laws for Louisiana that tied levee requirements to land ownership as a condition of title. The French corvee tradition established a principle in Louisiana that public works are the responsibility of private persons. The French applied professional engineering skills to the
problem of levee building and levee design. French settlement policies allowed the founding of a major leveed city as Louisiana's colonial capitol and permitted the establishment of two levee-building communities—French and German—as rural proprietors. The government encouraged commercial farming on a scale appropriate to the resources of each group—one primarily for exports, the other for domestic consumption. The French also provided slaves to those who could use them profitably. French landowners of noble birth and military upbringing brought their ability to command and deploy to the task of levee building. The French also crafted a legal framework which told landowners to build levees or forfeit their land. This principle served as the basis for levee construction well into the nineteenth century. New settlers moved into the Mississippi Valley after the end of the French period, but the need for levees remained. The newcomers would imitate and improve upon what the French established. And the natural rhythms of the swamp environment led them to create new levee-building communities, with laws adapted to new conditions, beginning with those of the Spanish regime.

ENDNOTES

1Antoine Simon Le Page du Pratz, Historie de la Louisiana (Paris: De Bure, 1758), reprinted as The History of Louisiana, Translated from the French of M. Le Page du Pratz, ed. Joseph G. Tregle, Jr. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press for the American Revolution Bicentennial Commission, 1975), 160; Andrew A. Humphreys and Henry L. Abbott, Report upon the Physics and Hydraulics of the Mississippi River; upon the Protection of the Alluvial Region against Overflow; and upon the Deepening of the Mouths, Professional Papers of the Corps of Topographical
2 For a discussion of military engineering and fortifications technology in seventeenth and early eighteenth-century France, see Christopher Duffy, *The Fortress in the Age of Vauban and Frederick the Great*. Warren Hamilton Lewis discusses the ostentatious splendor of the levee in *The Splendid Century: Life in the France of Louis XIV* (London: William Sloane, 1953; reprint, Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1953), 45-47. John C. Rule says Louis XIV and his domestic administrators made the presentation of power into an art form, and were "craftsmen" in the use of behavior and appearance to cultivate awe. That such tactics sometimes found an unsympathetic audience is reflected in the remarks of an English diplomat, Matthew Prior, who sneered at the egotism displayed at Versailles. According to Prior, Louis XIV's image "is strutting in every panel and galloping over one's head in every ceiling, and if he turns to spit he must see himself in person or his Vice-regent the Sun." Qtd. in John C. Rule, "Court, Capital, and Councils in the Reign of Louis XIV," in *The Sun King: Louis XIV and the New World. An Exhibition organized by the Louisiana State Museum*, Studies in Louisiana Culture, vol. 3 (New Orleans: The Louisiana State Museum Foundation, 1984), 41-44.


4 Settlement on the Lower Mississippi was intended by France as a means of populating the riverfront near the Gulf with workmen, soldiers, and families in sufficient numbers to defend the government's possession of the Mississippi River. If they settled in contiguous concessions within a small area on the riverside, they could muster quickly to repel invasion or insurrection. This would not be the case if their concessions straggled at random into the remote interior. See intent of government in its settlement location policy in "Order issued by his Majesty the King of France in Regard to Concessions in Louisiana," 10 August 1728, Archives, Louisiana Historical Society, New Orleans, La., published as "Edict of the Council of State at Versailles, August 10,
1728, Annulling All Concessions on the Mississippi," Louisiana Historical Quarterly 10 (April 1927): 166-75.

5Caleb G. Forshey, "The Levees of the Mississippi River," Transactions of the American Society of Civil Engineers, paper presented 25 August 1874, 3 (1875): 284. For a glowing account of the resources of the floodplain by a regional promoter from the last century, see Frank Tompkins, Riparian Lands of the Mississippi River: Past, Present, Prospective (Chicago: A. L. Swift & Co., 1901).


7Members of De Soto's expedition described the homes of Native Americans in the floodplains of the Mississippi Valley. Natives built on natural high ground when available and raised artificial mounds in areas that regularly overflowed. Chiefs' houses stood atop mounds. Natives built on poles, with moveable cross beams for keeping the floor above overflow. Galleries surrounded living quarters on four sides and provided storage for food and other goods during floods. De la Vega, qtd. in Harrison, 52. The Medora Site, in West Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana, is an extant prehistoric moundsite built by Native Americans in the floodplain. It features two mounds at either end of a plaza. One, a flat-topped platform pyramid, rises 13 feet high with sides 125 feet in length. On top sits a smaller circular platform, 3 feet high and 25 in circumference. The mound at the opposite end is but 2 feet high and 100 feet in diameter. That mounds had domestic as well as ceremonial uses is shown by potsherds and implements they contain. Robert W. Newman and Nancy W. Hawkins, Louisiana Prehistory, 2d ed., Anthropological Study Series (Baton Rouge: Louisiana Archaelogical Survey and Antiquities Commission, Department of Culture, Recreation, and Tourism, 1993), 26-27. See also George I. Quimby, "The Medora Site, West Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana," Anthropological Series 24, Publication 664, (Chicago: Field Museum of Natural History, 1951): 81-135. Newman and Hawkins's bibliography refers to writings on mound-building cultures of Louisiana and the Lower Mississippi, including those of: Poverty

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Point, Tchefuncte, Marksville, Troyville-Coles Creek, Caddo, Plaquemine, and Mississippian. See also Fred B. Kniffen, Hiram P. Gregory, and George A. Stokes, eds., The Historic Indian Tribes of Louisiana, from 1542 to the Present (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987); and, William G. McIntire, Prehistoric Indian Settlements of the Changing Mississippi River Delta, Coastal Studies Series (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1958).


The machinations are described in Marcel Giraud, Histoire de la Louisiane francaise, vol. 3, L'Epoque de John Law, 1717-1720 (Paris, 1974). A translation is planned by Louisiana State University Press. Father Charlevoix, a Jesuit dispatched to Louisiana in 1720 by the Duke of Orleans, arrived at New Orleans at the beginning of 1722. Before leaving France in 1720, he heard of the city having eight hundred good houses and five parishes. Charlevoix found New Orleans to be about a hundred huts, a
wooden warehouse, two or three houses which would not be thought decorative in a French village, and a congregation meeting in half of a store. Letter XXXI, New Orleans, 10 Jan. 1722, by Pierre Francois Xavier de Charlevoix, *Journal of a Voyage to North-America, Undertaken by Order of the French King, Containing the Geographical Description and Natural History of that Country, Particularly Canada . . . in a Series of Letters to the Duchess of Lesdiguieres* (Paris: Didot, 1744; London: R. & J. Dodsley, 1761; Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms, 1966), II, 275-76.


12Settlers could get land in Louisiana under the authority of an edict of October 12, 1716, by Louis XV's Council of State. It allowed settlers to hold lands they improved and cultivated, along with adjacent unimproved tracts, in concessions of two to four arpents at the waterfront which ran forty to sixty arpents into the interior. Grantees had two years to make improvements or the land would be forfeited to the Crown for regranting. Grantees had to perform seigneurial obligations to the King if such duties were later established in Louisiana. They could not sell the land until they put two-thirds of the entire grant in cultivation. See "The Edict of Louis XV of October 12, 1716, relating to grants of land in the Colony and in Dauphine Island and regulating future land grants in Louisiana," trans. Henry Plauche Dart, in "The First Law Regulating Land Grants in French Colonial Louisiana," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 14 (July 1931): 346-48. See also "Documents Concerning Bienville's Lands in Louisiana, 1719-1739," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 10 (Jan.-Oct. 1927): 5-17, 161-75, 346-80, 539-61. Bienville's construction report, March 1719, is in Archives Nationales de France, Archives des Colonies, Cl3a, 5, fol. 209. List of twelve concession holders at New Orleans, 28 April 1719, is in Archives des Colonies, B. 42 bis, fol. 252. A settler named Pellerin told of three houses and a Company store at New Orleans in April 1719, prior to being badgered by Hubert into a transfer to New Orleans. See Pellerin, Arsenal Archive, Mss. 4497, fol. 54, qtd. in du Terrage, 190. Marc-Antoine Hubert, though appointed Director General of the New Orleans Counter of the Company of the West, forsook New Orleans, setting himself up as a rival land developer to Bienville. Hubert preferred his grant at Natchez and lured new concessionaires, like Pellerin and Le
Page du Pratz, away from New Orleans. On this topic, see du Terrage, 182, 186, 190, and du Pratz, 23-24. For Le Page du Pratz's first glimpse of "New Orleans"—a hut built for Bienville and lived in by M. Paillout, his successor as commandant—see du Pratz, 21.

13 Even in 1718, Bienville suggested the merits of a canal from the Mississippi to Lake Pontchartrain as a means of draining the site. See Bienville, 6 June 1718, Archives des Colonies, C13c, 4, fol. 14. The canal would require about a mile and a half of digging and thus was far beyond the capacities of the workforce then available. His admission to the Company that levees and a canal might be necessary is appended to a dispatch of Larcebault, 15 April 1719, qtd. in du Terrage, 189. Le Page du Pratz's reasons for going to Natchez are in Du Pratz, 21-24. To context French Natchez with the Louisiana settlements, see Jack D. Elliott, Jr., "The Fort at Natchez and the Colonial Origins of Mississippi," Journal of Mississippi History 52 (1990): 159-97; and, Jay Gitlin, "Crossroads on the Chinaberry Coast: Natchez and the Creole World of the Mississippi Valley," Journal of Mississippi History 55 (1993): 365-84.

14 The three-pronged flood control plan is described by Pellerin, [1 August] 1720, Arsenal, Mss. 4497, fol. 54, qtd. in du Terrage, 195-96. A disabled colonial carpenter, Andre Penicault, in his manuscript account of Louisiana, says that Bienville's associates labored at New Orleans throughout 1720 and made "considerable progress."


15 The colonist Pellerin wrote, in connection with New Orleans, its flood, and modes of protection, that "at present, a great many slaves or negroes from Guinea are labouring to make it habitable." Pellerin, [1 August] 1720, Arsenal, Mss. 4497, fol. 54, qtd. in du Terrage, 195. "Etat de la Louisiane," a manuscript report from June 1720, gives the population of New Orleans and vicinity. From the workers available, it is clear that the causeway and drainage canal could not have been built or seriously attempted. Both structures would extend a mile or more through a swamp forest to the ridge along Bayou St. John. The best that settlers and slaves could do would be to heap "a sound dike on the river bank" to protect the area where they lived. The 1720 levee would have been quite limited in extent—not the full-blown embankment constructed later to front all eleven squares of the Vieux Carre. Pellerin is qtd. in du Terrage, 195. It is the opinion of Baron de Villiers du Terrage that the slaves Pellerin observed at New Orleans in late summer, 1720, were building levees,
rather than other flood works. Pellerin does not specify, but such is the logical conclusion. Du Terrage, 194-95. Further confirmation comes from a sketch of New Orleans in 1721 by Louis Francois Du Mont de Montigny, found in Paris in the Archives of the Ministere de la Marine, Service Hydrographique de la Marine, 4044c, 62, and reproduced in du Terrage, 221. The sketch shows sixteen buildings beside the Mississippi, with a stretch of forest between them and another group of buildings on the banks of Bayou St. Jean. The structures on the Mississippi are labelled as being a church, magazine, guardhouse, bakery, officers' houses, habitations, etc. Parallel to the river, in front of the buildings, is a double line labelled "fosse," which designates a ditch or trench. In the narrow space between the trench and the river Du Mont drew swiggles which resemble heaps of dirt. Obviously this is the 1720 levee. It sits immediately beside the Mississippi River—the "fleuve St. Louis"—and was raised by taking dirt with a shovel to make heaps at the edge of the bank. The "fosse" remained after the levee was erected. The drawing by Du Mont de Montigny shows the random, irregular siting and small extent of New Orleans, as it appeared to Pauger and Chaville when they came to lay out the sixty-six blocks of the Vieux Carre. A map of New Orleans, dated 10 Jan. 1723 and signed by Pierre Le Blond de La Tour, is shaded to show the extent of clearings made by 1721 (prior to Pauger's arrival) and those done between 1721 and 1723 (under the engineers' superintendence). The area cleared by 1721 could be roughly described as lying between present-day Conti and St. Anne Streets from east to west, extending back from the river almost to Chartres Street. Which is to say, the cleared area requiring levee protection in 1720 would not have been more than five blocks in extent. Map from the French Archives Nationales, Paris, reproduced in Leonard V. Huber, New Orleans: A Pictorial History (New York: Bonanza Books, 1980), 24. Edna B. Freiberg, Bayou St. John in Colonial Louisiana, 1699-1803 (New Orleans: Harvey Press, 1980), 55, asserts that the New Orleans levee of 1722 measured just two feet high. For Du Breuil, see Freiberg, 45; and, Henry Plauche Dart, "The Career of Du Breuil in Louisiana," Louisiana Historical Quarterly 18 (Apr. 1935): 269-70.

The two concessionaires able to make rice in 1720 included Joseph Chauvin de Lery, one of the well-to-do Chauvins from Canada who settled at Tchoupitoulas, west of New Orleans. Joseph and his brothers, Nicolas Chauvin de la Freniere and Louis Chauvin de Beaulieu, became the richest family in colonial Louisiana. Their Tchoupitoulas improvements greatly enhanced the development of the rural area north of New Orleans which is now Carrollton. Charlevoix praised the Tchoupitoulas settlement as the best improved in the colony because of the energy and industry of Du Breuil and the Chauvins. The missionary said they
"have lost no time, and have spared themselves in nothing." Moreover, the success of Du Breuil and the Chauvins rebuked those who insulted the colony's potential. According to Charlevoix, critics were "lazy fellows, whose misery unjustly discredits a country, which is capable of producing an hundred fold, of whatever is sown in it." Letter XXXI, New Orleans, 10 Jan. 1722, Charlevoix, II, 287. Information about property and progress of settlers at New Orleans comes from "Etat de la Louisiane," June 1720, manuscript report qtd. in du Terrage, 194-95.

17"Etat de la Louisiane," June 1720, reported 250 concessionaires at New Orleans waiting on the flatboats to take them and their goods to designated grants. River Road did not exist, of course, and the riverbanks—the only ground high enough to travel on—were covered in woods and dense canebrakes. Overland travel was out of the question for reaching concessions. Yet, the flatboats were delayed, the fleet was remanded to Biloxi, and Company officials recalled the Mississippi River settlers to Biloxi. Charles Le Gac, Director of the Company of the Indies, remarked that 150 concessionaires who went to New Orleans were being detained at Biloxi, as cited in Du Terrage, 194-95. A Works Progress Administration transcript of Le Gac's "Memoir" is in the Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, La.


19George C. H. Kernion, "Reminiscences of the Chevalier Bernard Deverges, an Early Colonial Engineer of Louisiana," Louisiana Historical Quarterly 7 (Jan. 1924): 57; du Terrage, 220; Adrien de Pauger, 23 June 1721, letter intended for Comte de Toulouse, qtd. in du Terrage, 223. Pauger had been appointed an engineer in the French army in 1707, served as captain in the Navarre Regiment, and was made a Chevalier of St. Louis in 1720, according to his record, qtd. in du Terrage, 225. See also Samuel Wilson,

20 Pauger complained in March of 1721 that he could not survey streets for the vegetation at the site, qtd. in duTerrage, 195; Pauger, *New Orleans, to Engineer-in-Chief Pierre Le Blond de La Tour, Biloxi, 24 April 1721*, Ministere de la Marine, Service Hydrographique de la Marine, 4044c, 67-2, 6, telling of labor dilemmas and modifications to site choice instructions; Assistant Engineer Franquet de Chaville's mss. memoir in Archives Nationales, published as "Le Voyage en Louisiane, 1720-1724," *Journal de la Societe des Americanistes de Paris*, 4 (1903), 1st Series, 132, qtd. in Frieberg, 59. Map of New Orleans, 10 January 1723, shows area cleared prior to 1721, area cleared 1721 to 1723, and portion remaining in forest. Map from holdings of the Archives Nationales, Paris, reproduced in Huber, 25. Charlevoix traveled downriver from Natchez with Pauger beginning in late December 1721. The priest's observation of New Orleans, recorded in letters dated 10 Jan. 1722 and 26 Jan. 1722, was of a townsite still largely covered in cane and trees. Charlevoix wrote, "Imagine to yourself two hundred persons, who have been sent out to build a city, and who have settled on the bank of a great river," with no idea but to protect themselves from the weather, meanwhile "waiting till a plan is laid out for them." Pauger showed his plan to Charlevoix, but the letter-writer confided that "it will not be so easy to put it into execution, as it has been to draw it." Charlevoix, II, 276, 279, 291-92

21 Pauger to La Tour, 14 April 1721, enclosed a plan for lots to be given to "those most capable of building along the riverbank," qtd. in duTerrage, 221. That his arrangements were confirmed is attested by a copy of Colonial Board's deliberation to ratify Pauger's proposed concessions, as cited by duTerrage, 226. Pauger to La Tour, 24 April 1721, duTerrage, 224, explains his movement of the main settlement away from the Lake Pontchartrain-Bayou St. John ridge area to the banks of the Mississippi.

22 That Du Pratz agreed with Pauger and Bienville can be seen in comments about Old and New Biloxi, "settlements, which have deserved an oblivion as lasting as their duration was short." Du Pratz, 50. Pauger asked for confirmation of a concession opposite New Orleans on 22 March 1722. He stated he was settled there, had ten acres in cultivation, a house worth more than a thousand livres, a barn and four slave cabins, eleven African slaves and a Native American servant, according to duTerrage, 243. Pauger and his workers were doing agricultural capital improvements, as required by the 1716 land law. Pauger's outburst against Biloxi is in his letter of 23 June 1721, intended for the Comte de Toulouse. On 24 April 1721, Pauger wrote to de La Tour of the great blessing a garden

23Pauger, New Orleans, to Durant, 29 May 1721, complains about De Lorme's annulment of land-for-labor agreements, Archives des Colonies, Cl3a, 6, fol. 137; Chaville, "Le Voyage en Louisiane, 1720-1724," 132, qtd. in Frieberg, 59; List of 108 free workmen engaged on projects of Company of the Indies in Louisiana, 9 Nov. 1721, cited in du Terrage, 227. A list, "Officials of the Colony of Louisiana, appointed at Fort Louis, Biloxi, 1722," shows the nature of the Company's operations in Louisiana and its bureaucratic structure. Top colonial appointments were the five members of the Superior Council--de Bienville, de La Tour, de Chateaugue, de Lormes, and Bion. Two hospital officials and fourteen civilian officials worked at the headquarters at Biloxi. Staff of the New Orleans counter included: Chief Clerk Marlot, Warehouse Guard Drillard, Keeper of Provisions Le Blanc, Notary/Clerk Rossard, and an apprentice clerk. Employees at other branch offices were mostly warehouse guards and clerks, distributed as follows: Ship Island (2 employees), Natchez (2), Natchitoches (1), Illinois (3), Missouri (1), Arkansas (1), Mobile (3), Alabamas (1), and eight officials in miscellaneous posts. These conducted trading operations and distributed goods to soldiers and concessionaires. Original list is in Archives des Colonies, Cl3, and published in Charles R. Maduell, Jr., trans., The Census Tables for the French Colony of Louisiana From 1699 Through 1732 (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1972), 32-33.

24Journal of Diron d'Artaguette, entry for 6 Sept. 1722, mss. in Archives des Colonies, Cl3c, 2, fol. 190. Opposition to Pauger is recounted from report by de La Tour in du Terrage, 226. Pauger's strongest enemies were, of course, anti-Biennillists. As Bienville's "agent"--in the sense that he superintended public works Bienville wanted--he inherited Bienville's enemies. Bonnaud, Dubuisson, and D'Artaguette, Director de La Chaise and the Capuchins, to name a few, were all against Bienville. The factionalism
around him is described in "Realism and Corruption in Louisiana Politics," 46-56. Carrigan attributes the situation largely to Bienville's character. In fact, much of the problem was structural. French administration was designed to promote disharmony and jealousy, through overlapping duties, divisions of civil and military functions, and the encouragement of a bureaucratic mindset which stressed rigid observances, even on a frontier. Du Terrage, p. 234, remarked on "the love for regulations, always so fatal to French colonies," as a factor in slow growth. Officials who held positions of commissary and commandant (in a primitive colony) or governor and intendant (in a mature colony) served as a check on each other. The dichotomy grew out of political developments in medieval and early modern France. In eighteenth-century Saint Domingue, a French colony which became Haiti, its Governor-General and Intendant were "The Two Chiefs." The Governor-General, who had military functions, was a noble. The Intendant had financial functions, was a commoner, and owed his rank to the King. The relationship of the governor and intendant mirrored that of the French crown allied with the bourgeoisie against the nobility. An intendant (or, commissary) could block a governor-general's (or, commandant's) wishes by withholding expenditures. This mode of operation (or, non-operation) was how the system worked. For a government employee like Pauger, hired by the noble-military branch, to be thwarted by the civil-bourgeois branch, was natural, but frustrating. In a sense, though, the Two Chiefs' ability to annoy was inhibited by their own lack of effectiveness. Corruption and inefficiency often prevented either from having as much control as they exercised in theory. Occasionally, Two Chiefs worked well together. Then, much good could be done, as in Saint Domingue in 1738 when Larnage and Maillart pursued the same tasks. Under their direction, "the population grew at a doubled rate, because the colonists tasted under Larnage and Maillart the attractiveness of paternal government at its best." Mederic-Louis-Elie Moreau de Saint-Mery, A Civilization that Perished: The Last Years of White Colonial Rule in Haiti, trans., abr., and ed. Ivor D. Spencer (Philadelphia, 1797-98; Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1985), 20, 140-41. Usually, infighting turned colonial capitols into wasps' nests of intrigue. It seems no accident that Dubuisson picked Rue Bienville for his "gewgaw." Choosing this site showed defiant contempt for Bienville and Pauger.

(New York, 1959), 19-20, tells about Du Breuil's construction of the Ursuline Convent, the oldest extant building in the Mississippi Valley, at 1114 Chartres St., New Orleans. See also Wilson's "An Architectural History of the Royal Hospital and the Ursuline Convent of New Orleans," Louisiana Historical Quarterly 29 (July 1948). Dubreuil's manuscript memoir, dated 28 June 1748, told about various services and the colony's development, such as the West Bank canal he dug in the late 1730s. The "Memoir" of Du Breuil is in the Archives des Colonies, C13, 25: 272-73. When a hurricane destroyed the fortress at the Balize in 1741, Louisiana's governor ordered Balize's engineer, De Verges, to draw plans for rebuilding. Du Breuil, the colony's richest citizen, made the lowest bid for the work and got the contract, according to Kernion, 67-68. Du Breuil also led the way in sugar production. Traveler Jean-Bernard Bossu, in a letter dated 1 July 1751, said sugar cane had already been grown in Louisiana; and, in a letter from June of 1762, said Du Breuil built the colony's first sugar mill. Bossu, Nouveaux Voyages aux Indes occidentales (Paris, 1768), I, 29; II, 157; qtd. in Rene J. Le Gardeur, Jr., "The Origins of the Sugar Industry in Louisiana," in Green Fields: Two Hundred Years of Louisiana Sugar, A Catalogue Complementing the Pictorial Exhibit (Lafayette: The Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1980), 4-5. Du Breuil grew sugar after it was introduced by Jesuits. A lengthy manuscript, found in an archive at Versailles, describes Du Breuil's sugar planting taking place for two consecutive years prior to his death in the fall of 1757, by which time he had built a complete sugar refinery. "Questions on Louisiana" and "Answers to the Questions on Louisiana," [1758-63], Archives Departementales des Yvelines (Versailles, France), E, 1442, qtd. in Le Gardeur, 6-7. For the scale of wealth the family of such a colonist could attain, consult his son's inventory in the Estate of Claude-Joseph Villars Du Breuil, 30 Sept. to 18 Nov. 1771, Rosemonde and Emile Kuntz Collection, Manuscript Division, Special Collections, Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University. Extant French censuses show the increase of Du Breuil's wealth in his lifetime: 1721--43 slaves, 1726--48 slaves, 1731--76 slaves. "General Census of all the inhabitants of New Orleans and environs, dated Nov. 24, 1721, as reported by Le Sieur Diron [d'Artaguette]," Maduell, 17-22; "General census of all the inhabitants of the colony of Louisiana dated Jan. 1, 1726," Maduell, 50-76; and "Census of inhabitants along the Mississippi River, dated 1731," Maduell, 113-22.


28 Drawing on information from Journal of D'Artaguette, du Terrage says workers seldom made more than 8 sols, 6 deniers a day, and that the 482 livres the Company paid for repairing hurricane damage on huts was a monetary "trifle." Du Terrage, 236. Accounts from July to Dec. 1722 are found in Archives des Colonies, Cl3a, 7, fol. 178, cited in du Terrage, 237, who gives information about expenses from Jan. 1723 to May 1724 on p. 240.


30 Forshey, "The Levees of the Mississippi River," (1874), 268. For an excellent description of social uses of the New Orleans levee at the end of the colonial period, see the Journal of Dr. John Sibley, 13 Sept. 1802, from the Lindenwood Collection of Sibley Manuscripts, Special Collections, Lindenwood College, St. Charles, Mo.


32 Du Terrage, 231-33.

33 Kernion, 56-57; Du Terrage, 239, 242-43. Pauger is quoted in Du Terrage, 242.

34 Pauger's land grant dilemmas and other trials are described by Du Terrage, 243-46. Pauger accused Bienville of wanting the land for himself, but in fact the engineer's improvements ended up in the hands of the King. Pauger was ejected without indemnity. Colonist Asfeld reported that the Company meant to replace Pauger with Broutin for sake of economy, qtd. in Du Terrage, 244. See Samuel Wilson, Jr., "Ignace Francois Broutin," in Frenchmen and French Ways in the Mississippi Valley, ed. John Francis McDermott (Chicago, 1969). Pauger's letter to his brother, from New Orleans, dated 6 November 1725, and his will, dated 5 June 1726 at New Orleans, are quoted in Du Terrage, 246.
Kernion tells about training and duties of engineers assigned in French Louisiana in his "Reminiscences of the Chevalier Bernard Deverges," 56-86. Of course, the central government's interest in development varied according to how profitable a region became. Louisiana remained poor during the French colonial era, but in the wealthy colony of St. Domingue, the government invested on a larger scale. The late-eighteenth-century Intendant's office at Port-au-Prince, for example, employed a surveyor general, a Western Division hydraulic engineer, a deputy hydraulic engineer, four surveyors, and an inspector of waters and fountains. Hydraulic engineers in Saint Domingue undertook river and harbor improvements, irrigation and dredging, and levee building, both for flood control and irrigation. Saint-Mery, 220. See also James E. McClellan, III, Colonialism and Science: Saint Domingue in the Old Regime (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 71-72. On the role of demobilization in making army engineers available for peace-time employments, see footnote 49 on Le Blond de La Tour. Other engineers, those with a crafts-based mechanical and civilian background, gained private employment at agroindustrial sugar plantations. An example is Justin Girod de Chantrans, Voyage d'un Suisse (Neuchâtel, France, 1785), the letters of a Swiss engineer who worked in the sugar refineries of Saint Domingue in the early 1780s. A short disquisition on the origins of the dichotomy between civil-military and mechanical engineers is found in Daniel Hovey Calhoun, The American Civil Engineer: Origins and Conflict (Cambridge, Ma.: Technology Press of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1960), 3-18. Calhoun says there is a basic conflict in engineering. The employer almost always resents the superiority that expertise confers on his engineer. Simultaneously, an engineer's consciousness of knowledge prevents him from being entirely subordinate to the guidance of his employer. Wilfulness is bound to erupt in their relationship.

Calhoun says the type of engineer a society hires at any particular time is limited by (1) the kind of engineer that is available and (2) the kind of engineer the society will accept, respect, or employ. Military engineers, surveyors, architects, and contractors in the colonial era could not afford to specialize. Calhoun, 5-6. As long as planter/slave-built levees satisfied the needs of society, and as long as that society lacked the money to pay for professional engineering services, non-professional levee building had to be relied upon.

A good overview of the topographical effects of the sedimentary process is found in Harrison's Alluvial Empire, "The Surface Characteristics of the Flood Plain," 21-41. Also, Elliott, I, 36-37. For more specialized studies, see James M. Coleman, Deltas--Processes of Deposition and Models for Exploration (Boston: International Human


Bienville and De Lorme report of 25 April 1721, qtd. in du Terrage, 228.

Du Terrage, 243, summarizes the extent of Pauger's land from the engineer's claim, dated 22 March 1722. The Colonial Board ordered owners to "enclose their land in palissades before two months had passed, under penalty of forfeiting all claim," on 19 Oct. 1722, qtd. in Du Terrage, 237. Louis Francois Du Mont de Montigny sketched a house, enclosed in palisades, for his Memoires historiques sur la Louisiane compose sur les memoires de M. Du Mont par M. L. L. M. [M. l'Abbe de Mascrier], 2 vols. (Paris: Bueche, 1753), and the drawing is reproduced in Du Terrage, 243.

Du Pratz, xx-xxiii, 12-17, 21, 33, 41, 53.

Ibid., 158.

Ibid.
Engineer-in-Chief de La Tour started his career as a draftsman in Portugal in 1702 and obtained an engineering appointment in 1703. He served the French army in Spain during the War of the Spanish Succession (1704-8), was captured at Alcantara in 1705, and exchanged in 1706. Engineers were in demand at sieges for their knowledge of ballistics. De La Tour participated in seiges at Quesnoy, Marchienne, Douai, Bouchain, and Fribourg. In 1715, Louis XIV gave him a knighthood of St. Louis. To raise his salary, De La Tour obtained a captaincy in the Piedmont regiment and a regular appointment as corporal in His Majesty's Engineers. Such was his background before going to Biloxi, and then New Orleans. De La Tour had strong reservations about New Orleans because its soil might not support the weight of stone buildings, not to mention the overflows. Du Terrage says de La Tour only succumbed to the New Orleans decision "when no choice was left him." Du Terrage, 224. Colonist Duvergier wrote 21 Aug. 1721 that "M. de La Tour is at the head of the malcontent concession-holders," qtd. in du Terrage, 232. For hurricane of 1722, see note 26. De La Tour's decision to grow indigo is reported in a letter of Director Jacques de La Chaise, New Orleans, to the Directors of the Company of the Indies, 6 Sept. 1723, Mississippi Provincial Archives, II, 321-22.


Memoir of Commissary Jean-Baptiste Du Bois Du Clos, 1713, Mississippi Provincial Archives, II, 79; Governor Antoine de La Mothe Cadillac to Marine Minister Comte de Pontchartrain, 26 Oct. 1713, Mississippi Provincial Archives, II, 177; Commissary Marc-Antoine Hubert to Council of the Colonies, [1717], Mississippi Provincial Archives, II, 232; Minutes of the Colonial Council of Louisiana, 24 Jan. 1723, Mississippi Provincial Archives, II, 285-86. Jack Holmes says "a single Negro slave would generally plant and attend two acres of [indigo] plants while at the same time furnishing his provisions." Holmes, 340. Equipment for indigo's manufacture and the processes involved are described in Helmut Blume, The German Coast During the Colonial Era, 1722-1803: The Evolution of a Distinct Cultural Landscape in the Lower Mississippi Delta during the Colonial Era, ed. and trans. Ellen C. Merrill (Kiel, Germany: Geographisches Institut der Universitat Kiel, 1956; Destrehan, La.: German-Acadian Coast Historical
and Genealogical Society, 1990), 52; also Jean-Bernard Bossu, *Travels in the Interior of North America, 1751-1762*, ed. and trans. Seymour Feiler (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1962), 205-6. According to Bossu, "the quality of the plant depends upon the soil, which should be light." For an account of indigo production by a colonial Louisiana planter, see Jean Charles La Maze de Pradel, "Mon Plaisir" plantation, to Abbe La Maze, 30 Nov. 1755, in Pradel (Jean Charles de, and Family) Papers, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, La. A Frenchman in Louisiana, General Victor Collot, noted problems of overflows: "The harvests . . . are very precarious, because this plant requires a dry soil; while the indigos planted in Lower Louisiana, which is overflowed almost every year, often perish before they ripen." Georges H. Victor Collot, *A Journey in North America* (Florence, 1924), II, 166-67. James McClellan's *Colonialism and Science* uses the term "agroindustrial" to describe plantations with complex processing facilities. McClellan, 12.


50Director Jacques de La Chaise, New Orleans, to Directors of the Company of the Indies, 6 Sept. 1723, Mississippi Provincial Archives, II, 321-22. La Tour died on 14 Oct. 1723, according to Pauger, "of nothing but chagrin at the mortifications heaped upon us all." Archives des Colonies, C13a,8, fol. 8.


52Bienville, "Memoir," Mississippi Provincial Archives, III, 519. No real difference exists between the spirit of enterprise that led to the building of continuous levees in 18th-century Louisiana's indigo region and that which prompted the capitalists of Virginia to cooperate for navigation improvements to market tobacco and grain. See Douglas R. Littlefield, "Eighteenth-Century Plans to Clear the Potomac River," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 93 (1985): 291-322. A British example of the cooperative principle is in Greg Laugero's "Infrastructures
of Enlightenment: Road-Making, the Public Sphere, and the Emergence of Literature," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 29 (1995): 45-55. Laugero describes private turnpike trusts which enhanced communications and promoted development. British gentlemen, impatient with traditional, personal labor requirements for roadbuilding, turned to a different method—that of private associations, depending on the paid patronage of travelers. Investment in a turnpike trust paid off by raising the profits of a rentier's tenants, therefore enlarging the value of rents and rental property. It was an infrastructure investment for profitability, just like an investment in a levee, canal, or modern farm equipment. Laugero, 49-50. Another example of cooperation for profit appears in Saint-Mery's account (p. 168) of an irrigation cooperative in colonial Saint Domingue. A landlocked planter named Bertrand persuaded neighbors to form a water supply association in the mid-1760s. It dug two canals to tap the Verettes and Tapion Rivers to carry water to twenty-two plantations. The project succeeded after three years, but Bertrand owned the last plantation on the line and his partners drew all the water before it reached him. With each advance, whether levees, turnpikes, canals, (or the Internet) comes challenges of equity and control.

plans to leave them, for the general craze is to talk of returning to, or at least a trip to, France. Each man tells that he will leave next year... this adds sparkle to life. A resident thinks of himself as camping--on an estate worth several millions." Saint-Mery, 22. The mentality of transience was destructive, however, to social improvement, as Saint-Mery attests. For instance, faced with eternally filthy streets, city administrators of Port-au-Prince proposed a sewage canal. They estimated a public subscription of 21,500 livres would pay for the canal, but only nineteen people attended the subscription meeting, and ten of those refused to contribute. Saint-Mery said Port-au-Prince was so badly improved it resembled a "camp of Tartars." Saint-Mery, 188, 204-5. Colonists founded the Journal of Saint Domingue in 1765 to promote learning, science, agriculture, and commerce, but it died after the fifteenth issue for lack of subscribers. Saint-Mery, 147. Much of Saint Domingue's problem was instability in the population mix. Many plantations belonged to absentees in France and were operated by young bachelor employees. Resident white males divided into cliques by class, occupation, and geography. As they aged, they either succumbed to the climate or retired to France. Few raised families in the colony. White men outnumbered white women five to one; the male to female immigration ratio was twenty to one. At the peak of Saint Domingue's development, there were only about 3,000 married white women in the colony, and white children usually left to be educated in France. Meanwhile, slaves outnumbered whites sixteen to one, and the large mulatto free colored class did not mix with other groups. McClelland, 56-58. Social instability was a logical prelude to revolution, which broke out in Saint Domingue in 1789. French Louisiana, by contrast, escaped this kind of disequalibrium. Louisiana was too poor to lure so many ambitious bachelors, and too poor to buy that many slaves. Also, Louisiana leaders such as Commandant Etienne Perrier and Director Jacques de La Chaise coaxed Louisiana's bachelor officer elite to buy property, marry, and establish families. "This will be the true way to be tranquil." Perier and La Chaise to the Directors of the Company of the Indies, 2 Nov. 1727, Mississippi Provincial Archives, II, 552-53. The arrival of German settlers in family groups further added to Louisiana's stability.


55 Lubin F. Laurent, "History of St. John the Baptist Parish," Louisiana Historical Quarterly 7 (April 1924): 317. Louis Voss, The German Coast of Louisiana, Concord Society Historical Bulletin 9 (Hoboken, N.J.: Concord Society, 1928), 8-9, contains text from pamphlet printed at Leipzig in 1720 by the Company of the West. In the German language, it told of gold, silver, copper, and lead mines, wildlife, and healing plants that could cure lovesickness. Indeed, Louisiana was marketed like a patent medicine. Some, of course, was true. Letters by an Ursuline nun in New Orleans in 1727 show the wild game available as provisions. She dined on "wild beef [buffalo], deer, swans, geese and wild turkeys, rabbits, chickens, ducks," and other waterfowl and game, as well as fish; also sagamite, a type of hominy. The Letters of Marie Madeleine Hachard, 1727-28, trans. Myldred Masson Costa (New Orleans, 1974), 18. Gitlin, p. 369, remarks that bear's oil served in the place of butter for cooking and could be a salad dressing. Du Pratz told of eating "wild ducks, summer ducks, teal, and saw-bills," also "carencro, wild geese, cranes, and flamingoes." He found that slaves and Canadian boatsmen considered tails of young alligators to be "a feast." Du Pratz, 24. On Native Americans as providers for European settlers, see Daniel H. Usner, Jr., "Food Marketing and Interethnic Exchange in the 18th-Century Lower Mississippi Valley," Food and Foodways 1 (1986): 279-310.


57 Laurent, 318; Deiler, 58-59; "Census of the inhabitants of the German villages located ten leagues above New Orleans along the river," 12 Nov. 1724, Deiler, 91. In addition to the toil of clearing land and working it with hand tools, the swamp wildlife caused problems for
early settlers. Birds ate corn, and on large concessions, proprietors kept one or two young slaves beating pots and pans to scare them away. Settlers kept fires lit at night to keep animals out of fields. Blume, 33-34.

58"Census," 12 Nov. 1724, Deiler, 90-92; Maduell, 39-42; Blume 23, 32. Jacob Folse's petition to the Superior Council at New Orleans, dated 12 May 1725, explained that he, his wife, and child were in dire need— he having been sick all summer in 1724 and losing all but seven barrels of rice in the overflow. The Superior Council allowed him to borrow rice against his next year's harvest. Deiler 57-58.

59Data concerning "storm Germans," dispossessed by the Lac des Allemandes hurricane and relocated to the Bienville concession, comes from "Census of the habitants along the Mississippi River from New Orleans to Ouacha, or the German villages," 20 Dec. 1724, Tantet, Recensement; Maduell, 43-47; Blume 28-30; Deiler, 92-93.

60Blume, 30. Of German Coast farmers, Gayarre, I, 354-55, says "every Saturday, they were seen floating down the river in small boats, to carry to the market of New Orleans the provisions which were the result of their industry." Traveler Redon de Rassac wrote in 1763 that the Germans supplied New Orleans with rice, vegetables, corn, milk, butter, cheese, and poultry, but a lack of slaves prevented them from engaging in indigo or sugar. Qtd. in Blume, 67. T. Jeffreys, The Natural and Civil History of the French Dominions in North and South America, vol. 1, A Description of Canada and Louisiana (London, 1761), tells of the German Coast acting as grocer to the city. Jeffreys said they loaded pirogues each Friday at sunset with "cabbages, salads, fruits, greens and pulse [peas, beans, lentils] of all sorts, as well as vast quantities of wildfowl, salt, pork, and many excellent sorts of fish." With two Germans per boat, they drifted downriver to hold a morning market. There, "along the bank of the river" at the New Orleans levee, they sold their produce for cash. Then they bought what they could not supply for themselves and rowed the pirogues upstream to their own concessions. Jeffreys, 147, and passim. With this in view, it is no wonder that the upper German Coast became the poorer part of the region. Upper Coast Germans had the least access to markets. For a look at cooperation and specialization between food and cash-crop producers on the Lower Mississippi in the antebellum period, see Mark Schmitz, "Farm Interdependence in the Antebellum Sugar Sector," Agricultural History 52 (Jan. 1978): 93-103.

61"From this humble but decent origin, issued some of our most respectable citizens, and of our most wealthy sugar planters. They have, long ago, forgotten the German language and adopted the French . . . The German Coast, so
poor and beggarly at first, became in time . . . the Gold Coast, or Cote d'or." Gayarre, I, 355. For names, see Laurent, 319; Deiler, 90, 93, 100. For a Cultural Resource Survey of a German Coast place over time, see Earth Search, Inc., Significance Assessment of Site 16SC61, Luling Revetment, Mississippi River, M-116.7-R, submitted to the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers, New Orleans District, 1993.

62 Humphreys and Abbott, 150; Harrison, 55; Gayarre, I, 382; Perier and de La Chaise, to Directors of the Company of the Indies, 2 Nov. 1727, Mississippi Provincial Archives, II, 552-53. Perier said that, in addition to the levee's completion, he would begin a canal from New Orleans to Bayou St. John. Perier's ideas for levees and drainage were part of a broad agenda for social and material improvement in Louisiana. His other reforms included: aid to orphans, requests for shipments of wives, moral codes, prison building, housing for Ursuline nuns, the hiring of instructors in tobacco culture, and the promotion of orange culture and silk-raising. Dawson, 27-28. At one time it was thought that crowns of Louisiana levees should be planted as mulberry groves for silkworms. Blume, 42-43.

63 Commandant Etienne Perier and Director Jacques de La Chaise to Directors of the Company of the Indies, 18 August 1728, Mississippi Provincial Archives, II, 589-90; Lewis, 72-75; Louis Francois Du Mont de Montigny, Memoires historiques sur la Louisiane (Paris: Bueche, 1753), qtd. in Humphreys and Abbot, 150.


66 Gayarre, I, 383.

67 Ibid., 468; D'Ausseville's recommendations, 1732, are qtd. in Blume, 44-45. In reference to D'Ausseville's warnings about trees in the river, forests covered the
floodplain and bluffs right to the Mississippi's banks prior to the building of levees. When banks caved, trees fell in with the soil and were swept downstream. Du Pratz commented, in conjunction with the spring rise, that ships at New Orleans quickly set sail with at high water, "because the prodigious quantity of dead wood, or trees torn up by the roots, which the river brings down, would lodge before the ship, and break the stoutest cables." Du Pratz, 55. Rice growing in early Louisiana can be found in Blume, 33-34, 70-71; Deiler, 59; R. A. Wilkinson, "Production of Rice in Louisiana," De Bow's Review of Southern and Eastern States 6 (1848): 53-56; and, Mildred Kelly Ginn, "A History of Rice Production in Louisiana to 1896," Louisiana Historical Quarterly 23 (April 1940): 50-53. For settlement of D'Ausseville's estate, see James D. Hardy, Jr., "Probate Racketeering in Colonial Louisiana," in Readings in Louisiana Politics, 2d ed., Mark T. Carleton, ed. (Baton Rouge: Claitor's Publishing, 1988), 35-45.

68 Perier's opinion, 1731, is qtd. in Blume, 32


70 Blume, 79; Surrey, 92. For a representation of the extent of settlement from New Orleans to Natchez in the middle of the French period, see a map of the Mississippi River settlements drawn by Ignace Broutin in Aug. of 1731--"Carte particuliere du cours de fleuve Mississippi ou St. Louis a la Louisiane, depuis la Nouvelle-Orleans jusque' au Natchez. Levee par estime en 1721, 1726, et 1731; dresse par Broutin, en aout 1731"--that is, a particular map of the course of the river Mississippi, or St. Louis, of Louisiana, from New Orleans up to Natchez. [with the extent of the] Levee estimated through 1721, 1726, and 1731. Louisiana Collection, Howard-Tilton Library, Tulane University, New Orleans, La. Dangers to levees are described in Forshey, 279-80; and, William Hewson, Principles and Practice of Embanking Lands from River-Floods, as applied to "Levees" of the Mississippi. 2d ed., (1858; New York: David Van Nostrand, 1870), 80-83.

71 The physical phenomenon of caving banks is discussed in Elliott, I, 36; and, Harrison, 8-11. Antebellum levee engineer William Hewson minced few words in describing the dangers involved in placing levees too near the bank. "Private interest," he said, "is very often a disturbing influence in forcing the location of Levees from the line of safety." He spoke of planters being "so short-sighted as to have urged, and in fact obtained, the location of a
Levee around three sides of . . . a turnip patch," rather than sacrifice improved land to a more rational levee alignment. Hewson said it was imperative to ascertain the type of riverbank one was dealing with--whether "making" or "caving"--and to determine "their commencement, their rate of progress inwards, and their advance down-stream . . . ." Hewson, 106-7.

Du Pratz, 54; Elliott, I, 48-57. Du Breuil's Memoir, 28 June 1740, Archives des Colonies, Cl3, 25: 272-73, tells of a canal cut in the late 1730s from the west bank of the Mississippi, two miles above New Orleans, to connect with bayous that led to Barataria Bay. This served as an outlet for reducing flood heights as well as a transport route to the Gulf. Too, levees on the Mississippi at this period of time did not aim at the total exclusion of the high water. In the absence of power machinery, levee flumes were used to run rice and saw mills. Many plantations had timber canals that led to the river. Sluices and ditch systems also irrigated rice at high water. Openings like these relieved pressure on the levees.

Du Pratz, 51-52, 55.

Du Pratz, 54; Forshey, 268. Gayarre, I, 381-2, quotes from Perier's announcement to the Company of the Indies, 15 Nov. 1727, in which he said he would build a canal from New Orleans to Bayou St. John. Bienville contemplated this at the time of the city's founding, but lacked workers for its execution. Perier arranged for inhabitants to furnish slaves to dig a canal 65 feet wide and two feet deep. He started the project, but too few slaves could be gathered through corvees, and whites evaded the work. Rain washed the beginnings of the canal away. King Louis XV to Governor Bienville and Intendant Salmon, 2 Feb. 1732, Mississippi Provincial Archives, III, 562; and Bienville to Salmon, 12 May 1732, Mississippi Provincial Archives, III, 594. Du Mont de Montigny drew a plat of a typical New Orleans city block showing it divided into twelve lots and surrounded by a fosse (ditch) on all four sides. Drawing is reproduced in du Terrage, 243. Bridges connected the block to four adjacent streets, and the bridges (one on each street) led to a "parapet" (sidewalk) on the house-side of the ditch. One bridge served all lots on each side of the block, four sides in all. According to Nancy Surrey, ditches surrounding blocks were to be one to two feet wide and one-and-a-half feet deep. Inhabitants of each lot had to dig the ditch in front of their place, but bridges, being common property of several householders, were paid for by a tax on slaves. The first bridges, built of wood, rotted in one year. Du Breuil, as commissioner of public works, volunteered to supply bricks to rebuild more durably--116 bridges in all--but they were not installed. Surrey, 94. Information about New Orleans houses of the
early 1760s standing eight feet above ground comes from Captain Philip Pittman, 43. In Chaville's day, the 1720s, they were only raised one foot, according to du Terrage, 237. For an account of Ursulines as a source of social uplift in the colony, see Jane Frances Heaney, A Century of Pioneering: A History of the Ursuline Nuns in New Orleans, 1727-1827, ed. Mary Ethel Siefken and Sally Reeves (New Orleans: Ursuline Sisters of New Orleans, 1993).

Du Pratz, 54-55, 61-62, 124; Carl J. Ekberg, "The Flour Trade in French Colonial Louisiana," Louisiana History 37 (Summer 1996): 361-82. For general conditions in the Upper Mississippi Valley, see Clarence W. Alvord, The Centennial History of Illinois, vol. I, The Illinois Country, 1673-1818 (Springfield, Ill.: 1922); and, Morris S. Arnold, Colonial Arkansas: 1686-1804 (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1991). Pittman gave brief descriptions of the upper settlements just after the end of the French period in the 1760s. He told of tobacco and trade at Natchitoches—40 families (p. 32-33); cattle, tobacco, indigo, poultry, and timber at Pointe Coupee—2,000 whites and 7,000 slaves (p. 60, 73-74); hunting at Arkansas Post, where overflows prevented the growing of crops—8 families (p. 82-83); then no permanent settlement until Notre Dame de Kaskaskias, the first village of the Illinois country—65 families. There, residents ground corn and cut planks at Paget's mill prior to his murder by Cherokees in 1764, and Jesuits kept a cattle herd and brewery prior to their expulsion (p. 83-85). Other settlements of French Illinois included La Prarie de Roches, where Pittman found corn and cattle—12 families (p. 87); Kahokia, whose inhabitants lived by hunting and the Indian trade, but did little farming and could barely feed themselves—45 families; Paincourt, a trading village whose name meant "not much bread"—40 families (p. 95); and Ste. Genevieve, which produced corn and lumber and provided access to lead mines—70 families (p. 96). The Illinois settlements were densely-settled villages with communal grazing rights, elevated outlying fields, and water power for milling. They neither became levee-building communities in the French colonial period, nor produced plantation crops. Population growth and economic development at Pointe Coupee benefitted from the Atchafalaya River's ability to drain water from the Mississippi. Pointe Coupee also had high banks for farming and elevated lands on Fausse Riviere, a bend of the river which became separated in a cutoff of the early 1700s. At Fausse Riviere, French colonists farmed high banks without fear of overflow, because it was not an active riverbank. Pointe Coupee prospered too from its nearness to British traders in West Florida. Forshey suggests it contained as much as 25 miles of levee at the time of the Louisiana Purchase. In the French period, Pointe Coupee's levees did not join those downriver. Little is known of them. Forshey, 269.
Joint dispatch of Bienville and Salmon, 31 Aug. 1735, qtd. in Gayarre, I, 469; Blume, 56-57.

Gayarre, I, 355-56.

William Darby, _A Geographical Description of the State of Louisiana_ (Philadelphia: John Melish, 1816), 128, says "nothing is more dreaded by the inhabitants than those fissures, or as they are aptly termed, Crevasses." More will be said in subsequent chapters. In the French period, the destructive power of crevasses was limited by the low height of the levees, the comparative smallness of the leved region, the numerous natural outlets that dispersed water from the Mississippi, and the permeability of the levee line. Levees were cut to service canals, irrigation ditches, and mills. They also did not offer much protection from overflow.

The Company of the Indies wanted Louisiana to supply the West Indies with wood. See Colonial Council of Louisiana to Directors of the Company of the Indies, 28 Aug. 1725, _Mississippi Provincial Archives_, II, 494. Jean Charles de Pradel told his brother in France, in a letter dated 22 Sept. 1729, of buying a wooded tract near New Orleans and placing three men on it to cut timber. They would make barrel staves, and de Pradel thought he had enough trees for a hundred thousand staves worth 140,000 livres. Lumbering killed "two birds with one stone" because it also cleared land for farming. To his younger brother, Abbe La Maze, on 24 May 1751, de Pradel said that many ships were leaving from New Orleans carrying lumber to Saint Domingue. In another to Abbe La Maze, 20 Nov. 1753, de Pradel discussed the use of high water for timber hauling and his sales of lumber to the West Indies. Pradel (Jean Charles de, and Family) Papers, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, LSU. For Louisiana sales of pitch and tar, see Bienville and Salmon to Maurepas, 3 April 1734, _Mississippi Provincial Archives_, III, 643-44; and, Pittman, 60. Saint-Mery's account of Saint Domingue offers a look at the demand side of Louisiana's ability to sell lumber. On the island, deforestation caused erosion, flash floods, and a drier climate. Mahogany was exported; other native wood supplied crates, building materials, and fuel. The accessible forests were used up, and it was less expensive to import lumber than to haul it from remote mountains. At Mole Saint-Nicolas, a fortified naval base, the town consisted of pre-fabricated, two-storied houses with galleries and belvederes. Some were shipped from North America and assembled on the island. Saint-Mery wrote after the Treaty of Paris (1763) which took Louisiana and Canada away from France, and he deplored the fact that France could no longer furnish such structures from its own forests. Saint-Mery, 15, 167, 223-24; McClelland, 32
Increased prosperity had a direct impact on the slave population. Wealth from indigo meant Louisiana planters had more money, better credit, and the government's attention in promoting their interests. The census of 1744 shows that Louisiana contained about 5,800 people: 3,000 white civilians; 2,000 slaves; and 800 soldiers. By 1746, this increased to more than 8,800, of whom about 4,000 were white, leaving about 4,800 slaves—a significant increase in just three years. The interest shown in acquiring slaves can be assumed to be proportional to that devoted to levee building. One item (the slaves) produced the crop that made money; the other (the levees) protected it from overflow. See article on Marquis de Vaudreuil in Louisiana Governors, ed. Dawson, 30-31. Indigo production declined in Saint Domingue in the 1740s, in spite of its profitability at the time, because of crop diseases and insects. McClellan, 67.

Terms of the 1743 land and levee law are cited in Humphreys and Abbott, 151.

Deiler, 92, 94; Nicolas Chauvin de La Freniere's arrangement with Bienville is in Wilton P. Ledet, "The History of the City of Carrollton," Louisiana Historical Quarterly 21 (Jan. 1938): 224. Warren H. Lewis describes the corvee in The Splendid Century: Life in the France of Louis XIV, 72-74. In France, corvee requirements varied according to the region of residence, but generally demanded several days of unpaid labor each year on roads and bridges. Corvees started out as a seigneural due owed to a landlord by male villagers under the age of sixty. According to Lewis, the most notable thing that occurred in France in the seventeenth century, from the peasant's point of view, "was the steadily decreasing influence and power of the seigneur whose duties were gradually taken over by the central government." Such a government "brought in its train the militia, the state Corvee, and a heavier taxation," yet also freed tenants from some of their lord's powers. The King "became the universal seigneur." Seen in this light, it is reasonable that the King's government would not permit an anachronism like seigneural dues to gain a foothold in Louisiana on lands Bienville obtained from the Crown. Lewis, 73-74. As a later example of corvee labor in Louisiana, per the central government, see Kernion, 70-71. He tells of an instance in 1746 when Governor Vaudreuil feared a British invasion and decided to fortify the Mississippi at English Turn. Vaudreuil assigned Chief Engineer De Verges to design a fortress and issued orders for people in New Orleans and the countryside to furnish one-fifth of the slaves for six weeks to build it. This was a case of military necessity, rather than routine maintenance, but it was also a colonial corvee.

84Commandants such as Karl D'Arensbourg of the German Coast and Louis Juchereau de St. Denis of Natchitoches acted as intermediaries between the people and their colonial administrators at New Orleans. By virtue of their command over soldiers at the various posts, commandants enforced laws. For a discussion of the structure of colonial Louisiana's government, see Charles E. O'Neill, Church and State in French Colonial Louisiana (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966). On the amorphous duties and powers of the Superior Council, see Jerry A. Micelle, "From Law Court to Local Government: Metamorphosis of the Superior Council of French Louisiana," in Readings in Louisiana Politics, 2d ed., 7-25.

85Bernard De Verges is another example of the French indigo elite--typical of that levee-building community. He was born in Bayonne, France, in 1693 to a noble family of seigneurs. Bernard's father, a younger son, served as an army officer, and Bernard was trained as a military draftsman. In 1720, he sailed with de La Tour and Boispinel. Pauger did not desire him at New Orleans, so De Verges went to mouth of the Mississippi and became commandant of the Balize in the latter 1720s. Like many officers, he married prudently (and late) in New Orleans at the age of forty. In the late 1730s, he bungled a road survey in a campaign against the Chickasaw and Bienville remanded him to the Balize. Nonetheless, De Verges found ways to increase his pay, such as a request in 1742 to be allowed to ship one ton of goods on every vessel from France--without freight charges--which indicates he conducted wholesale or retail sales. From 1743 until 1766, he operated "Trianon" plantation with Adrien de La Place. With age, De Verges gained professional seniority. Governor Vaudreuil used him in fortifications projects and allowed De Verges to become engineer-in-chief. In 1766, De Verges died. The inventory at "Trianon" shows that he and La Place planted indigo. They had forty indigo cases, several outbuildings, and eight slave cabins, five roofed with palmetto leaves. The plantation lay within the region described by Du Pratz and Pittman as being leveed, and the land law of 1743 would have ejected them had they not built a levee at "Trianon."

The inventory of his townhouse reveals other appurtenances of life in the floodplain. De Verges owned six mosquito bars to drape over beds, a chain for prisoners (either for unruly slaves or for convicts used on public works), and a tin speaking trumpet (either an ear trumpet for deafness, or perhaps a megaphone which he could have used for calling to ships at the Balize or to give orders to work crews). George C. H. Kernion, "Reminiscences of the Chevalier
Bernard De Verges, an Early Colonial Engineer of Louisiana," Louisiana Historical Quarterly 7 (Jan. 1924): 56-86.

Pittman, 38-41, 58-60; Forshey, 268-69. The extent of continuous settlement on the riverfront did not increase until the 1760s with the settlement of Acadians on the Mississippi north of the German Coast.

Pradel (Jean Charles de, and Family) Papers, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University. The collection contains 407 items, dated 1719 to 1954, including eight folders of Jean Charles de Pradel's personal correspondence, 1721-64. Many were published in French in A. Baillardel and A. Prioult, Le Chevalier de Pradel: Vie d'un colon françoise en Louisiane au XVIIIe siecle, d'Apres sa correspondance et celle de sa famille (Paris: Maisonneuve Freres, 1928). An unpublished translation, "Correspondence of the Chevalier de Pradel: A Translation of the Letters of Jean Charles de Pradel to His Family in France," trans. Henri Deville de Sinclair, for the Survey of Federal Archives in Louisiana, 1937-38, is at the Louisiana State Library, Baton Rouge, La. See also Patricia Dillon Woods, "Jean Charles de Pradel in French Colonial Louisiana, 1717-1764" (M.A. thesis, Louisiana State University, 1972). French indigo gentry of early Louisiana were not dissimilar to counterparts in other colonies. Indeed, Jean Charles La Maze de Pradel would have felt at home in the British-controlled Chesapeake of the 18th century, as described by Jack P. Greene. In this Upper South region, given to commercial agriculture and diversified economic pursuits, Greene found the gentry to be very market-oriented and willing to experiment to make money. In Pursuits of Happiness: The Social Development of Early Modern British Colonies and the Formation of American Culture (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 98-99, Greene writes:

As their growing interest in western lands as a source of income, the rapidity with which they sought to take advantage of new economic opportunities in grain and iron production beginning in the 1720s and 1730s, and their avid pursuit of internal public improvements in water transportation in the 1760s and 1770s so powerfully attest, however, they were by no means insensitive to the shifting potentialities of the market. Rather, like so many of their counterparts in contemporary Britain, they were constantly on the lookout for and eager to take advantage of new market possibilities to add to their wealth and to support their increasingly polite and expensive lifestyles.
Ensigns made 40 livres and common soldiers 9 livres a month, plus clothes, food, and shelter. Duclos to Pontchartrain, Oct. 1713, Mississippi Provincial Archives, II, 84-86. By 1690, there were five offices of secretary of state in Louis XIV’s government—foreign affairs, war, marine (and colonies), royal household, and administration of the Reformed Religion (dealing with converts to Catholicism). Departments of Marine and royal household always belonged to the same minister, so Louis actually had four secretaries of state. Rule, 44. At the time of de Pradel’s arrest, Company Director Raujon fined him for illegal trading by refusing to pay the ten months of salary owed him. Baillardel and Prioult, 33; Woods, 26-27.

In a letter to his father, de Pradel said the Company of the West would continue to operate until it had paid its debts, which was now its colonial mission. He also told his father he meant to study fortification design, a respectable goal after his recent troubles. Jean Charles de Pradel, Paris, to Jacques de Pradel, 8 April 1721. Benard de la Harpe included de Pradel in his account of a military detail dispatched to hunt Swiss deserters. Jean-Baptiste Benard de la Harpe, Journal historique de l'établissement des Francais a la Louisiane (New Orleans, 1831), 355-56. This was published, ed. Glenn R. Conrad, as Historical Journal of the Establishment of the French in Louisiana, trans. Jean Carn and Virginia Koenig (Lafayette: Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Southwestern Louisiana Press, 1971). Gayarre, I, 355-57, tells of the food shortages in Louisiana in 1723; as does de La Tour in a letter to the commissionaires at New Orleans, 13 Sept. 1722, Archives des Colonies, C12, 6: 339-40v. The sympathetic Director de La Chaise wrote the other Company Directors about the plight of the soldiers, using a young captain as an example. Captains, such as de Pradel, earned 90 livres a month, paid up to 50 a month in rent, and could only subsist by trading excess rations from the Company warehouse, yet Bienville allowed none but his favorites to draw them. La Chaise to Directors, Sept. 1723, Mississippi Provincial Archives, II, 317-18.

91 Jean Charles de Pradel, New Orleans, to his mother, 1 Sept. 1729; Jean Charles de Pradel, New Orleans, to his brother, 22 Sept. 1729, Pradel Papers, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, LSU. Perier and de La Chaise wrote Company Directors about wooden shoes, saying the slaves wore out too many expensive leather shoes and the poor could not afford them—2 Nov. 1727, Mississippi Provincial Archives, II, 560. The number of slave feet—about 6,800—is in Surrey, 245. Pradel's letter of 1 Sept. 1729 is illuminates his reasons for investing in agricultural real estate. Pradel said:

Until now, I have had no home; so that naturally when some expedition was formed I was generally sent away with it, and all these changes of post upset my affairs greatly. Today, to avoid such inconveniences, I have just bought a plantation . . . [because] officers who are established on this lower coast of the river in the neighborhood of New Orleans will not be assigned to expedi­tionary duty. As I come into money, I use it to buy slaves. My country place this year will give me victuals beyond my needs and, provided it does not rain too much, my crops which are now ripening will be very good. They consist of rice and corn.

Thus, for stability of time and enhanced income, de Pradel took advantage of Perier's desire to have officers put down roots in a community. This would lead them to identify with the colony's success and prevent the instability and impermanence that characterized St. Domingue. Bienville, who succeeded Perier in 1733, did not admire Perier's policy, but the inducement of non-assignment to expeditions had already been offered. Officers were already land­owners, farmers, and aspiring planters, fully aware of the gain to be acquired through commercial farming and business pursuits. De Pradel's fear of rain and overflow shows that with landownership, they also developed a need for flood control—levées and ditches—to protect investments.
Hence, Perier's desire to identify officers with land development provided motive power for founding a levee-building community among the French elite.

Jean Charles de Pradel, New Orleans, to his mother, 22 Mar. 1730; de Pradel, L'Orient, France, to his brother, 8 Mar. 1731; Receipt, signed by J. C. de Pradel, 1 April 1731; de Pradel, New Orleans, to Abbe La Maze, 25 Jan. 1733; Pradel Papers, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, LSU; Baillardel and Prioult, 82, 116. As to candle wax berries on native shrubs, this was noted and promoted by several influential persons in the colony. Du Mont de Montigny, du Pratz, Dr. Prat, and Du Breuil all wrote to France concerning the plant's potential as a market crop. Woods, 83-85. Du Breuil, who claimed in 1752 to have made 6,000 pounds of wax from the berries, said that other colonists succeeded in proportion to the number of workers they could assign to the tasks. Du Breuil, to Marine Minister Maurepas, 30 Sept. 1752, Archives des Colonies, C13, 36: 325v. Dr. Prat, a botanist and physician in Louisiana, said candle wax production gave planters a way to use young, sickly, and old workers in a way that would not tax their abilities, and that the best months for planting the wax trees were in winter (when the stronger slaves were cutting wood, clearing land, and building levees). Dr. Prat's memoir on wax-bearing shrubs of Louisiana, 5 April 1742, Archives des Colonies, C13, 27: 13ff; and, Archives des Colonies, C13, 28: 184ff.

Bienville wrote, "You must realize, Monsieur, that it is a question here of a habitual sickness that he had had for fifteen years and which did not prevent him from going in past years." The real problem was that his wine and brandy shop "has taken precedence over his military duties and made him forget his obligations to serve the King." Governor Bienville and Intendant Salmon to Marine Minister Maurepas, 30 Sept. 1733, qtd. in Baillardel and Prioult, 135; Woods, 56.

The purchase of "Mon Plaisir" is in H. H. Cruzat, ed., "Records of the Superior Council of Louisiana," Louisiana Historical Quarterly 8 (July 1925): 500; Maurepas, Minister of Marine, to Intendant Salmon of Louisiana, 29 Oct. 1742, Archives des Colonies, B74: 672; Jean Charles de Pradel, "Mon Plaisir," to Abbe La Maze, 24 May 1751, Pradel Papers, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, LSU.

Jean Charles de Pradel, to Abbe La Maze, 2 April 1752; de Pradel, "Mon Plaisir," to his brothers, 25 Sept. 1752; de Pradel, "Mon Plaisir," to his brothers, 29 April 1753; de Pradel, to La Maze, 20 Nov. 1753, Pradel Papers, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, LSU.
In a letter to his brothers, 2 April 1752, de Pradel wrote of his pleasure in knowing that his wife and children were worthy "of the extra trouble I take to leave them a comfortable fortune. I do my best and neglect nothing to make my little accumulation grow." His latest project had been the planting of two thousand myrtle-wax trees. He realized a fine crop from them in 1751, but had to replace a good many which were broken in a hurricane. "I do not let myself get the least down-hearted at accidents like that," he said, "but I replaced those that were broken, and I propped the others." De Pradel's practical, can-do spirit was a valuable asset for a man who lived with the threat of floods and overflows. Rather than allowing setbacks to crush his spirit, he examined problems and dealt with them. Nevertheless, worries affected his health. In his letter, he told of a long stretch of sickness when he experienced aversion to food and could keep nothing down but water. Many of his letters describe the symptoms, yet on 29 April 1753, after the litany of ailments, he wrote, "I build, I plant, I graft, as if I were to live half a century more, and it is the only pleasure that I have these days." Spoken like a true entrepreneur. According to a letter of 24 May 1751, de Pradel's wax factory occupied a room in a ninety-foot ell on the side of the main house at "Mon Plaisir." The ell housed his offices, kitchen, dining room, laundry, and wax-making equipment, "where are located my cauldrons." Jean Charles de Pradel, "Mon Plaisir," to Abbe La Maze, 24 May 1751; de Pradel, to La Maze, 2 April 1752; de Pradel, to La Maze, 29 April 1753; de Pradel, to La Maze, 20 Nov. 1753; Pradel Papers, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, LSU.

In spite of the pride de Pradel took in his family—a wife and son who moved in the colony's first circles, and three daughters at a fashionable convent in France—he felt ill-used. In a letter of 23 May 1754, de Pradel commented that his wife stayed in New Orleans almost year-round, so he would not presume to send his brother her regards. "Everyone to their tastes," but he much preferred his lovely plantation house; unlike his family, it could be improved every day. Indeed, de Pradel and his wife more-or-less separated. His letter of 6 July 1754 said that he had supported two separate households for three years, and he worried about his children's allowances, especially that of his "lordly little son," the "little marquis." ("I confess that my daughters on their own account also spend much money.") The complexities of his business and household records almost defied comprehension, and at the end of one paragraph on finances, spending, and letters of exchange, de Pradel exclaimed to his brother, the Abbe: "I get so confused with all these accounts that I no longer know what I am saying." Stress, combined with the swamp environment, had its usual consequences, as described in a letter of 10 April 1755: "continuous attacks of chronic
fever, the flux, and vomiting, and a distaste for all sorts of food have brought me to look like a skeleton; and finally I have had to live only on milk mixed with a little tea in which I break up some bits of bread, without having any regular hours for meals." The same letter told of Governor Kerlerec's offer and de Pradel's intention of becoming an indigo planter. Jean Charles de Pradel, "Mon Plaisir," to Abbe La Maze, 6 Feb. 1754; de Pradel, to La Maze, 23 May 1754; de Pradel, to La Maze, 6 July 1754; de Pradel, to his brothers, 10 April 1755, Pradel Papers, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, LSU.

98Jean Charles de Pradel, "Mon Plaisir," to his brothers, 10 April 1755. Letter to Abbe La Maze, 24 May 1751, mentions that the ell at "Mon Plaisir" stood only three feet off the ground. One had to step down from the main house when approaching via the connecting gallery. "A large and imposing" brick staircase in the middle of the facade led to the elevated first floor. The house faced the Mississippi across formal gardens. De Pradel, to La Maze, 24 May 1751, Pradel Papers, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, LSU.

99Jean Charles de Pradel, "Mon Plaisir," to Abbe La Maze, 5 April 1756, Pradel Papers, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, LSU.

100Woods, 93-95; Clark, 124; Jean Charles de Pradel, to Abbe La Maze, 26 Oct. 1763, Pradel Papers, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, LSU.

101Jean Charles de Pradel, to Abbe La Maze, 26 Oct. 1763; de Pradel, to La Maze, 14 Mar. 1764, with postscript by Madame Alexandrine de La Chaise de Pradel, to Abbe La Maze, announcing de Pradel's death, 28 Mar. 1764, Pradel Papers, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, LSU. For the eighteenth-century Jesuit mission, see Roger Baudier, The Catholic Church in Louisiana, vol. 2 (New Orleans, 1939); and Albert Hubert Biever, S. J., The Jesuits in New Orleans and the Mississippi Valley (New Orleans, 1924). From 1725 to 1763, the missionary headquarters for work among the Native Americans of the Mississippi Valley was in New Orleans. In the latter year, Louis XV suppressed the Society of Jesus in Louisiana and the brothers departed, leaving properties behind. The de Pradels bought their plantation, and the site is now the New Orleans Central Business District. For a general study of Jesuit goals in social improvement, see James Brodrick, The Economic Morals of the Jesuits (1934).

102Forshey, 268-71; Blume, 79; Pittman, 38-41, 58.
 CHAPTER TWO

LEVEES IN SPANISH LOUISIANA, 1763-1803:
EXPANSION AND ENFORCEMENT

By the early 1760s, levees lined the Mississippi River from below New Orleans to the upper German Coast. Landowners built them to guard improvements and retain grants from Louis XV, King of France. The riverside featured a city levee at New Orleans, rural levees in Creole and German parishes, and levees further upriver at the Creole settlement of Pointe Coupee. Between the German Coast and Pointe Coupee, a long unleveed section awaited the arrival of new settlers. A visitor described these intervening swamps as "un desert immense," where nothing was seen but "two feeble Indian villages." The soil was as fertile as that already granted to Frenchmen and Germans, lacking only the clearing of trees and addition of levees to ready it for cultivation. However, Louis XV was in no hurry to plug the gap in the line of habitations, nor was he particularly interested in Louisiana's development. The colony produced little revenue for his empire and was costly to administer. Its indigo and lumber business sustained a small planter class, but the colony's chief importance was geopolitical rather than economic. For Louis, control of the Mississippi helped defend his more profitable French colonies in
FIGURE 2.1

MISSISSIPPI RIVER SETTLEMENTS OF COLONIAL LOWER LOUISIANA

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Canada and the Caribbean. Levees were the principal item of infrastructure in Louisiana, but settlers built those for themselves. The government gave little assistance except to command into existence what the resident landowners wanted for their own protection. In 1762, embroiled in the Seven Years' War, Louis XV transferred the leveed colony to his cousin Charles III, King of Spain. The Treaty of Paris (1763) ratified their arrangement, and Louisiana's riverfront passed under the hand of Spain. Its tenure as a Spanish colony lasted from 1763 to 1803.\footnote{1}

Spain's major contributions to the development of the levee system lay in expanding the extent of the levees and in providing better supervision. It accomplished the first achievement by encouraging and sponsoring settlements on the riverside through land grants to new colonists. During the Spanish period, an important immigrant group--Acadians--came to Louisiana in answer to an invitation from Charles III. They settled on the Mississippi and built levees which joined the German Coast embankments to those of Pointe Coupee. For Acadians and other grantees, such as Canary Islanders at Terre Aux Boeufs, the Spanish military commandants enforced levee laws through their authority over land distribution. Late in the Spanish period, a tier of secondary officials--the syndics--was created to help commandants with levee inspections. Overall, Spanish levee policies promoted development, guarded more land, and erected better rules for construction and oversight.\footnote{2}
Centralization was a marked tendency of Spanish administration, and bureaucrats at all levels stayed in frequent communication. However, policies which originated from the Court in Spain still had to be carried out at the local level. In Louisiana, local community identities revolved around the worship facilities which served various Catholic congregations. For each parish, centrally located places of worship stood on the banks of the Mississippi, and priests on the royal payroll conducted services for communicants who traveled by water or on roads that ran just inside the levee. As members of levee-building communities, priests took a natural interest in the state of the river and in the condition of levees. Public notices about levees were tacked to church doors, and priests read them to their frequently illiterate congregations. The church and its officers furnished a means of publicizing the needs of the colony. On a spiritual level, it admonished settlers to do their duty to God and the King. In secular matters, Spain manifested its authority through military commandants stationed at various posts. They were charged with the organization of settlers into militias, and commandants' posts were loosely associated with the parishes. Not every post had a church, but many did. Religious and political authority figures supported each other. Both engaged in social discipline and were attentive to the state of the levees.
Local commandants were by far the most important functionaries in Spanish levee administration. Their noble background and military training encouraged habits of command and a sense of professionalization, as well as an attitude of aloofness toward those they governed. However, as with the French officers, Spanish commandants often bought land, married local women, and became members of the indigenous planting group. In communities so small, where a great percentage of the population consisted of black bondsmen, it was impossible for local officials to escape a feeling of kinship with the planting community's concerns. Indeed, a commandant on the Mississippi was deeply involved in the everyday work of levee-building communities. A description of his office includes duties pertaining to a judge, sheriff, head of militia, parish executive, and courthouse staff rolled into one. He supervised all aspects of the "police" of a district, in its verb form, meaning "to control, protect, and keep orderly." In matters of land distribution, it was a Spanish commandant's job to screen potential settlers, assign them to grants, and check on the progress of their improvements. He reviewed passports, ejected squatters, registered sales of land and slaves, drew contracts, notarized documents, served retrocession and foreclosure notices, conducted forced sales, and settled small claims suits. He also had authority to inspect roads, strangers, Negroes (bond or free), and levees. Commandants regularly reported to the
Spanish governor about local conditions. The governor, in turn, could inform his own superiors of minute details on the basis of commandants' reports. In this way, levee administration on the Mississippi became somewhat centralized. Commandants had the power as royal deputies to order residents of their districts to perform the required public works. Their superior, the governor of Louisiana, could even order cooperation among and between commandants for the better service of multiple districts. However, for all of these officials, effective control over the levees only extended to works ordered from grantees. Their theoretically unlimited powers, derived from an absolute monarch, fell flat in places where no one lived.

Spain could not call levees into being in Louisiana by direct government spending because the Spanish Crown had little money. It relied on private persons to build public works in exchange for land. Hence, it was Spain's policy to settle grantees in single-file on the banks of the Mississippi. As in the days of the French, commandants placed grantees in contiguous succession on the riverfront to build continuous levees and roads. On receiving a commandant's orders, men who lived in densely settled ranks of leveed frontlands could quickly assemble as a militia or crevasse crew as circumstance dictated.

Commandancies in Spanish Louisiana covered far-flung geographic areas, and many required levee protection. The major districts on the Lower Mississippi were: Creole
settlements from the Balize to New Orleans, New Orleans itself, and the planter enclave of Tchoupitoulas; the First and Second German Coasts; Acadian settlements at Cabannoce, La Fourche, Valenzuela, Iberville, and [West] Baton Rouge; and Creole Pointe Coupee. Away from the Mississippi, there were interior posts and settlements, including: the upper edges of Lake Pontchartrain, Galveztown on the Amite, Natchitoches, Rapides, the Attakapas and Opelousas prairies, and the banks of Bayous Teche, Boeuf, and Lafourche. Also, remote posts more-or-less above overflow existed for Ouachita, Avoyelles, Arkansas, and the Illinois Country. Few farmers lived outside the leveed region in Spanish Louisiana, but commandants at the farther outposts cultivated economic relations with Native Americans to enlist help against European rivals. White residents of those areas mostly engaged in grazing, hunting, and the Indian trade. On the east bank, the Baton Rouge District included posts at Manchac and Thompson's Creek (Feliciana) which became British in 1763 but passed to Spain after the American Revolution. Early settlers there were primarily British in origin. The Natchez District, though British in culture, became Spanish in allegiance in 1779 due to the exploits of Louisiana's Governor Bernardo de Galvez. Further upriver, the Spanish Illinois settlements were culturally French, and Creole settlers moved to Missouri on the west bank when the east bank became British. Spanish
commandants in the Illinois Country held sway at New Madrid, Ste. Genevieve, New Bourbon, and St. Charles.\textsuperscript{5}

Of course, the only metropolis in the colony was New Orleans, the city in the floodplain, whose problems with overflows brought levees on the Mississippi into existence. Its city government under the Spanish was the Cabildo. This institution superseded the French Superior Council, but had a narrower function in that the bulk of its policies affected only the city, not the colony at large. The Spanish abolished the Superior Council because of its role in a revolt in 1768 against Antonio de Ulloa, Spain's first governor of Louisiana. In New Orleans, the Cabildo supervised and maintained the city levee. To do this, it hired free blacks and slaves, and used convicts for labor. It also sometimes intervened in the upkeep of plantation levees just west of the city.\textsuperscript{6}

With rural commandants on the Mississippi and a Cabildo at New Orleans, both under the oversight of a colonial governor and his superiors, the levees of Spanish Louisiana did not lack for supervision. Since agricultural development was crucial to the colony's success, all of Louisiana's officials desired to see progress in the levee system as a means of guarding fields from overflow. Unfortunately for Spain, Louisiana's economic resources did not fit very well into the imperial trade network. Prior to its cession to Spain, Louisiana traded with France, Britain, and all the Caribbean islands. This, Spain would
not allow because, unlike France, its actively managed mercantilist economy did not accept the principle of colonial free trade. Spanish colonies existed only for the good of the Mother Country and had no right to engage in a commerce which only benefited themselves. Sadly, Spain did not need the tobacco or indigo grown by Louisiana's levee-building planters. Cuba and Guatemala already provided these. Nor did it value Louisiana's swamp lumber. France, Britain, and the Caribbean islands had been good customers, but Spanish bureaucrats forbade that trade and, consequently, faced a constant struggle to find other markets for Louisiana's goods. After the cession, its levee builders faced the unenviable prospect of protecting lands with levees which might or might not be profitable.7

A description of Louisiana's leveed settlements at the beginning of the Spanish era comes from the hand of an English lieutenant named Philip Pittman who lived in the British Floridas from 1763 to 1768. The government of England's King George III sent him to the east bank of the Mississippi after the Seven Years' War to survey rivers for the British army, and particularly to study the feasibility of clearing Bayou Manchac as a route to the Gulf. While on reconnaissance, Pittman made observations about Spanish Louisiana. He observed levees and witnessed the level of development the colony reached with their protection.8

In describing the Mississippi Valley in the mid 1760s, Pittman began at The Balize, five miles from the Gulf at
the river's South Pass. In French, "balise" means a beacon. Here the government had a lighthouse, garrison, and pilots to help ships over the bar at the river's mouth. From The Balize until within a few leagues of the Detour de L'Anglois (English Turn), the river's banks were marshes, unfit for cultivation. Gradually, fringes of arable soil arose at the riverside above the level sea-plains. A few recently opened and as-yet-unprotected plantations appeared near the Turn. Yet, from the Turn to New Orleans, well-improved, leveed properties with attractive houses became typical of both sides of the river. The cultivable soil was extensive enough to repay the trouble of reclaiming it from overflow, and planters devoted attention and time to the upkeep of embankments. From English Turn, levees stretched along the riverside more than fifty miles, as high as the present-day parish of St. John the Baptist. According to Pittman, levees within this area provided travelers with "a good coach-road all the way." He learned that country proprietors supplied their own levees. Public monies paid for the one at New Orleans.  

At the time of Pittman's visit, New Orleans still consisted of its original sixty-six squares divided into twelve lots each. In the early 1720s, New Orleans dwellings stood one foot off the ground, but Pittman in the early 1760s found them to be eight feet above ground. The added elevation responded to snakes, mosquitoes, chronic drainage problems, and occasional flooding caused by
crevasses, hurricanes, or the seepage of water through the city levee. Domestic architecture typically consisted of timber frames on piers, filled with bricks or mud. These materials would suffer considerable damage in an overflow. Pittman reported seven to eight hundred houses in the city and perhaps seven thousand free citizens, plus slaves. The defensive works did not impress him from an engineering standpoint, consisting of nothing but a stockade "with a banquette within and a very trifling ditch without." He did not regard the city levee as a fortification.\textsuperscript{10}

Agriculture gave value to the leveed land in rural areas. Pittman's remarks on the farms beside the river are, therefore, appropriate to a discussion of colonial levees. Continuing upriver from New Orleans, he saw a procession of leveed farms on both sides of the Mississippi for almost forty miles. These, and the ones between New Orleans and English Turn, were "the richest and most cultivated plantations on the Mississippi." He found that the crops were diverse in nature, and the Spanish Governor Ulloa had not yet arrived to impose new trade restrictions. Much of Louisiana's produce still went to the French island of Saint Domingue, particularly corn, rice, beans, myrtle wax candles, and cypress lumber. St. Domingue exported indigo and sugar to Europe, but some said that Louisiana's indigo was even better than St. Domingue's. Sugar, though a staple of Louisiana's economy in later years, was too susceptible to freezing (in the varieties then known) to
succeed in Pittman's day. Jesuit priests and a few rich planters started growing cane in Louisiana in 1762, and Pittman saw riverside mills for processing. Unfortunately, frosts led them to abandon the crop just after Pittman's visit, and planters did not resume sugar cultivation for three decades. Indigo continued as Louisiana's main leveed cash crop in the 1760s, but when the trade restrictions went into effect, they strove to redirect Louisiana's efforts into the production of leveed tobacco which could be sold to Mexico. Spain already had a good supply of indigo from Guatemala. Meanwhile, German Coast farmers operated leveed truck farms and took vegetables, butter, and eggs to New Orleans.\textsuperscript{11}

North of the German Coast, Pittman saw remnants of villages belonging to various tribes. The Native Americans occupied riverfront lands, but did not hold titles from the Crown or engage in duties of levee construction. The Houma had about forty warriors; the Alibamons, approximately twenty families. Chetimachas who lived at the Fork of the Chetimaches, the head of Bayou La Fourche, claimed about sixty warriors. None of these alluvial tribes were formidable enough to frighten the Spanish, nor strong enough to attract favors as potential allies. Native Americans in Lower Louisiana would soon be displaced by levee-building farmers who followed the King of Spain's commands.\textsuperscript{12}

Between the German Coast and Bayou Manchac, Pittman encountered newly settled Acadians, evicted from Nova
Scotia for refusing to take an oath of allegiance to the British king. These Catholics of French descent had lived as hunters, fishermen, and subsistence farmers in a remote part of eastern Canada since the early 1600s. Since their maritime province was subject to extreme tides, they built dikes there to regulate overflows from the sea. The experience proved valuable when they came to Louisiana.\footnote{13}

The Grand Derangement, as Acadians called their exile, came about because the British feared Acadians would not remain neutral in a conflict between French and English colonists. When Acadia became part of the British Empire in 1713, its government permitted French Acadians to hold a neutral status of citizenship in which they were not forced to renounce Catholicism or to take an oath to the King of England. The British stance of toleration lasted for more than forty years. Then, the outbreak of the Seven Years' War caused hard feelings and made the British expect Acadians to combine with French partisans at Quebec and Montreal to attack New England. As a result, in 1755 the British forcibly deported French Acadians and gave their land to settlers who would pledge allegiance to England. Since they were simple country people who had not actively rebelled, the British did not prosecute them as traitors. Instead, they resettled them in North America away from potential French allies, without, however, making restitution for lands lost in Nova Scotia. Having no land or employment and being largely unable to converse with
British settlers, Acadians lived for a time in Pennsylvania and Maryland, enduring prejudice and poverty. Pittman said they worked hard and could have prospered in the British dominions, but they would not endure proscriptions against Catholic worship, a religion "to which," Pittman wrote, "they are greatly bigoted." Some were deported to islands in the Caribbean, where they quarreled heartily with German refugees. Many died of exposure and malnutrition. In Spain, the Francophile Charles III learned of their plight and encouraged Acadians to remove to Louisiana. Unlike the British, he wanted Catholic settlers. Acadian energies would bolster the Church, expand the levees, and contribute men to the colonial militia. Under the direction of royal commandants, Acadians accepted vacant lands on the Mississippi, including those of the Houma, Alibamons, and Chetimachas. About "three hundred families of this unfortunate people" (Acadians) lived in Louisiana at the time of Pittman's tour. They had just arrived and had not yet built levees when Pittman visited, but he thought some of their "Coast" was never covered with more than a foot of water. "When secured from the inundations of the river by a bank [embankment] being thrown up," he said, [these lands] will be as good as any in Louisiana."14

Above the Acadians, Pittman viewed the last leveed settlement, that of Pointe Coupee. It began about thirty miles north of Bayou Manchac and ran for twenty miles on the Mississippi's west bank. Colonists also lived several
miles west of the river on "La Fausse Riviere." Pittman thought Pointe Coupee's population numbered two thousand whites and seven thousand slaves. Its planters grew tobacco and indigo for export and sent huge amounts of poultry to New Orleans to provision the city and ships' crews. They also made lumber and staves for shipment to the West Indies. The barrels carried island-grown sugar to Europe, and island carpenters assembled the pre-cut lumber into dwellings, an early form of pre-fabricated housing.  

Governor Antonio de Ulloa arrived to take charge of this thinly populated and rather primitive colony in 1766. Instructions from Spain told him to prevent Louisiana's trade with the British, the French, and their islands, but the government gave him a paltry allowance of troops and money to enforce its laws. Settlers took an instant dislike to Ulloa and the whole situation. Tensions ran so high that Ulloa conducted the government's affairs from a ship during part of his term. In 1768, the Superior Council declared his credentials invalid, banished him from Louisiana, and proclaimed its allegiance to France. An armed mob occupied New Orleans, and even the Acadians were stirred to support the insurrection. Ulloa lacked the resources to resist, so he fled to Cuba.  

If Louisiana's colonists had allowed Ulloa to govern, he might have been able to make significant contributions in flood control and drainage. Enlightened despot Charles III sent Ulloa to Louisiana because of the governor's
record as an improver. He was an engineer with experience in canal construction, naval base design, and mining technology. His work on the Canal of Castile enhanced Spain's internal communications. As a scientist and mathematician, Ulloa experimented with electricity, founded the natural history museum of Madrid, wrote learned books, discovered platinum, and was elected to the British Royal Society for Improving Natural Knowledge. Yet, in spite of Charles III's munificent intentions, Ulloa was the wrong man for reconciling Louisiana to Spanish rule. For instance, he lacked the ability to charm the planters and could not convince colonial leaders of the merits of Spain's commercial policies. Also, he lived in town and did not engage in the duties of the levee-building community. More importantly, Ulloa received no money for public works or defense. He held nothing but the threat of dispossession to motivate levee builders in their arduous task of swamp reclamation. As a result, with the implementation of Spanish trade laws, Louisiana contained a resentful, proud, and angry people who were growing suddenly devalued crops on oft-mortgaged land with restless slaves in leveed and fragile fields. As his ship sailed away, planters said "Good riddance!"17

In spite of this rebuff, Charles III was not inclined to be vindictive. In fact, Charles delighted in French things and had sparked riots in Spain when he tried to make Spaniards wear French fashions. An Irish soldier named
Alexander O'Reilly saved the King from a mob of protestors in 1766 and was favored thereafter with promotions. When Charles III decided to reassert his authority in Louisiana, he wanted to be tactful, conciliatory, and forceful at the same time. He chose O'Reilly as his agent. Among other achievements in Louisiana, O'Reilly successfully issued a royal land law which pleased levee builders and promoted the spread of flood control on the Mississippi. O'Reilly's code of 18 February 1770 offered a thorough recipe for the better regulation and maintenance of Louisiana's levees.18

To guarantee a respectful audience for the King's new laws, O'Reilly sailed to Louisiana with more than a dozen ships and debarked at New Orleans with two thousand heavily armed troops. The intent was to inspire awe and fear in this rebellious outpost. Where Ulloa had been told to leave the colony's former government intact, O'Reilly would abolish French laws and implement Spanish edicts. By the end of 1770, his ordinances recreated Louisiana's government. To his credit, O'Reilly tried to fit the new laws to the needs of the people. For example, he conducted a census to ascertain the colony's human population, its crops and livestock, and the general condition of its countryside. The census showed that almost 14,000 people lived in Louisiana in 1770. About 3,500 resided in New Orleans. France had made some progress in Mississippi River colonization since 1720, but Louisiana still lagged far behind the British colonies in population. Apart from
the arrival of the Acadians in the mid-1760s, its leved area had scarcely grown in extent since the 1730s. With Anglo-Americans crossing the Appalachians, O'Reilly wanted to stimulate Louisiana's population so it could sustain itself and discourage invasion by the British.\textsuperscript{19}

To attract developers, Louisiana needed more generous provisions for the acquisition of land, guidelines for its improvement, protection from overflows and stray animals, and military security through better logistics. To that end, O'Reilly issued a policy to attract immigrants to its most fertile and accessible land, the banks of the Mississippi. His edict was called "Concerning Grants of Land in Louisiana to New Settlers, Fencing of Same, Building of Roads and Levees, and Forfeiture of Strayed Cattle." If O'Reilly could make cultivable land more available to actual settlers, discourage speculations in unimproved tracts, and enforce the completion of needed improvements, he would greatly advance the colony's profitability. Both he and Charles III viewed leved farming as the key to a more secure future.\textsuperscript{20}

In the preamble to the land edict of 1770, O'Reilly stated that he composed the ordinance after much thought and study, "having nothing in view but the public good, and the happiness of every inhabitant." Armed with experience from the mistakes of Governor Ulloa, O'Reilly personally visited Louisiana's Creole, German, and Acadian Coasts, as well as Pointe Coupee, to witness conditions first-hand,
and he listened to settlers from interior bayous, via petition, from Opelousas, Attakapas, and Natchitoches. O'Reilly consulted well-informed men about local problems, modes of farming, and the level of improvement in various regions, then decided that "the tranquility of the said inhabitants, and the progress of cultivation" obliged him to reform Louisiana's land laws. He particularly meant to correct: irresponsible speculations in vacant lands, the neglect of public works by private landowners, and damages caused by stray cattle. All of these entailed an emphasis on the better supervision and upkeep of the levees.21

Under the provisions of O'Reilly's ordinance, the King of Spain would furnish land, free of charge, to families who agreed to improve it according to regulations. Household heads who desired land on the Mississippi could claim a tract measuring forty arpents deep with a width of either six or eight arpents on the riverfront, depending on the amount of labor they could muster. These slivers of land gave each proprietor access to the Mississippi for shipping and irrigation, "high" banklands for farming and pasture, and swampland covered in cypress for forage and lumbering. Within the first three years of residence, grantees on the river had to build "levees sufficient for the preservation of the land, and the ditches necessary to carry off the water." In addition, O'Reilly's settlers had to make and maintain a roadway along the levee at least forty feet wide between their seep ditch and the fence that enclosed the
cultivated fields. The road was River Road, the Chemin Royal, which paralleled the river in all settled riparian districts. Fences were of cypress planks, or "pieux," about nine feet long, stacked five to six high. Within three years, a settler had to clear his entire front of trees to the depth of two arpents from the river (nearly four hundred feet), and fence the clearing. He could enclose more land if neighbors consented and his labor supply permitted extra clearing and fencing. However, no matter how much land he controlled, his "public works" would have to be maintained through private labor.  

By the end of the eighteenth century, some colonists had as much as a hundred arpents protected by levees and enclosed within pieux fences. Fences kept animals out of the fields, so they grazed on the levee. Dr. John Sibley, a traveler in Louisiana at the end of the Spanish period, noted that, from the banks of the Mississippi "to the Fences within the Levy," animals enjoyed "a most Luxuriant Pasture." O'Reilly's fence law saved food and exports from being devoured or trampled by animals, but also strained the levees. Cattle, horses, pigs, and sheep damaged the levees, ditches, and roads. Yet, in a land where soil declined so rapidly into swamps a mile from the riverside, there was no alternative but to include levees in the domestic landscape. Settlers would just have to be diligent and watchful to keep trampled levees in repair when the time for high water approached.  

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Three years was the Spanish time limit for compliance. If settlers did not meet their obligations, grants would retrocede to the Crown for re-granting. Under O'Reilly and his successors, settlers experienced little toleration for weakness or incapacity. As seen in the Roquiny case during the French regime, the levee code made special provisions for orphans, but the limited indulgence it offered shows how seriously the Spanish Court viewed its reforms. If a grant inherited by minors remained uncleared, with levee and road out of repair, the local commandant investigated the situation. He could compel the minors' guardian to supervise and complete the works if they had adequate means (a sufficient slave force or the money to hire a crew). If, however, the orphans' lack of means caused the neglect, the lands were confiscated and sold to someone better capitalized. If he bought the confiscated grant within six months, the proceeds would go to the orphans; otherwise, they received nothing. The arrangement seems harsh, but lax enforcement would not have benefited anyone in the long run. The government had to exercise coercive force for the good of the community as a whole. 24

Under O'Reilly's rules, grantees could not sell or alienate grants before the expiration of three years, nor could they sell at all until the requirements for obtaining title had been met. This restriction kept speculators from engrossing huge tracts for resale through insincere dummy grants which they never meant to improve. Charles III and
General O'Reilly envisioned Louisiana's land grants as a means for achieving population growth and the completion of essential public works, not as a way for speculators to enrich themselves at the King's expense. In order to safeguard the ultimate purpose of the law, sales could only be made with a written permission from the governor, "who will not grant it until, on strict inquiry," he found that the leveeing, road-making, ditching, clearing, fencing, and residence requirements had been fulfilled.\textsuperscript{25}

By issuing land grants to individual households in contiguous rows, Spain aimed at a complete levee line. Unfortunately, some parts of the Mississippi riverfront were so difficult to levee that no one would voluntarily settle there. Gaps at vacant lands interrupted finished levees and endangered the improvements of adjacent proprietors. Land on points, for example, presented a dilemma to settlers because point lands faced the river for so wide an expanse compared to the depth of the grant. Points had excellent soil and contained virtually none that was uncultivable, but were so narrow and attenuated that a proprietor got a wider front (and, thus, the obligation to build more levees). The usual grant of six to eight arpents wide and forty arpents deep was much less trouble. To handle the dilemma, O'Reilly's ordinance proposed a way to dispose of undesirable sections of riverfront. The law offered point grantees up to twelve arpents of front to compensate for the deficiency in depth. This meant a
grantee would be required to build twelve running arpents
of levee and to clear twenty four superficial arpents (area
measure) in three years, rather than half to a third of
that amount. O'Reilly realized that grantees might avoid
points because of the heavy labor obligations. However,
even if no one applied for them, he said they would "be
distributed to the settlers nearest thereto, in order that
the communication of the roads may not be interrupted."
The forcible granting of white elephant lands to hapless
neighbors is one of the more unusual methods by which the
Spanish got levees built, but it generally seems to have
worked. Adjacent proprietors were immediately interested
in the completion of the levee line. If they had the means
to build additional levees, it was to their advantage to do
so. After all, the government controlled the shipment of
slaves and could channel sales of slaves to landowners who
were charged with difficult tasks of upkeep. In Louisiana,
slaves were the avenue to wealth through the cultivation of
larger acreage and more valuable crops. Thus, the
assumption of risk and hardships could ultimately work to a
colonist's profit. Spain had a patriarchal view of the
settlement process, and, within its ability to pay and
administer Louisiana, the colonists benefited from the
attention it bestowed upon levee-building proprietors.
Altogether, O'Reilly's land ordinance of 1770 covered the
flood-control obligations of landowners so thoroughly that
many years passed before significant alterations were made
to the system. Meanwhile, colonists in the alluvial landscape planted crops, sawed lumber, and went about their daily tasks. Levee building made the routine possible.26

A glimpse of that routine can be obtained through a study of Spanish records concerning the German Coast, such as its census of 1769 which acquainted Spanish officials with the region's resources. The enumerator discovered that its population of 2,016 was made up of 1,268 whites, 740 slaves, and 8 free blacks. Considerable diversity prevailed among its 220 household heads, including 66 Germans, 90 French Canadians or Louisiana-born Creoles, 52 Frenchmen, and 12 "foreigners," perhaps Swiss, English, or Spanish. Despite their differences, levee duties united them as a maintenance community because the government had distributed 1,735 linear arpents of riverbank to the households; and, until the mid-1770s, they had but one commandant to enforce levee laws. Farmers on the German Coast occupied 1,558 riverfront arpents in 1769; in addition, 51 arpents consisted of pasture, probably for dairies. The parish churches held 13 arpents, and 113 arpents were either unimproved or abandoned. Most likely, farmers who built levees on their own lands shared the duty of keeping church levees repaired. The glaring problem, of course, was the 113 arpents of vacant land which had no owner to make improvements. Much of it had apparently been lost by grantees who renounced or defaulted on the levee duties. A
loss of manpower in these areas meant that contiguous levees could not be completely built or repaired.  

According to the 1769 census, the crops of the German Coast were as diverse as the populace. The enumerator used a quantity measure for foodstuffs and a monetary value for commodities. He found about 12,900 quarts of corn; 12,300 quarts of rice; 1,400 quarts of beans; 14,300 livres of indigo; 7,400 livres of cotton; and 4,300 livres of tobacco. The inhabitants had 34,000 pieces of lumber ready for sale. Poultry and livestock consisted of approximately: 7,000 chickens; 2,000 pigeons; 2,000 turkeys; 400 ducks; and 150 geese; also, 3,000 cattle; 2,400 pigs; 1,850 sheep; 630 horses; and 450 draft oxen. This level of output and capital investment had all been achieved since the Germans' arrival less than fifty years earlier as penniless contract workers. Their prosperity depended completely upon a domesticated landscape protected by levees.

To help those who were helping themselves through the correct observance of levee codes, the administration of General O'Reilly quickly addressed the problem of flooding caused by vacant, unleveed lands. For example, German Coast historian Helmut Blume, who studied colonial land transactions, found twenty new land concessions made in the parishes of St. Charles and St. John the Baptist in March and April of 1770. Clearly, the grants came in response to O'Reilly's land and levee edict of 18 February 1770, which he crafted for the completion of Louisiana's levees and
roads. Since the census of 1769 showed the need for levees on 113 arpents in the German Coast, O'Reilly's agent, the German Coast commandant, executed his wishes by finding settlers to close the gaps. These grants brought more stability to the Coast because its levee lines were nearing completion, but persistence was also necessary. Owners must continue the maintenance duties as long as they kept the land. On the other hand, death, reversals of fortune, or removals to other homes sometimes caused a colonist to part with a grant. To illustrate, an inventory of legal documents from St. John the Baptist Parish taken in 1793 shows the sale of 252 concessions from 1770 to 1792. This represents an average turnover rate in which the entire group of grants could change hands twice in 23 years. Sales of less than full tracts also occurred. Nonetheless, one should not view this seeming intransience among the landowners as evidence of failure. Actually, the reverse is true, because sales were only legal if a settler had successfully built and maintained his public works.  

According to researcher Helmut Blume, "it happened again and again [on the German Coast] that property was given up and then had to be reconsigned." For instance, Robin De Logny, commandant of the Upper German Coast (St. John the Baptist Parish), sent a letter to Governor Unzaga in 1776 asking him to give the bearer a grant on the Mississippi. The land he targeted for reassignment had been relinquished by Charles Roubeau and Mathieu Robert
"because they could not keep the roads, levees, etc. in good condition." In August of 1774, the Commandant wrote Unzaga in disgust with the performance of several grantees who were not fulfilling their royal contract. They "do no work on their concessions; they do not maintain either the road or the levee." Neighbors suffered deep overflows, because "they . . . wallow in inactivity." Hence, De Logny declared it would be best to confiscate and bestow the grants upon people who were more deserving.30

Yet, by 1779, it seems that corrections had been made or perhaps De Logny, with a greater awareness of the demands of the environment, had grown less critical of the inhabitants' performance. In his inspection report to Governor Bernardo de Galvez of 8 August 1779, he wrote that the condition of the public works in St. John was generally good with a few exceptions. The exceptions listed indicate the kinds of flood control problems a Spanish commandant had to deal with. For example, Olivier Soreille, a non-resident owner of 30 to 32 arpents, had been warned to upgrade his levees. De Logny emphasized to Soreille that he must "guarantee his neighbors against rising waters by building a solid levee and drainage ditches." The Commandant wrote to Galvez, "I have made your position on this essential matter clear to him." Besides Soreille, a disorderly family named Dupart owned eight vacant arpents at the edge of the parish, but had built no road or levee. "All the neighbors complain about it," De Logny said. In
another example, Monsieur Masson was neglecting his levee while trying to sell eight arpents of vacant land. The reason being, he had agreed to hold it for neighbors who wanted the acreage but were not ready to make a purchase. Their self-interested trafficking in Crown grants was threatening the region's security and gave De Logny cause for complaint. On the other hand, Monsieur Sansoucy, a sick man with a wife and children, was physically unable to levee his six arpents. "It is a pity that he is always sick," De Logny remarked. Though "he has promised to make a levee, I believe he is not in any condition to do it."

The situation "has always inconvenienced his neighbors," but the wife begged De Logny for mercy and vowed to hire someone to build a levee "so that they will not lose their land." De Logny agreed to a 15 day extension. Concerning one neighborhood, that of Bonnet Carre, De Logny had no criticism. He wrote that its 50 to 60 arpents of flood-prone riverfront were just uninhabitable, "full of trees and impassable abysses." In his opinion, "it would be impossible for any mortal to pass the night [there] without falling victim to the trees or the chasms." Nonetheless, before the Spanish regime ended, even that idyllic spot had been granted away. Governors did not see hardships first hand, nor were they as sympathetic as De Logny to the plight of individual colonists. Public interest, in the broad sense, required a few sacrifices from those who consented to improve troublesome real estate.31
What was involved in the physical completion of a Spanish levee? In November of 1774, De Logny recommended dimensions of six feet high with a base of fifteen feet. Many colonial levees were not as tall as that, but the task cannot be underrated. The usual Spanish grant of six to eight arpents per household measured 1,152 to 1,536 feet across, requiring a levee four to five football fields in length. If De Logny prevailed in requiring levees six feet in height, the structure would be taller than the average man's head. To dig that much dirt and pile it in place was daunting enough, but the job of clearing trees for the levee and road easements cannot be forgotten. A clearing on a typical grant to satisfy O'Reilly's law would measure at least 450,000 square feet. If a settler was assigned a point grant, the front of his land would increase to 12 arpents--2,304 linear feet, or 7 1/2 football fields of embankment. To undertake such a job, while simultaneously opening a new farm and providing for a wife and children, was incredibly stressful. The wonder is not that the levees of colonial Louisiana were imperfect, but that people managed to build them at all.32

Acadians and Canary Islanders were the principal recipients of grants in the Spanish era, and at the time of their arrival they were destitute. None initially had slaves to assist with levees or other legal requirments. Fortunately, they were close-knit groups who worked well together and were highly motivated by the prospect of

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having their own land. Too, Acadians were not unfamiliar with the process of levee building. In Nova Scotia, their coastal levees typically measured 4 1/2 to 5 1/2 feet high--occasionally as much as 7 1/2 feet high--with a base of 11 feet and a crown of 1 to 2 1/2 feet across. There were few or no slaves in Nova Scotia, and Acadians did the physical work of dike building themselves. Unlike Creole planters of the Indigo Coast, who were drawn primarily from the junior ranks of noble families, Acadians felt no stigma about building with their own hands. The acquisition of land set many on the path to wealth, and they eagerly embraced the chance to achieve a modest independence. As Louisiana's newest white proletariat, the willingness to do physical labor turned them into men of property. During the Spanish period, levees on the "Acadian Coast" quickly arose in what are now the parishes of St. James, Ascension, Iberville, and West Baton Rouge.33

Meanwhile, further downriver, the new settlers on the German Coast experienced chronic problems with crevasses in levees they had just finished. The perennial trouble spot of Bonnet Carre--near the border between the First and Second German Coasts--gave much cause for concern in the Spanish period. For example, in 1774 its new levees broke and the whole extent of Bonnet Carre flooded. The crevasse area of thirty arpents belonged to several poor people who had arduously fulfilled the terms of O'Reilly's levee law. In the face of their present losses, they lacked the means
to make repairs. Two proprietors abandoned concessions in
the summer of 1774 and moved in with other settlers. Other
landowners told Commandant de Logny they would resign from
the properties after the harvest unless the governor built
a replacement levee. De Logny knew the demand would be
viewed in Madrid and New Orleans as outrageous, but his
familiarity with the situation prompted him to counsel
accommodation rather than eviction. In fact, De Logny told
the governor that residents of St. Charles Parish ought to
aid the people of Bonnet Carre in levee rebuildings. As he
said, the people of St. Charles were prosperous and in easy
circumstances, with "beaucoup de negres" (plenty of slaves)
to do levee tasks. Levees at Bonnet Carre protected the
improvements of St. Charles, but its people contributed
nothing to the works. De Logny argued it would not be
wrong to force them to help the poor of St. John the
Baptist in this case. After all, both parishes were part
of the King's Domain and effective levee construction would
be a public service. Louisiana had no constitution, nor
quibbles about what it allowed in the field of public
works. Therefore, the King and his agents could order
whatever seemed prudent for each situation.34

In accordance with the Commandant's recommendations,
work began on a new Bonnet Carre levee as a cooperative
effort after the harvest of 1775. Unfortunately, the
situation failed to improve, because the Mississippi broke
through time and again. The discouraged settlers who
relinquished grants included Francois Le Boeuf and his son Dominique. They had accepted land from De Logny in April of 1770, but gave up thirty arpents at Bonnet Carre in September of 1776 and expressed a strong desire to relocate among the Acadians. George Hymel abandoned a front of six arpents; others vowed to follow. Who could De Logny find to take their place? All regretted to lose improvements, but it seemed hopeless to plant crops and build levees in an active, relentless flood plain. The Commandant's report of 1779 depicted problems with terse forthrightness. He said constant breaks in the levees of Bonnet Carre robbed inhabitants of crops and cattle. Many families had left or were leaving for safer ground. The original crevasse affected a front of thirty arpents, but its eroding effects spread far beyond. In fact, if someone did not install a durable levee there within three years, he predicted the crevasse would take at least 28 miles of riverfront out of cultivation. "Because of the continually increasing devastation, it will then be too late to bring things back into order," De Logny wrote. He pled with the governor to look into the matter. "I myself," he wailed, "have 60 arpents of grain fields under water, in addition to a portion of my indigo fields. I can grab ducks from my window and fish in my back yard." All the neighbors, for twelve miles upriver and fifteen miles downriver, endured the same conditions. The situation worsened in August of 1779 and 1780 when severe hurricanes struck. In 1780,
Governor Galvez reported a pale red horizon which "painted faces yellow, a sign of what was to come." The gale struck at three o'clock, and, Galvez remarked, "One cannot imagine such a day of greater fear and more terrible disorder. Everyone was screaming loudly for help and no one could offer any." Hundreds of buildings blew down between New Orleans and the Acadian Coast, with staggering losses of crops as well. Some tried to sell what was left among the rubble in order to move away.33

Discrete breaks at vulnerable locations like Bonnet Carre inundated distinct neighborhoods, but great flood years placed the whole riverside at risk. For example, in the flood of 1788 overflows occurred at such disparate locations as Arkansas Post; St. Genevieve, Illinois; Manchac, near Baton Rouge; and the two German Coasts. Acadian settlers suffered so much that Governor Esteban Miro sent corn and rice for their relief valued at $12,000. After floods of this type, levee reconstructions had to be undertaken throughout the Lower Mississippi Valley.36

A document issued by Miro in 1789 reveals what was ordered to better protect St. Charles, the "First Parish of the Germans." A copy of his orders in the Henry Remy Papers at Louisiana State University reminds one of the ethnic complexity that developed on the river. The copyist, a Creole historian of American Louisiana, translated the Spanish governor's writings into French, but
the law applied to German settlers in a Spanish colony concerning work done principally by African slaves.\textsuperscript{37}

In his edict, Miro told inhabitants of the First German Parish to nominate a new category of officials--the syndics--by majority vote to look after the preservation of levees and the better maintenance of roads. Syndics were to be reliable landowners who earned the community's respect. Under Miro's plan, they were chosen by the people themselves as public servants to supervise crucial public works. By assuming duties of inspection and oversight, the syndics gave material aid to the commandant and allowed him a more coordinative and managerial role. This local governing board composed of a district commandant and syndics was the forerunner of an American system of local government which came about in the territorial period, that of a parish police jury composed of ward jurors under a parish judge. Based on intimate knowledge of the neighborhood and its people, Spanish syndics divided their parish into supervisory levee and road districts (wards) which answered to the post commandant. To make sure that inhabitants performed public works in a timely fashion, as soon as the crops had been gathered, syndics made inspections. If inhabitants ignored a syndic's counsel or failed to proceed promptly, so as to give the syndic "uneasiness," he responded by telling the delinquents how big to make their levees and what thickness they would have.\textsuperscript{38}
These Spanish syndics probably judged the necessary height of levees in the same way the French did. That is, by estimating the height of future floods according to previous high water marks. Under Miro's plan, a syndic could pronounce an inhabitant to be delinquent and notify him of what was required. Then, syndics could call on other proprietors to furnish slaves for the completion of the delinquent's levee. Syndics told inhabitants how many slaves to send to the work and for how many days workers would be demanded. Miro stated that his principal point was to prevent crevasses. Steps such as this, for preparedness, would be better than costly repairs and avoidable losses. Miro required all inhabitants to be ready to assist in the contribution of slaves or workers for upgrading the levees, because crevasses affected them all. In fact, his ordinance of 1789 gave syndics the authority to address problems and summon slaves whenever they judged levees to be in danger. Syndics became a pillar of levee administration for decades to come. They were the catalyst for communication, cooperation, and coaching, to urge the inhabitants of Lower Louisiana into timely compliance with salutary levee laws.39

The next major addition to Spain's levee laws came in 1792 from the hand of Louisiana's reform governor, Baron Hector de Carondelet. Carondelet was not just interested in levees; he energetically turned his attention to whatever improvements seemed desirable in the colony. For

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example, Carondelet granted lands to settlers on a liberal scale to increase the population, and he distributed free seeds for crops he wished to promote. He built forts, improved waterways, and started drainage projects. He demanded a more thorough observance of police regulations concerning the upkeep of levees, roads, and bridges. He founded New Orleans's first police department, its fire department, street lights, and newspaper. Carondelet did these things from a genuine feeling of public spiritedness, but also from a sense of foreboding about the revolutionary direction the world was taking. As governor from 1791 to 1797, he could not but look with alarm at political developments around him. Encroaching Westerners in and from the infant United States, slave rebels in Saint Domingue, and expansionist regicides in France all seemed bent on overturning the world. Carondelet hoped to prevent the spread of revolutionary contagions into Louisiana by making its people happy with the opportunities they enjoyed under an enlightened Spanish monarchy.40

Carondelet's Louisiana levee ordinance of 1792 began with an explanation of the importance with which he viewed these works. As he said, "the maintenance of the levees interests all the inhabitants where crevasses ruin in an instant the fruits of a year of labor." Since "fortune and existence depends in a great part upon the success of the crops," security from overflow held a supreme importance. To enforce standards of levee construction and maintenance,
Carondelet expanded the office of syndic into all the river parishes. Under Carondelet, they were eyes and ears for the governor, watching inhabitants and reporting to commandants. The commandants, in turn, kept the governor up-to-date on whatever affected the public interests of Louisiana. One day, syndics might learn about an imminent crevasse; the next, hear rumors of a slave revolt. In either case, syndics were men of substance and reputation who knew the heart of the levee-building community and were loyal (hopefully) to the interests of the King of Spain. Under Carondelet, they became inspectors of Louisiana's riparian communities in every sense of the word, political, mental, and physical. However, the inspection of levees was their most important on-going duty.\(^4\)

In Carondelet's plan, syndics made regular inspections of levees within their districts and told each landowner what to do to bring levees up to code. Proprietors could harvest the crops before commencing levee repairs, but they had to treat the syndic's orders with respect. Carondelet decreed that inhabitants who disobeyed a syndic's levee directives would be fined forty piastres. Half the fine went to the Royal Treasury and half to the Hospital for the Poor. Any inhabitant who slandered or maligned a syndic because of his levee orders would be fined one hundred piastres, levied on the slave property of the planter who committed the offense.\(^4\)
According to the levee edict of 1792, a syndic had authority in cases of crevasse to commandeer as many slaves as he considered necessary from each inhabitant of his district, drawn on the same side of the river, for closing a breach. The landowner at the spot of the crevasse had to recompense the slaves' owners at the rate of four reales per day. Any who refused to send slaves to the crevasse, or rejected the contributing planters' demand for compensation, received a fine of two hundred piastres. These provisions showed the community that individual rights and liberties were subordinated to the public good in times of crisis. Demands for assistance could not be ignored with impunity. In addition, syndics could even request slaves from outside their districts if the neighborhood's own slave force was insufficient to cope with an emergency. In these cases, the colonial government approved the conscription of extra hands and billed the proprietor for labor. Obviously, a crevasse could devastate a landowner's finances as well as his fields.43

Like O'Reilly before him, Carondelet was not inclined to tolerate the presence of settlers on the riverfront whose finances were insufficient to keep levees in repair. He said that "Messrs. the syndics will . . . report to the Government the residents who are out of condition to keep up their levees for the want of negroes and means." His policy toward impecunious settlers was short and sweet: "They will be ordered to sell their lands at the end of the
harvest." Necessity compelled the government to this stern course, for many proprietors suffered if one lacked the capacity to keep levees intact. Floods did not spare a poor man or his neighbors, and Nature itself conspired to remove him from the Louisiana waterfront. Thus, in his levee edict, Carondelet ratified the laws of Nature. In effect, Louisiana's levee-building communities were well on their way to becoming a frontier for the rich—those rich, at least, in the command of sufficient labor for the building of levees. Otherwise, they faced eviction.44

In addition to regulations concerning syndics and crevasses, Carondelet's ordinance of 1792 introduced several reforms pertaining to improved levee construction. The governor aimed to make levees more durable through rational building methods. For example, Carondelet compelled landowners to forgo one common, but ultimately counter-productive, shortcut. The easiest way to build a levee was to dig earth from two trenches and heap it in the middle. Experience showed, however, that digging soil from the side next to the river left a trench which channelized the river's force for abrasion directly at the levee's base. Whole sections could be undermined when water raced through a trench at the levee's front. To prevent this, his ordinance prohibited landowners from digging levee soil on the side next to the river. Earth would have to come from the swamp side of line and be thrown or hauled into place. The ordinance told inhabitants to fill any ditches
which then existed on the river side of the levee and to
replace them with a berm, a "sloping bank . . . which will
lose itself imperceptibly at the edge of the river." 45

The building of a berm in front of the levee was
another of Carondelet's reforms. This requirement came in
response to Louisiana's habit of piling dirt into narrow,
tall levees with steep sides. Breaks in structures so
shaped were frequent and devastating, for high water poured
through with great force, often washing buildings and crops
away and leaving fields covered in sand. A gently sloping
berm required the clearing of more land, and the excavation
and emplacement of greater quantities of dirt, but greatly
added to a levee's durability because water pressure spread
across a longer, thicker, and less vulnerable surface.
Proprietors were also told to plant the slope with a turf
of short grass, usually Bermuda grass, to resist erosion
and scouring. Other requirements included a rise in
elevation. Believing that Louisiana's levees were
generally too low, Carondelet ordered that they be raised
above the high water mark of 1792. Seep ditches had to be
redigged as well, if their alignments were incorrect.
Carondelet wanted them "six good toises (36 feet) distance
from the said levee on the side by the cypress grove."
Presumably, the Chemin Royal (River Road) was inserted
between the levee and the ditch within the bounds of that
thirty six feet. 46
Once he made provisions for better levee construction, Carondelet also proclaimed his rules for improved disaster prevention. In places liable to give trouble to levee builders, such as spots where cut-offs, caving banks, or crevasses annoyed a neighborhood, Carondelet told proprietors to stash a supply of "pickets, planks, Spanish moss and other articles necessary to stop the crevasses." The failure to keep such items on hand carried a fine of one hundred piastres. Marauding livestock bothered the Governor. Their trampling on levees was a frequent cause of damage, and Carondelet announced he would not permit livestock to roam free "from the time of the seed planting up to that of every sort of harvesting." Animals in violation of curfew would be arrested and penned until reclaimed by their owners, and, the Governor tersely added, "pigs are comprised in this said prohibition." Any horse, mule, cow, pig, or ox that roamed the levee without human supervision could be confiscated for the benefit of the Hospital for the Poor. Impounded animals had to be redeemed with a price, and owners were supposed to pay each levee's proprietor for any damages the animals caused.

Carondelet's levee edict of 1792 manifests the Governor's sense of what was lacking in Louisiana's levee system and reveals an active intelligence at work in the devising of rules for reform and improvement. However, the law also contains commonsense precepts drawn from the life experiences of two or three generations of levee builders.
Carondelet consulted the locals to learn what was needed, and communities knew what was needed because they had struggled with levee and drainage solutions through trial and error for years. Carondelet's communications with the inhabitants, both in person and through reports from the commandants and syndics, showed what Louisiana needed, and he (contrary to public officials in our own time) acted decisively to bring it about.  

The working of Carondelet's ordinance on a personal level can be seen in numerous actions taken during his tenure. For example, in 1792, the Governor issued orders to Nicolas de Verbois, a commandant of the Acadian Coast, telling him to appoint syndics to help inspect levees and impartially enforce proper upkeep. This appointment of syndics by the commandant was different from Miro's earlier instructions which allowed communities to select syndics for themselves. On the other hand, Carondelet was operating in unsettled times and he worried more than Miro did about the decentralization of power in the colony. If residents were disloyal, the government's trusting them to choose their own inspectors would be suicidal. One might as well give conspirators a key to the colony. Thus, in Carondelet's administration, he appointed the commandants and ordered commandants to choose the syndics. Together, they screened candidates for land grants and noted any disloyal tendencies or rebellious notions. Carondelet probably expanded the number of syndics in the parishes as
well, especially after an abortive slave revolt in Pointe Coupee in 1795 which implicated slaves belonging to Julian Poydras, a philosophe who sympathized with the French Revolution. A census taken in the First German Coast in 1795 showed the presence of ten syndics, five on each bank, monitoring the community and supporting the commandant. These and fellow syndics throughout Louisiana kept a careful watch on inhabitants and their slaves. Nevertheless, in spite of his caution about conspiracy and revolt, Carondelet did want Louisiana's vacant riverfront to be settled with loyal levee builders. He told Verbois to give banks in his district away within the year to those who would levee it promptly. Thomas Hebert, an Acadian of Iberville County, District of Manchac, received such a tract from Verbois in 1792 for fulfilling Carondelet's orders. Hebert's grant fronted the river for almost three arpents and spread inwards to the customary depth of forty arpents. He lived in a neighborhood densely settled with small farmers, and this modest tract featured a levee about 580 feet long. Some of Carondelet's levee arrangements were far more ambitious.⁴⁹

As usual, Bonnet Carre presented the government with an ongoing dilemma. In the days of Governor Miro, inhabitants of the German Coast congregations of St. Charles and St. John the Baptist asked for relief. Miro agreed to a project proposed by Antoine Peytavin. The entrepreneur offered to borrow $16,000 from the royal
treasury to build a sound levee at Bonnet Carre. Peytavin would repay the loan in six years if, at the end of that time, the government transferred the area's concessions to him as his own land. Since the crevassed levee builders of that incorrigible area were technically delinquent, Miro agreed to Peytavin's proposal. He built a levee as promised, but its condition soon deteriorated. In 1793, Carondelet wrote Peytavin a harsh complaint about the numerous overflows which poured over the levee the year before. Now, in 1793, repairs were neglected and part of the embankment had caved in. "I hope," Carondelet said, "that the promptness and the zeal with which you will follow my orders will relieve me of the unpleasantness of having to repeat them." Should that, however, be the case, Peytavin would owe a fine of one hundred piastres.50

Carondelet frequently used psychological tactics of praise and shame to motivate colonists toward excellence in their public works. Lacking money to pay for improvements, he found other triggers to prompt them. A good example of his persuasiveness is the completion of a canal for the drainage of New Orleans. Even Bienville had pointed out the merits of a drainage ditch to carry levee seepage and rainwater away from the Crescent City, but none of Louisiana's governors before Carondelet managed to get it built. Carondelet suggested that the canal run from the city's back ramparts to Bayou St. John. What were the advantages? For one thing, it would be a health reform by
removing stagnant water which was thought to be the main source of the city's "bad air." Besides, Carondelet told the people of New Orleans that if they did not drain their city with such a canal, its townsite would be uninhabitable in fewer than three or four years. Why? Streets were already covered with water when nearby levees broke, and with each overflow, sedimentary deposits raised the land at the river's edge, making a sunken basin that could never drain in relation to surrounding lands. Everyone agreed that standing water made the city unhealthy. For example, local critic James Pitot wrote that "diseases [are] never more mortal than during the years when crevasses have saturated the cemeteries and covered the outskirts . . . with decayed debris." Carondelet's plan to drain New Orleans found a willing audience.51

After spreading his alarm, Carondelet asked planters and slaveowners in the vicinity to donate their slaves' time to the cause. Patriotic inhabitants responded by sending sixty slaves to dig the canal. Carondelet supplemented this "voluntary" workforce by hiring workers with funds raised by public subscription. A subscription allowed small or non-slaveowners in the city itself to contribute. He also used the labor of condemned criminals. The work proceeded very rapidly, especially that of the borrowed slaves, doubtless because their owners had other tasks in mind for them at home. Nonetheless, the slaves made a trench six feet deep for a considerable distance
before returning to their plantations. Carondelet kept the convicts and hired slaves on the job for several months thereafter. They finally reached Bayou St. John and achieved success. Then, he asked for an upgrade.\textsuperscript{52}

Obviously, Carondelet had a mindset for the creative envisioning of opportunities. He now expressed a desire to make this new ditch \textit{navigable}, from Bayou St. John to the city, so merchants could receive heavy products by water from the piney woods north of Lake Pontchartrain. Items such as lumber, tar, and pitch could be boated to the mouth of Bayou St. John, hauled up the canal and carried by wagon to the city levee for reloading on ocean-going ships. A navigable canal would help New Orleans's merchants as well as rural naval-stores producers on the north shore. Once again, Carondelet pled for aid from the public-spirited portion of the community. This time slaveowners sent 150 slaves, who deepened the canal to fifteen feet. That autumn, after the completion of most farm work, Carondelet asked for another slave loan. He said that if planters within fifteen miles of the city would send slaves for just eight days, he could render the canal navigable into the city. The public responded; by winter, the canal was in use. Applause honored Carondelet's initiative, and New Orleans placed a plaque on the Cabildo in three languages to tell of his efforts.\textsuperscript{53}

In later years, citizens remembered Carondelet as their most forward-thinking governor. However, the bursts
of effort he kindled could not substitute for the merits of institutionalized and bureaucratically managed routine maintenance. The Spanish colonial system simply did not provide enough funds for upkeep on the canal, and within eight years it was almost unusable. Critic James Pitot wrote in 1802 that Carondelet's successors did not interest themselves in improvements, and the canal suffered the indignity of becoming a trash dump for lazy residents. By 1802, dumping raised the bottom to the point that it was too shallow for boats; besides which, trees fell into Bayou St. John and obstructed the route from Lake Ponchartrain. No one took the trees out, just as no one kept the silt dredged out of the Bayou's mouth. It built so high that a pirogue could barely cross, much less a barge of masts or turpentine. This was a sad, but rather predictable fate for a public work that relied so heavily on public spirit rather than an adequate tax structure, reliable funding, and routine, consistent, supervisory maintenance.54

One might be led to comment that Spain did not tax Louisiana heavily enough to sustain truly public works. The royal revenue demands consisted of a 4 percent tax on legacies left to non-relations, a 2 percent tax on legacies over $2,000, a 6 percent export/import duty, and a half-year's salary tax on new officials. Residents paid no local property taxes. Indeed, Dr. John Sibley noted in amazement, as he mounted the Mississippi in 1802, that "the owner of every plantation is Obliged by the King to keep
these Levys in repair . . . which is the only Tax they pay." Judging from what we know of the task, the cost of this tax-in-kind was not inconsiderable, and Sibley, had he settled on the Mississippi instead of Natchitoches, might not have been amazed that levee building was used in lieu of money as a tax payment. Nevertheless, provided one adds the duty of building a road, bridges, and drainage ditches to the construction of a levee, Sibley was essentially correct. Actual money payments to the colonial government were few and far between in Louisiana. Barring subscriptions and voluntary contributions, little money existed for the funding of public works. If private landowners could not do a job by improving their own properties, the Spanish more-or-less had to let that improvement go by the wayside. In its overall administration of Louisiana, the shortfall between the colonial government's expenditures and revenue was met by an annual subsidy from the Spanish central government. Louisiana never supported itself independently in those days, and defense expenditures were heavy, especially in the 1790s, because of the need for agricultural and Indian subsidies, and the upgrading of military defenses against the British and the United States. Even so, Carondelet was not responsible for the Spanish Empire's structural shortcomings or for the undeveloped state of colonial economies. Within the range of possibilities, he was a man of merit who contributed much to the development of leveed Louisiana with imagination and energy.55
In 1795, Louisiana needed all of Carondelet's talents to cope with another flood. About sixty miles of riverfront sank beneath the overflow, and the land was feared by some to be almost beyond reclamation. The year 1795 was an especially bad time for a flood in Louisiana because of a simultaneous indigo blight and canceled governmental tobacco subsidies. Shattered levees, reformed in 1792, now guarded lagoons full of diseased indigo and unsaleable snuff. Not a pretty prospect. Thus, Carondelet revised his police regulations on 1 June 1795 to modify former laws and adapt to changed conditions. He realized that swift, concentrated action was necessary, but timely repairs could only be made if neighborhoods pooled resources and drummed stragglers into line. Therefore, his edict of 1795 announced that levees would be built and upgraded as a communal effort by all residents of the damaged districts. "No matter whether they are rich or poor," inhabitants had to make fully two-thirds of their slaves available for levee duty. Carondelet explained that the quality and timely completion of levees suffered because people with few slaves built too slowly. Now, a neighborhood levee-work-pool would do the rebuilding for all. By repairing embankments in a short burst of work, early in the low-water season, proprietors could have levees in place before the next high water. Meanwhile, earthworks could cure and settle. They Withstood a flood in better order if allowed to be wetted with rain, because the moistening and drying
process settled, compacted, and baked them (in the sun) before the water rose in earnest. Like cheese, levees grew better with age. Also, levees built *en masse* as a group project would not drag on in a haphazard fashion as each proprietor got around to it. Thousands of syndic-negotiated slave borrowings and enforced or voluntary hirings would be reduced (in Carondelet's emergency plan) to a short, supervised corvee that applied to all at the same time. Carondelet explained that he took these radical, almost communistic steps because Louisiana's constant flood damages had exhausted his patience. "The land is finally going to receive protection," he vowed.56

According to Carondelet's new directives, levee work unfolded in the following manner. On August 1st, the supervisor of a district—whether commandant or syndic—inspected all levees, roads, and bridges in his district. He made the trip with two witnesses to vouch for the honesty of the proceedings and with two technicians whose know-how about levees enabled them to give good advice. The district levee supervisor and technicians investigated and deliberated to decide what work to require. After farmers and planters brought their harvests in and finished their chief field preparations, "which is roughly around the end of October," the supervisor and technical advisors gave inhabitants their assignments. At the end of December, the inspection was repeated with the supervisor, technicians, and witnesses to see if the work required had
been done. If the performance fell short of what was asked, the supervisor would hire slaves from the district's inhabitants to correct problems at the expense of those "against whom complaints have been ascertained." The requisitioned slaves had to work on successive Sundays until the situation was resolved, at the rate of four reales per day per negro.\textsuperscript{57}

No slaveowner could refuse a supervisor's demand for his slaves' services in the work of levee repair. In the 1792 ordinance, the Governor said the money paid for the slaves' hire went to their owners. The police orders of 1795, on the other hand, suggest that slaves were now to receive the pay themselves. The Governor's law of 1795 specified that slaves had Sundays off as a legal holiday. If harvests or other matters required their attention on Sunday, a master could work them but had to pay them four reales per day for overtime. Since this figure is identical to what a delinquent levee builder paid for slave work on Sunday, it seems that slaves were getting the money to build the delinquent levees.\textsuperscript{58}

In regard to this practice of "paying" slaves, masters in Louisiana often advanced clothes and treats--such as tobacco or tafia--to slaves, which the blacks subsequently "paid for" in installments from the proceeds of Sunday work. French tourist Berquin-Duvalon said if a master wanted a job done quickly, it was more effective to promise three fingers of tafia than to threaten a whipping, for
slaves would "fly through flames" for tafia and tobacco. The incentive gave slaves something to look forward to—a degree of hope in their work. A few slaves in Spanish Louisiana were even able to buy their own freedom, and the policy of paying slaves for extra effort was perfectly in line with Carondelet's tactic of conciliating Louisiana to the rule of an enlightened monarchy. With slaves in the abusive Caribbean colony of Sainte Domingue up in arms and torching plantations in the 1790s, the Governor sought to make slaves in Louisiana less desperate and more reconciled to their status through humane treatment. In his view, chaos would not benefit the owner or the owned. Meanwhile, the chance to earn money provided slaves with capital for purchases and even a faint prospect of working their way out of slavery. Under Carondelet's reforms, levee-building slaves became, in a small way, consumers like their masters. Based on the proceeds of levee-based agriculture, master and slave both subsisted on credit earned from economic activities that flood control made possible. Levee work may even have been a welcome break of routine for slaves, because it gave them a chance to socialize with bondsmen from other plantations in group outings. Doubtless there were opportunities for courting and family reunions during these supervised levee excursions. And, without Sunday work like levee building, vegetable gardening, hunting, fishing, or poultry raising, slaves would have had a more limited wardrobe, a poorer diet, and
probably no access to recreational narcotics and alcohol. By providing rewards and the chance to buy things, levee building contributed to consumerism and the morale of the slave force. It also prevented damages from overflows or crevasses that slaves would have had to repair! Thus, it was as much in the slave's interest to build good embankments as it was the master's. They were all members of the levee-building community with a common (if unequally rewarded) stake in the levees' success.59

Carondelet's edict of 1795 told settlers how to improve levees so that, hopefully, their dirt would better withstand the next high water. Apparently, some of the breaks of 1795 were caused by levee blowouts, where water pressure found weak spots and exploded the soil. During low water months, the Governor ordered inhabitants to fill all holes they found within three toises (18 feet) of the levee, river, or road. Holes left by the removal of stumps had to be filled, as did holes caused by burrowing animals or the breathless crawfish. Carondelet specifically targeted the latter. In their vast numbers and insatiable gnawing, crawfish could quickly undermine levees or trigger crevasses. One unusually ignorant traveler, Estwick Evans of New Hampshire, observed Louisiana crawfish and concluded that their existence within fields at some distance from the river "proves that the land in this part of the country is afloat." He thought crawfish swam into fields through subterranean streams. In fact, they flourished in drainage
ditches, and Carondelet attacked them by forbidding the digging of lateral ditches adjacent to levees. Ditches had to commence at a respectful distance behind the levee to keep crawfish away. One can only imagine the vengeful glee with which crevassed levee builders would sling crawfish into boiling pots. To help defeat their burrowings, Carondelet told levee builders to put wooden facings on both sides of the levee. He thought levees would be even better if the planks projected higher than the crown.60

Unfortunately, the inspection and work provisions in Carondelet's levee law of 1795 are ambiguous regarding how much levee maintenance remained in the hands of individual proprietors and how much had been permanently transferred to the district levee pool. It is more than likely that the levee-labor-pool concept was only designed to rebuild the levees en masse in 1795. Traditional private responsibilities for household levees on each grant continued to operate as the normal mode of procedure. Two-thirds of a district's slaves were made available to work on other properties, but individuals who fell short in their obligations still had to pay for the assistance. It may be that district levee supervisors drew a distinction between extraordinary damages due to notable flood years and ordinary damages due to individual negligence or incapacity. Notwithstanding, the trend of Spanish levee regulations was always to push settlers of slight means off the riverfront. Enforced communal levee building was not
designed to subsidize poor men, but to prevent their damaging the wealthier settlers while officials sought to remove and replace them with people of greater capacity.\textsuperscript{61}

In addition to these matters, Carondelet's law of 1795 also furnished levee supervisors with specific guidelines for dealing with crevasses. Since the levees, roads, and bridges were all vulnerable during high water, every citizen was charged to be especially watchful of their condition. A supervisor who found a proprietor not being watchful of "his levees, his bridges and road" (again--personal, individual obligations) was to fine him one hundred pesos. "If despite all this care" a crevasse occurred, the district supervisor was to demand one third of the slaves of the district's inhabitants to close the crevasse. Each slaveowner either responded immediately to the crisis or paid a fine of two hundred pesos and compensated the victims for the damages which resulted. If the first third of the slaves proved insufficient to close a crevasse, the supervisor called out a second third with the same penalties for non-compliance. If both thirds failed, he called on neighboring districts for help. People of those districts had to offer a third of their slaves, or suffer the same fine of two hundred pesos.\textsuperscript{62}

Who composed the 3rd "third" of slaves which was never called for levee work? Reason leads one to conclude that it consisted of slaves who were children, as well as the aged, and those incapable of levee duty. The first third
was probably the able-bodied male slaves, and the second third the females. Men performed the heaviest jobs, like clearing trees and shoveling, but women could do lighter levee tasks such as piling dirt or dragging limbs away to be burned. According to Francois Marie Perrin du Lac, a French traveler, the slave children of Louisiana went naked until the age of eight and started working when they received clothes. This suggests the age at which an able-bodied slave was considered available for duty.\textsuperscript{63}

The exemption of some whites from direct labor on the levees was class-based, but it became quasi-racial because the richer slaveowners delegated physical labor completely to slaves. As wealthy planters became entrenched in elite levee-building neighborhoods, it came to be thought of as demeaning to do levee work. Members of the slave-owning gentry supervised levee work and pitched in with vigor at times of crisis, but did not routinely dig the dirt. On the other hand, in poor regions like the colonial Acadian Coast, whites worked on levees just like the whites who built roads in poor neighborhoods in colonial Virginia or Carolina. They could not afford superior airs. The object of levee building was to save improvements and secure a title. As a result, poor men must do it for themselves.\textsuperscript{64}

Visualization makes the levee-building experience seem more real. Imagine rafting down the Mississippi at the end of the Spanish period in the late fall. It is a time of low water when crops are in and planters are engaged in
The river is quiet now except for the birds. Near the shore, in river bends, willows rustle as water glides through trailing branches. Sounds from the bank carry distinctly over le fluve (the river), and you hear tokens of everyday life from the banks—the barking of dogs, crowing of roosters, and striking of clocks. Now, closer to the river's edge, you hear noises of scraping, chopping, digging, and slicing, with thuds made by the dropping of clods. Fog hides much of the scene, but you glimpse moving figures beyond a herd of cows which have come down to drink. As the sun grows bolder, it becomes obvious that a gang of slaves is at work on the levee. A crevasse damaged levees in this prosperous parish last spring and a considerable rebuilding is underway. At one side, a knot of planters views the proceedings with bored expressions, their backs to a fire where roots, stumps, and organic trash are burning. Soft phrases of disinterested French drift to your ears across the water, though the conversationalists are perhaps a hundred feet away. The young men are dressed in a glamorous type of discomfort described by traveler C. C. Robin: "the neck covered with a high collar, arms lost in long sleeves . . . the chin buried in a triple cravat and legs sheathed in high boots." Short classical curls adorn these young, opulent Creoles, as in Paris, but "not many years ago they were seen with queues dangling about their legs." Whips and canes
reinforce their aura of authority. Horses snort and stamp, tied to fallen trees. 65

The older planters at this meeting are dressed for comfort rather than show. Breezes carry a bite this autumn morning, so they are wrapped in blanket capes—the favorite cool-weather garment of Louisiana men. Blanket capes are well-suited to the active people of this climate, "where, within a few hours" a hot day follows a cold morning and "one can be sweating in a sheltered place, but shivering if exposed to the wind." Since planters worked outside, they had to have a coat "that can be put on and taken off without a lot of trouble." Blanket coats were easy to wear when walking, riding, working, or lounging. Louisianians prefer French blankets with a blue border, cut and sewn like an overcoat with bathrobe sleeves.66

Thus attired, a local syndic and his two technical consultants, the best levee-makers in the neighborhood, are checking ground preparations where a new levee section will be built. Slaves pause from their digging to hear what the syndic will say about the thickness of the new levee's base. The slave men present a curious appearance, because their blanket coats are equipped with hoods rather than collars. So dressed, it almost looks like a troop of Trappist or Carthusian monks have been spirited to the banks of the Mississippi. Nonetheless, the labor of these "brothers" is earthy enough. They are heaping dirt on a long embankment that already reaches to their hips and will
go as high as their heads. Since this levee work is being
done in a timely manner, not on an emergency basis, only
the men--the so-called "first third" of levee workers--have
been summoned to work. Beneath their hooded cloaks, they
wear shirts and pants of coarse blue German Limbourg cloth.
The tools are common farm implements--"light plows . . .
ordinary spades, flat wide picks of medium size such as one
might expect . . . in a land with no rocks." After
inspecting the ground preparation, the syndic calls to the
planters. The nervous one, the crevassed landowner, paces
forward, and two young dandies who must witness the
syndic's decision follow him. They bow slightly to your
raft as you float past. Then, you slide beyond the scene,
and the sound of shovels resumes behind you. Thus
concludes this glimpse of life on the leveed riverside.67

More concrete insights into the levee task can be
gleaned from historian Margaret Dalrymple's study of the
letterbooks of John Fitzpatrick, a merchant who built
levees in British West Florida during the Spanish period.
His experience illustrates the challenge of levee building
for a landowner whose slave force was too small for his
needs.68

Fitzpatrick moved to British territory at the mouth of
Bayou Manchac in 1770 to engage in a clandestine trade with
Spanish colonists. From 1770 to 1777, British trade
flourished here while Louisiana's Governor Luis de Unzaga
discreetly looked the other way. Unzaga's non-enforcement
of Spanish mercantilism reconciled many in his colony to
the rigors of Spanish rule, and west-bank planters
prospered on infusions of credit from British east-bank
merchants. The British traders allowed Spanish colonists
to buy slaves and supplies with Louisiana produce, then
carried goods down Bayou Manchac to Lake Pontchartrain for
export. Manchac Village occupied ground at the bayou's
mouth. Since the bayou was an outlet of the Mississippi,
it flooded as the river rose. This caused problems for the
townfolk. In 1772, for example, Fitzpatrick warned a
friend who expressed an interest in town lots that the
lower end of Manchac Village flooded even in low water.
Behind the town, Fitzpatrick said, "it is low Sipruss swamp
& some Cane brakes for many miles." He recommended a
purchase at the upper end of Manchac where banks stayed dry
except in the highest water. On higher ground even that
inconvenience, he wrote, could "be asly Stopt by good
Ditches or leavies as their is in Orleans." His remark
shows that the New Orleans levee did good service on the
Lower Mississippi as a prototype for flood control.
Proprietors could copy it, even when they did not
understand hydraulic engineering. By imitating the New
Orleans levee, developers like the traders at Manchac could
reclaim land and increase productivity.69

This "Merchant of Manchac" kept a wary eye on his
neighbor the river. In January of 1773, Fitzpatrick wrote
that at present the Mississippi "ripples mighty fast." He
sent condolences to a business partner in June of 1774 because a recent overflow killed most of their seventy-two sheep. The survivors were grazing on high lands two miles from Manchac. As to the village levee, it failed because of "the faulling in of the Banks." A traveler glimpsed remnants of the levee in 1777, but much had already fallen into the river. By that time, there was little point in preserving the town. Unzaga left office and his successor, Governor Bernardo de Galvez, punctiliously enforced Spain's anti-smuggling laws. The new governor's ethics cost Fitzpatrick his customer base, and the Merchant retired to a small plantation. At this retreat, Fitzpatrick's flood worries continued. For example, in May of 1779, he complained that he lost two-thirds of his tobacco "in one Night's time," besides "the Total Loss of all my Cattle." His personal losses in this one overflow totaled $900.70

In July of 1779, Fitzpatrick wrote merchant John Miller of Pensacola for "6 Extra Sockett Spade[s] Without which I shall not be able to perform a Work that I have partly undertaken, To wit the making of a new Levie round this Place." Unless he obtained shovels quickly, Fitzpatrick would be undone, "as I have no other Employment for my Negroes." The flood destroyed his prospects for a crop, so levee building seemed the best way to occupy his time. As to his house in the leveed town of Manchac, a message he sent in March of 1780 to a tenant said that four pesos, two reales of her house rent had been applied to the repair of
the front levee. If side levees became necessary, the
remaining four pesos, six reales would go to that. (A peso
equalled a dollar). In July he told her the levee proved
unnecessary, so he would send her money back (as soon as
she returned the books she borrowed).71

During the American Revolution, Governor Galvez
annexed British West Florida. This turned Fitzpatrick into
a Spanish subject, and he had to conform to arduous Spanish
levee laws which generated heavier expenses of upkeep. For
example, in November of 1786, Fitzpatrick expressed regrets
to Adam Bingaman of Natchez that shortness of funds
prevented him from visiting Natchez. Money was tight
"owing to my having a new Livee to make in front of my
plantation; from the one end to the other." The task
forced him to hire extra hands, "which I have now at work
on very high wages. But when once done; it will be a
Livee to the place for my lifetime." The durable qualities
of the Spanish embankment reconciled Fitzpatrick to the
expense. Unfortunately, he did not live long to enjoy it,
dying in 1791. Meanwhile, the probate inventories offer a
detailed glimpse of his lifestyle--that of a small planter
in modest circumstances on a big piece of riverfront. The
documents show he had an old house in Manchac and an
unfinished house on the plantation. The town house held
several pieces of mahogany furniture and some china, plus a
sizeable library. The plantation had a leveed front of
eleven arpents (about 2,112 feet, or 7 football fields)
with the usual depth of forty arpents. Sixty arpents were cleared and fenced. Appraisers valued it at 2,000 pesos. Fitzpatrick had livestock worth 890 pesos and eleven slaves valued at 2,590 pesos. For a cash crop, he grew tobacco.72

It is difficult, looking at the inventory, to see which slaves would have been most helpful in Fitzpatrick's levee building. Santiago, a male field hand, was seventy years old. Manchak, a male field hand aged about fifty, had kidney trouble and was appraised lower than nine-year-old Francisca. The most useful were probably Teodoro, a laborer and carpenter; Ana, a thirty-eight-year-old field hand; fifteen-year-old Pedro; and Mariana, who could wash, iron, and cook a bit. It is easy to see why Fitzpatrick had to hire extras to build his levee. His small work force consisted mostly of house servants. Incidentally, in case the levees failed, his storage buildings contained two cypress pirogues, a bottle of quinine, and implements used in levee building: "nine shovels, seven in good condition and two broken," a hoe for cutting tree roots, and five used axes. Appraisers valued the shovels at seven pesos. Upon them, as Fitzpatrick said, all the rest of the estate depended. No shovels, no levee, no plantation.73

Day-to-day activities among the levee-builders of Spanish Louisiana can also be seen in a letter written by Daniel Hickey to his beloved son Philip in April of 1793. They lived at Hope Estate plantation in East Baton Rouge, a few miles above Fitzpatrick and a few miles south of the
present campus of Louisiana State University. In the letter, Daniel admonished " Phill," who was visiting an uncle in New Orleans, to "indeavor to be at all times Polite, manly, & Discreet." His escort, their neighbor Mr. Rowell, had gone to New Orleans to sell lumber, and Daniel hoped Rowell was able to get a good price for it. As for himself, "I have been very bad with the gout, not altogether confined to bed but [in] a great deal of pain." Local news included alarming reports about the river. Fortunately, the trouble primarily affected the opposite bank. Daniel Hickey reported:

The River still rising & several Leveys Broke, Mr. Turnbull's give way aposite to the House, but is again stopt, some on the other side the River quite in a bad way. All the Roads above Mr. Rowells Intirely under water, we begin to be afraid of the Back water here owing to the Lake at Yl. Point. We are still sowing Indigo seed & what has been already sowen does not come up well, on account of the unfavorable weather . . . so that I am afraid I shall have to resowe a great deal again.74

In regard to losses and costs associated with overflows, Creole levee builders had similar problems but often on a larger scale. For example, at Tchoupitoulas, several miles upriver from New Orleans, wealthy planters named Jean Baptiste de Macarty and Leonardo Massange endured continual levee breaks at properties in Carrollton Bend. Worn out by the expense of rebuilding, they even abandoned the land. When the untended Macarty and Massange levees admitted water into New Orleans in 1789, Governor Esteban Miro asked the city's Cabildo to help pay for
repairs. Both plantations stood outside the city, beyond the reach of Cabildo responsibility, but the Governor thought the occasion justified extraordinary measures. Besides, Macarty was his brother-in-law. Complaints and Miro's persuasion convinced the Cabildo's councilmen, or regidores, to grant 3,480 pesos for the "permanent repair" of the two plantation levees. And, to recompense the city treasury, the Cabildo laid a "contribution" on the people of New Orleans. Both these actions--the city-funded repair of non-municipal levees and a direct taxation of Louisiana colonials--were technically illegal, but councillors sent a letter of self-justification to the Council of the Indies. Meanwhile, the Cabildo assumed control of the defaulted plantations on the basis, one supposes, of being the agent responsible for rebuilding their levees. Spanish land laws gave riverfront land to persons who built levees, and in the case of delinquencies provided regrants to whoever fulfilled the requirements. One doubts, however, that the King and his governors meant for cities to become proprietors through projects of public land reclamation. The tacit acquisition of plantations through levee defaults put New Orleans's city council in a dubious position. In the meantime, the Cabildo twice offered the abandoned lands for sale at public auction but found no buyers. Bidders were discouraged by a deed clause that prevented a resale of the lands until the levees had been placed in good repair.75
Obviously, the city government of New Orleans had no desire to be permanently responsible for the levees of Mssrs. Macarty and Massange. Nor did it want to go into planting or land development. However, finding no buyers for the plantations, the Cabildo offered to give the land to anyone who would protect the city by assuming responsibility for the levees' upkeep. In the spring of 1790, the Cabildo's own attempt at levee reconstruction failed. Those it threw up at the Macarty and Massange plantations collapsed, so the Cabildo organized another rescue. It sent convicts to the crevasse and hired free blacks to make repairs under the supervision of Regidores (city councilmen) Francisco Pascalis De la Barre and Rudolfo Ducros. Though living in town, these Creole planters had experience with levee construction and understood the task better than the councilors who were merchants. To undertake the job of reconstruction, it would be practical and effective to raise a workforce among the slaves on adjacent plantations. Unfortunately, the Cabildo could not commandeer the slave forces of rural planters because they lived outside the city limits. To increase the number of workers, Governor Miro (whose authority was unrestricted in these matters) requested a slave levy from the planters of Tchoupitoulas. Along with each slave gang, he asked them to send a week's rations and a white overseer. Planters honored their Governor's request, and the motley crew finished its levee repairs in late summer of 1790 at a cost to the city of
7,481 pesos, 1 1/2 reales. To pay it, the Cabildo took money out of a special fund intended for the relief of victims of the New Orleans fire of 1788. The city eventually repaid 4,000 pesos to the fire fund, apparently when the King finally approved the loan from the fire fund to the levee project. One wonders what became of the remainder. At any rate, the city's plantation levees broke again in 1792. The Cabildo sent carts of dirt and asked then-Governor Carondelet for help. Again, Regidor Rudolfo Ducros was appointed to superintend repairs here and at other crevasses beyond the city. Some questioned the legality of his appointment, but the pragmatic Carondelet judged Ducros to be the best man for the job. In spite of his efforts, a hurricane on 18 August 1793 inflicted further damage. The city seemed incapable of dealing with the problem, and its legal position was dubious. Carondelet assumed responsibility for the solution by returning the land to private ownership. 76

In 1795, Jean Baptiste Macarty reentered the picture at Carrollton Bend under a levee-building arrangement with Carondelet. The planter agreed to resume ownership of his property in exchange for building a monstrous levee which--it was hoped--would resist the assaults of the Mississippi. Macarty's new levee was unique in size and shape among the colonial embankments of the Mississippi. To strengthen it, he incorporated large amounts of cypress. The reinforced section ran for more than 1,900 feet (6 1/2 football
fields) with a height of 6 feet, a crown of 18 feet, and base of 20 feet. The front rose straight from the ground, and the backside only sloped two feet in a rise of six feet. To make an earthen mound so configured to cohere, it was necessary to face the levee with five thousand cypress logs impaled as vertical posts. They were cut nine feet long—six feet exposed and three feet stuck in the ground—with no gaps between. Essentially, Macarty built a mud-filled pallisade. A second earthwork, a berm, stood at the levee's base on the river side, measuring three feet high and ten feet deep. It also had a cypress sheath that plunged three feet below ground and three feet above. All the levee's vertical logs were pegged to cross pieces for stability. Pegs, rather than nails, were used in order to resist corrosion. Workmen estimated that sinking and pegging the logs would take two hundred work days—quite an investment of time and expense.77

Other tedious tasks also went along with the embanking at Macarty's plantation. To prepare the soil, slaves had to clear a large site of trees and palmetto. The contract allowed slaves to dig dirt from borrow pits on the river side of the levee fifteen feet or more away, or on the swamp side at least forty feet away, but only to the depth of two feet or less. The dirt that went into the levee had to be free of roots or other foreign and vegetable matter. Clearing was expected to take two hundred days. A transpiration ditch, parallel to the levee, was also required,
measuring two feet wide and two feet deep (six inches wider at the top). The ditch ran forty feet behind the levee. Lateral drains 3 feet wide and 2 1/2 feet deep coursed along from the riverfront to the backswamp.78

Estimates said that the new Macarty levee contained 20,928 cubic yards of earth and would need the labor of 100 slaves for 74 days to complete, assuming a bondsman could dig and move three cubic yards per day. Carondelet helped Macarty to recruit a work force, and the owners of fifty hired slaves were assured that a white overseer would supervise. The Governor also appointed a project director. Then, on 22 December 1795, apparently after the levee's completion, he transferred the land to Macarty.79

Spanish records show several examples of grants to men who attempted to build difficult levees. The instance of Monsieur Peytavin at Bonnet Carre has already been shown. Lorenzo Sigur tried a similar arrangement near New Orleans. He borrowed 8,000 pesos interest-free for six years from the Cabildo so he could build a levee which served the public interest, then he would become the land's proprietor. Displeased with Sigur's performance, New Orleans sued for the money's return and he abandoned the land. As a result, breaks flooded the surroundings in 1799 and Governor Manuel de Gayoso ordered repairs at the city's expense. In this instance, voluntary contributions were collected which paid for all but 292 pesos, 5 1/2 reales, of the repair costs. The city covered the shortfall.80
Francisco Bernoudy and Joseph Xavier de Pontalba also asked for loans from the Cabildo to build private levees on land which caused flooding in the city and environs. Bernoudy's request was denied, the city claiming it had no money for the project. He was told to ask the royal government for funds. Pontalba, on the other hand, assumed responsibility for a flood-prone tract and relinquished it. Planter Bartheleme Le Breton bought it at auction, but he also failed to keep the levee repaired. Contrary to custom, Le Breton asked to be allowed to renounce just the part of the grant where the levee was breaking. Outraged by this attempt to circumvent the very object of the Spanish grant system, the Cabildo refused to allow Le Breton to make a partial abandonment and told Carondelet in November of 1793 that he should forbid partial abandonments as a general principle. Curiously, Pontalba was allowed to renounce 16 arpents of frontlands while keeping 28 arpents. The exception in Pontalba's case was made, perhaps, because he was a son-in-law of Andres Almonester y Roxas, a royal notary who personally funded the building of the Church of St. Louis, the Charity Hospital, the Presbytere, and the City Hall. Further down the social scale, Acadians on caving banks who said they were giving land back to the King (as if this were an act of generosity) were told by Intendant Morales in 1799 that this was sheer pretense and would not be allowed. The failure to keep a whole levee and road intact offered great inconveniences to neighbors,
he said, and a partial completion did not satisfy the King. He did not want worthless banks and broken levees, but continuous settlement. Article Eighteen of Governor Manuel Gayoso's instructions to commandants in 1797 also demanded that people settle on contiguous grants. "It shall not be permitted to any new settler to form an establishment at a distance from other settlers." To do so would make the colony less defensible, more difficult to police, and incapable of permanent improvement.81

Invigorated by the example of enterprising governors like Miro and Carondelet, the New Orleans Cabildo of the 1790s took better care of its city levee. It hired free blacks and used convicts to keep public embankments in repair. Carondelet also aided the cause of New Orleans flood control through the construction of six floodgates completed in early summer of 1796. These opened the riverside to let water from the main channel into the backswamp to reduce pressure on the levees. With donated labor, Carondelet was able to bring the gates to fruition for only 120 pesos. Carondelet's idea of diversified flood control, using outlets and drainage rather than "levees only," was sound and ahead of its time. However, one wonders how long the Carondelet floodgates, like his canal, actually operated for the intended purpose. Almost a century and a half later, the United States' Army Corps of Engineers was still struggling with the concept of floodgates for the protection of New Orleans. In this, as in
many other matters, the Spanish in Louisiana had excellent ideas about improvements for the colony—it was their execution and upkeep which was lacking. They simply did not have the means or the time to bring goals to fruition, particularly during the administrations of the last two governors, Gayoso and Salcedo, when Spain was under heavy defensive pressures from France and the United States.82

Governor Manuel Gayoso de Lemos came to power in Louisiana in 1797. Since his previous post had been the governorship of the Natchez District, Gayoso's first major act after the appointment was to tour important riparian settlements on the Lower Mississippi to better acquaint himself with the colony. Immediately, Gayoso was struck with the decayed condition of its levees, roads, and bridges. In a report dated 28 August 1797, he spoke of public works which were virtually ruined and suffering inexcusable neglect, placing the riverside in great danger. In such critical circumstances, he called on district commandants, syndics, and the chief inhabitants to confer in local "think tanks" about how to proceed with the work of levee renewal—"cette grande entreprise." In response, gatherings occurred and some residents volunteered to pay a money tax on their property, if the Governor would supervise the founding of a levee fund to hire workers or soldiers to keep levees in repair. Their idea shows that some well-to-do inhabitants would have gladly converted their public labor duties to a money tax if "professional"
levee builders would take charge in an efficient structure of regular, bureaucratized oversight. Forward-thinking individuals wanted a division of labor which would let them concentrate on planting, while hirelings maintained levees and roads. For the time, the concept was progressive and original. It also suggests an awareness that some flood problems were beyond the ability of private persons to fix. Thus, they wanted the Governor to take charge as coordinator with authority to do what needed doing. At the other end of the spectrum, however, Gayoso learned that some people stubbornly refused to comply even with the laws that already existed. For example, Gayoso was forced to make a public spectacle of Jean Baptiste Pechoux, from the Acadian district of La Fourche des Chitmachas, for refusing to heed a commandant's levee orders. The Governor threw Pechoux into prison until he agreed to conform to the laws; then, in 1798, the Acadian wrote Gayoso of his change of heart! Yet, the ink was barely dry on this triumph before Gayoso's satisfaction was tinged with embarrassment by a syndic's indictment of his own father-in-law, Stephen Watts, for refusing a summons to send his slave crew to help mend a crevasse. To show that no one was above the law, Gayoso personally ordered his father-in-law to do the work. 83

Gayoso's eleven-page "Bando de Buen Gobierno," or "Proclamation for Good Government," was published in the state-affiliated New Orleans newspaper, the Moniteur de la Louisiane, in January of 1798. Among his reforms, Gayoso
prohibited the construction of buildings on the levee, which was a problem in New Orleans because of the levee's role as a market. He ordered people to keep vehicles, coaches, and horses off the levee; its use as a road led to crevasses. And, he decreed that vagrants in Louisiana would be sentenced to labor on the public works. (An excellent notion). Unfortunately, this well-meaning Governor's time in office was cut short by his untimely death in 1799. He had a will to make improvements, but, as with most Spanish colonial executives, too little money to make sweeping reforms. Defense swallowed much of the budget. For example, Louisiana's share of the imperial subsidy from Spain rose from $500,000 a year in the mid-1790s to $800,000 in 1797, due to the cost of guarding it from aggressive neighbors. Contemporary critic James Pitot, always eager to discredit Spain, insinuated that Gayoso was bribed to side with the interests of the United States. Pitot said the Governor came to office poor and in debt, preoccupied with personal troubles, and it seemed that his opening of Spanish ports to American commerce was more in the interests of Americans than the Spanish. Actually, Gayoso's stay in Natchez convinced him that Americans were desirable settlers who might tolerate Spanish rule--in spite of the Empire's weakness--if Spain would make it worth their while through trade concessions and land grants. King Charles IV's siding with the anti-American Intendant Juan Bonaventure Morales against the
liberal Governor Gayoso in the matter of land distribution helped to alienate would-be colonists from the United States. It was not long before Spain lost Louisiana, and the Americans bought it.84

A useful, though biased and negative, assessment of the Spanish contribution in the late colonial period can be drawn from the manuscript critique that James Pitot wrote for the persuasion of French expansionists. A Frenchman born in Normandy in 1761, Pitot was chased from Saint Domingue in 1791 by the slave revolt, lived in Philadelphia from 1793 to 1796, then moved to New Orleans to take advantage of his language skills and the recently opened traffic on the Mississippi. Prosperity attended his mercantile efforts, so that by 1800 he was able to build a fine brick house on Royal Street. Nevertheless, Pitot's experiences with city government during an era of Spanish weakness convinced him that Spain's legacy on the colony's development was one of mediocrity. In 1802, he traveled to Paris to give his "Observations" to policymakers who, he hoped, would reinstate Louisiana into the French Empire.85

Pitot met many in France who thought Louisiana was worthless, but he asserted that it held great agricultural and commercial prospects. Nor should one be daunted by the caprices of the River Mississippi, he said. Although its "fury . . . during five or six months every year threatens to swallow up the inhabitants along its banks," the floods were restrained by Louisiana's levees. With appropriate
crops—particularly sugar and cotton—and reasonable trade policies, Pitot believed that leveed Louisiana could supply many shipments of valuable commodities. 

Much of Pitot's criticism of Spain can be discounted as the opinions of a Francophile who ardently wanted to discredit the colony's administration rather than its intrinsic value. He praised Carondelet as an exception to the venal and listless leadership he said that Louisiana endured in its late Spanish era. However, Pitot arrived too late in the century to see first-hand how primitive and undeveloped the colony was before the Spanish arrived. His prejudice against Spain, and his desire to flatter Napoleonic France, led him to denigrate the progress Spain did achieve. For example, he said little or nothing of the advances that O'Reilly, Unzaga, Galvez, and Miro brought to the levees or to the plantation economy they sustained.

For instance, Pitot complained that Spain had valuable and worthy laws on the books which were never properly enforced. In New Orleans, "despite engineers whom they have repeatedly employed . . . and convicts to make the necessary embankments and excavations, there is stagnant and putrid water in many streets, and the drainage canals are clogged." Outside the city, "the same laxity abounds." He claimed that Louisiana's "roads have deep holes; the levees and bridges are not maintained; and every time the Mississippi rises substantially, it causes crevasses that obstruct the roads and ruin the planters." Carcasses of
"fish, snakes, and animals" remained after the receding of overflows, and they exhaled noxious vapors that sickened inhabitants. Pitot said most of this laxity was caused by political corruption, bribery, and carelessness, but some was the fault of the people themselves. Their graciousness inspired affection at first, but one's heart was often alienated thereafter by their envy and fickleness. He called them hospitable, ignorant, passionate, and noisy; pleasure seekers fond of hunting and dancing, who would willingly labor all year to make a splendid appearance at the winter's Carnival balls. The colony's population, he estimated, was about 30,000 whites and 25,000 blacks. If correct, this represented a great increase over the end of the French period. In forty years, Spain's land policies brought many new settlers, and its levee laws enabled them to stay, but Pitot refrained from praising that. Instead, he said Spanish policies which appeared benevolent masked Madrid's intention to strangle the colony. "Insects, devastating floods, and hurricanes . . . walked abreast with the government to impoverish" it. Pitot's allusions to deliberate destruction pertained to his dislike of a Spanish mercantilism which restricted trade. Free trade, on the other hand, he supposed would be the key to growth, so New Orleans could act as the entrepot and distributor for the whole Mississippi Valley.88

It would be tedious and repetitive to recount Pitot's descriptions of various neighborhoods on the river. The
important thing to note in regard to levees is that he witnessed the rising level of water in the main channel which attended the completion of levees on the Acadian Coast. Settlers in that region were following orders from their governor and commandants when they raised the height of the Mississippi, but the effect of their levee work on planters further downriver was serious and alarming. Pitot said that "devastating floods are bound to come . . . there is no doubt that the government should do something immediately." Yet, how was equity to be attained in a system where landowners built levees for themselves and there was little central planning or coordination except in response to occasional disasters?89

To combat higher flood levels, Pitot emphasized the importance of drainage through the improvement of natural outlets, such as Bayous Plaquemine, Manchac, and Lafourche, or the Atchafalaya River. For example, he spoke of a logjam in the Atchafalaya whose opening, by "experts and engineers" from France using "laborers, torches, and crowbars," might easily (he thought) knock six inches to a foot off of the high water levels of the Lower Mississippi. This would relieve levee builders by removing the need to expand the size of their embankments. But drainage projects of that type had to be funded as truly public works through taxes or subsidies. Private persons would not settle in places that lacked arable land or navigable waterways, thus could not be relied upon or forced to make
these improvements. The only means of permanent flood control which had worked, so far, was the construction of levees by people who received titles to valuable crop land as the incentive for their labor. Spain had no means to make improvements beyond that agenda. France, as it turned out, had no interest. In 1803, it became the United States' turn to try to bring Louisiana to a higher stage of development. Even so, levees remained the centerpiece of Louisiana's agrarian economy, and Spanish officials had made admirable strides to bring levees into being. By an intelligent use of the one asset they controlled—the ability to grant land titles—the Spanish increased the extent of arable land, as well as Louisiana's population. The populace grew from about 14,000 at the beginning of the Spanish regime to about 44,500 by the time the colony reverted to France. Thus, in spite of what fault-finders like Pitot said, the Spanish contribution to flood control on the Mississippi was both real and enduring. Much of the progress the Americans achieved was the direct result of Spanish precedents for methods of organization in construction and upkeep.90

ENDNOTES

Reorganization under the Family Compact," Hispanic American Historical Review, 12 (1932): 269-80.


3 Helmut Blume, The German Coast During the Colonial Era, 1722-1803, trans. and ed. by Ellen C. Merrill (Kiel, Germany: Geographisches Institut der Universitat Kiel, 1956; Destrehan, La.: German-Acadian Coast Historical and Genealogical Society, 1990), 85; Sidney A. Marchand, The Story of Ascension Parish, Louisiana (Donaldsonville, La.: by the author, 1931), 39; Robert D. Calhoun, "The Origin and Early Development of County-Parish Government in Louisiana (1805-1845)," Louisiana Historical Quarterly 18 (Jan. 1935): 76-77. For a list of offices and officials from colonial payrolls, see Abraham P. Nasatir, ed., "Government Employees and Salaries in Spanish Louisiana," Louisiana Historical Quarterly 29 (Oct. 1946): 885-1040. The lists of priests' salaries makes plain the connection between the name of the church and the name of the parish.


5 Zadok Cramer, The Navigator: Containing Directions for Navigating the Monongahela, Allegheny, Ohio, and


8 Pittman, 9-15.

9 Ibid., 34, 38-41.


12 Pittman, 60. On 27 Sept. 1776, Maurice Conway asked Governor Unzaga to confirm a purchase from the Houmas--the former site of a village measuring about three miles on the left bank of the Mississippi. Since it had already been cleared of trees, Conway asked for, and received, a back

13Pittman, 60-61; Blume, 112; C. Schott, "Die kanadischen Marschen," Schriften des Geographischen Instituts der Universität Kiel 15 (1955): 34. After the expulsion of the main body of Acadians, British and German farmers who got their land insisted that some Acadians remain as captives to operate the dykes. Newcomers found the dyke system difficult and wanted the original builders' help. That is, until Acadians threatened to slit the captors' throats and recover their farms once Spain and France had won the Seven Years' War. Brasseaux, New Acadia, 8-11, 30-31.


16Din and Harkins, 40-46; Brasseaux, New Acadia, 77-89; John P. Moore, Revolt in Louisiana: The Spanish


21 "O'Reilly's Ordinance of 1770," 237-38.
In support of fence regulations, O'Reilly complained there was nothing "more injurious to the inhabitants than strayed cattle." After 1 July 1771, "they shall be considered wild and may be killed by any person whomsoever, and no one shall oppose himself thereto, or lay claim to any property therein." "O'Reilly's Ordinance of 1770," Sec. 11, 239-40.

"O'Reilly's Ordinance of 1770," Sec. 2, 10, 11, 238-40.

Ibid., Sec. 3, 6, 238.

In 1802, Sibley noted parts of the Acadian Coast in which there were "some points or Turns in the River . . . that are not cleared or Settled, owing to the Banks falling in and the difficulty of keeping up the Levy." Sibley, "Journal," 30 Sept. 1802, Special Collections, Lindenwood College, St. Charles, Mo.

"Recapitulation Generale, Tant de la Population que des terres concedees et defrichees, Bestiaux, Volailles et autres productions des deux Rives de la Coste des Allemands a six Lieux de la Nouvelle Orleans," 27 Sept. 1769, Archivo General de Indias, Seccion 11 A, Leg. 27 A; Blume, 81-82.

On the impoverishment and sufferings of the Germans at the time of their arrival, see Blume, 7-12.

Concessions granted in the parishes of St. Charles and St. John the Baptist, March and April 1770, Archivo General de Indias, Seccion 11 A, Leg. 2357; "Inventaire des actes et papiers du greffe de la paroisse St. Jean Bte. des Allemands fait en 1793 le ler fevrier et jours suivans," Archivo General de Indias, Seccion 11 A, Leg. 207 B; Blume, 106; "O'Reilly's Ordinance of 1770," Sec. 3.

Commandant Robin de Logny, Second German Coast of La., to Governor Manuel de Unzaga, [New Orleans, La.], 25 July 1776, Archivo General de Indias, Seccion 11 A, Leg. 189 B; Commandant Robin de Logny, Second German Coast, to Governor Unzaga, [New Orleans, La.], 12 Aug. 1774, Archivo General de Indias, Seccion 11 A, Leg. 189 A; Blume, 104.

Commandant Robin de Logny, Second German Coast of La., to Governor Bernardo de Galvez, [New Orleans, La.], 8 Aug. 1779, Archivo General de Indias, Seccion 11 A, Leg. 216 B; Blume, 104-5.

Commandant Robin de Logny, Second German Coast of La., [to Governor Manuel de Unzaga, New Orleans, La.], 8
Nov. 1774, Archivo General de Indias, Seccion 11 A, Leg. 189 A; Blume, 111; "O'Reilly's Ordinance of 1770," Sec. 1, 2, 4.

33 C. Schott, 34; Blume, 112. Brasseaux says, "dyking and draining the very fertile sea marsh above Port Royal [Nova Scotia] (begun sometime after 1630)" took place among other subsistence "activities based on communal labor pools . . . synonymous with tightly knit extended families." Habits of communal flood control, formed in maritime Canada, were transported to the Mississippi. Brasseaux, New Acadia, 11. Canary Islanders were less involved in levee construction in Louisiana than Acadians because they generally cultivated elevated soil at Terre aux Boeufs which extended away from the Mississippi. For their experience, see Gilbert Din, The Canary Islanders of Louisiana (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1988).

34 Commandant Robin de Logny, Second German Coast of La., to Governor Manuel de Unzaga, [New Orleans, La.], 12 Aug. 1774, 8 Nov. 1774, Archivo General de Indias, Seccion 11 A, Leg. 189 A; Blume, 114.


37 Governor Don Estevan Miro, "First parish of the Germans and the other side of the river. Instructions that will have to be observed by the syndics nominated by the majority of the vote of the inhabitants of a District, in order to look after the conservation of levees and the well-maintenance of the roads," 22 July 1789, and "Ordinances for the maintenance of roads, bridges, and

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38Ibid.

39Ibid.

40For context see Holmes, "Economic Problems of Spanish Governors," 535-39. In the mid 1790s, Carondelet complained that "evil-minded, turbulent and enthusiastic individuals" with "nothing to lose, had spread false rumors, calculated to give rise to the most complete distrust between the Government and the people." Thus, Spanish Louisiana was "threatened with all the disasters to which the French colonies had fallen a prey." He referred to St. Domingue. Bishop Luis de Penalvert y Cardenas excoriated Louisiana creoles in 1795. He said they rarely attended mass, did not observe fasts, had black concubines, and discouraged slave marriages. At supper, they sang songs which were "shameful, lascivious, and sacrilegious." Moreover, "their houses are full of books written against religion and the state." The King "possesses their bodies and not their souls. Rebellion is in their heart, and their minds are imbued with the maxims of democracy." In the Bishop's opinion, only the skill and energy of Carondelet forestalled open rebellion. Gayarre, III, 351, 378. Praise for Carondelet appears in: Robin, 92-95; Din and Harkins, 142-48, 282; and James Pitot, Observations on the Colony of Louisiana from 1796 to 1802, trans. Henry C. Pitot (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press for the Historic New Orleans Collection, 1979), 13. See also Thomas Marc Fiehrer, "The Baron de Carondelet as Agent of Bourbon Reform: A Study of Spanish Colonial Administration in the Years of the French Revolution" (Ph.D. diss, Tulane University, 1977); and Gilbert C. Din, "Spain's Immigration Policy in Louisiana and the American Penetration, 1792-1803," Southwestern Historical Quarterly 76 (1973): 255-76.

41Carondelet's rules for good government appear in "General regulations; maintenance of bridges, roads and carriage-ways as well as directives concerning the slaves, to be supervised by the commandants and syndics of the settlements and coasts in the province of Louisiana," 1 June 1795, Biblioteca de Ultramar, Biblioteca National, Madrid, vol. 19509, folios 5-6. Copies of his levee edict of 28 June 1792 are in the Henry Remy Papers, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, LSU. It was published as "Governor Carondelet's Levee Ordinance of 1792," trans. Laura Porteous, Louisiana Historical Quarterly 10 (Oct. 1927): 513-16. Among their police duties, Carondelet's syndics were charged to hear reports about sedition, to forward travelers lacking passports to the commandant, to
organize patrols, and to forbid that assemblies of more than eight people discuss public affairs. Syndics were appointed every nine miles on both sides of the river.


42"Carondelet's Levee Ordinance of 1792." Robin says syndics could levy fines of up to 10 piastres on small law-breakers, by permission of Carondelet. Robin, 95. Din and Harkins confirm this in New Orleans Cabildo, 120. The so-called "coastal syndics" [síndicos de las costas] in rural areas were also "petty judges" [jueces pedaneos]. They assisted post commandants. Beginning in 1797, the New Orleans Cabildo elected 12 additional syndics to contribute to better government in rural areas within fifteen miles of the city. These were still under post commandants, but exerted an influence which was believed to be beneficial to city interests. The Cabildo appointed three syndics for Tchoupitoulas, two for the west bank upriver, two for the east bank below the City, two beyond the suburb St. Charles, and one each for Bayou St. John, Metairie, and Gentilly. See Din and Harkins, 120; Acts of the Cabildo, vol. 4, (2), 92, 5 Jan. 1798, and Acts of the Cabildo, vol. 4, (4), 149, 8 Jan. 1802. For primary source documents on workings of the Cabildo, including administration of levee affairs, see New Orleans Municipal Records, Records of the Cabildo; and, Works Progress Administration, Translated Transcripts of Acts and Deliberations of the Cabildo, 1769-1803, in Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Special Collections, Hill Memorial Library, LSU.

43"Carondelet's Levee Ordinance of 1792."

44Ibid.

45Ibid.

46Ibid.

47Ibid.

48Ibid.

49Claim of Thomas Hebert on basis of levee and road duties commanded by Governor Carondelet through Commandant de Verbois, in Walter Lowrie and Walter Franklin, eds., *American State Papers, Public Lands* (Washington, D. C.: Gales and Seaton, 1834), II, 355; Din and Harkins, 119-21; Gayarre, III, 351, 355; "Premiere Cote des Allemands, Recensement General des Habitants que chaque lieue de ce district contient pour Servir a l'establisement des Nouvx. Syndics, 1795," Archivo General de Indias, Seccion 11A, Leg. 211; Blume, 85, 92; Jack D. L. Holmes, "The Abortive

50Blume, 115; Gayarre, III, 223; Governor Hector de Carondelet, [New Orleans, La.], to Antoine Peytavin, [Bonnet Carre, Second German Coast, La.], 28 Dec. 1793, Archivo General de Indias, Seccion 11 A, Leg. 27 B.

51Gayarre, III, 331-32; Din and Harkins, 255-56; Pitot, 111.

52Gayarre, III, 352; Din and Harkins, 256.


54There was a caretaker appointed for the canal, but the job carried no salary and yielded no fees. Din and Harkins, 79, 256; Robin, 30; Pitot, 29-30

55Gayarre contended that Spain's return of Louisiana to France was prudent from an economic standpoint, quoting the Marquis of Grimaldi, who said of the first transfer that State was "acquiring nothing but an annual incumbrance . . . [for] a distant and negative utility—which is—that of possessing a country to prevent its being possessed by another." When Spain returned Louisiana to France, it "acted wisely" to escape "a useless and expensive" drain which was already "on the eve of being wrested from her by her powerful neighbors." Jack Holmes, though, points out that although Louisiana was expensive to administer, it was not an undesirable property. Gayarre, III, 624; Sibley, "Journal," 13-20 Sept. 1802, Special Collections, Lindenwood College, St. Charles, Mo.; Holmes, "Economic Problems of Spanish Governors," 522, 535-43; Robertson, I, 179; John S. Kendall, *History of New Orleans* (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Co., 1922), I, 35.

56Governor Hector de Carondelet, "Reglamento sobre la policia general," 1 June 1795, Biblioteca de Ultramar, vol. 19509, folios 1-17, esp. 5-6., published as "A Decree for Louisiana Issued by the Baron of Carondelet, June 1, 1795," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 20 (1937): 590-605; Blume, 115-16; Gayarre, III, 346-47, 373; Holmes, "Indigo," 338-47.

57Carondelet, "A Decree for Louisiana, 1795;" Blume, 115-16.

58"Governor Carondelet's Levee Ordinance of 1792," 514; Carondelet, "A Decree for Louisiana, 1795."


Carondelet, "A Decree for Louisiana, 1795."

Ibid.

Francoise Marie Perrin du Lac, Voyage dans les deux Louisianes: et chez les les nations sauvages du Missouri, par le Etats-Unis, l'Ohio et les provinces qui le bordent, en 1801, 1802 et 1803 (Lyon: Bruyset aine et Buynand, 1805), 410-11.

Since levee-building initially provided impoverished settlers with the means to be people of property, there was no stigma attached to the labor involved. Indeed, there would have been more shame attached to an inattention to the necessary work. Later, as wealth increased and slaves multiplied, levee construction was usually seen as a form of labor to be done by slaves. By the antebellum period, it was almost completely a job for slaves except in cases of emergency repairs. Yet, when the Irish arrived in the 1840s as penniless whites, many worked in levee and drainage crews. They were as poor as the Germans and Acadians had been, but were not recruited by governments on the Mississippi to become landowning farmers. Instead, times and opportunities had changed. On the Mississippi, the late antebellum levee-building Irish contract workers
became a transient, landless proletariat, and they soon learned that the upper tiers of native white society regarded them as somewhat less-than-equal. These Irish had no option but to continue in the tasks for which they could find employment. However, they became prejudiced against blacks because they resented the implication that they and the blacks occupied a similar social status due to the types of work they did. "Soon no one who desired to maintain his standing with his white associates would consent to work beside a slave, or even along with the free Negroes." Nor did it help improve the status of the actual, physical builders of levees for governments to assign levee duties to convicted vagrants, criminals, hired slaves, or hired free blacks. See John S. Kendall, "New Orleans' 'Peculiar Institution,'" *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 23 (July 1940), 870.

65 Concerning the attire of alluvial Louisianians, Robin continued, "I was tempted to believe that a whirlwind had brought these men suddenly from the far north and deposited them on this stifling coast, buttoned up as they were with their red faces, their labored breathing and the sweat flooding the folds of their collars." Robin, 47; Amos Stoddard, *Sketches, Historical and Descriptive, of Louisiana* (Philadelphia: Mathew Carey, 1812; reprint, Baton Rouge: Claitor's Publishing Division, 1974), 324.


67 Ibid., 50-53, 238.


70 John Fitzpatrick, Manchac, to McGillivray and Struthers, Mobile, 6 Jan. 1773, in Dalrymple, 139; John Fitzpatrick, Manchac, to John McGillivray, Mobile, 23 June 1776, in Dalrymple, 170-71; John Fitzpatrick, Manchac, to John Stephenson, Pensacola, 28 Aug. 1772, in Dalrymple, 127; William Bartram, *Travels through North & South Carolina, Georgia, East & West Florida, the Cherokee* 

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Country, the Extensive Territories of the Muscoqueges, or
creek Confederacy, and the Country of the Chactaws, ed.
Francis Harper (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958),
270-71; John W. Caughey, "Bernardo de Galvez and the
English Smugglers," Hispanic American Historical Review 12
(1932), 46-58; John Fitzpatrick, Manchac, to Robert
Montgomery, Pensacola, 9 May 1779, in Dalrymple, 433.

71 John Fitzpatrick, Manchac, to John Miller,
Pensacola, 10 July 1779, in Dalrymple, 329; John
Fitzpatrick, Manchac, to Lieut. J. J. Graham, New Orleans,
2 Mar. 1780, in Dalrymple, 341; John Fitzpatrick, Manchac,
to Lieut. J. J. Graham, Pensacola, 13 July 1780, in
Dalrymple, 358.

72 John Fitzpatrick, Manchac, to Adam Bingaman,
Natchez, 10 Nov. 1786, in Dalrymple, 421-22. The inventory
is summarized in Dalrymple, 425-32.

73 Dalrymple, 425-32. Fitzpatrick's estate was
"sealed" by Lieut. Francisco Rivas, the Spanish commandant
of Fort Bute in East Baton Rouge, in his capacity as
probate judge. The wooden house, doubtless raised off the
ground, measured 22 feet long by 30 feet deep. It had two
galleries, as well as a kitchen. For an overview of the
tobacco industry in Spanish Louisiana, see Clark, 176-92.

74 Daniel Hicky, Baton Rouge, La., to Philip Hicky, New
Orleans, 10 April 1793, Hickey (Daniel) Letter, Louisiana
and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Special Collec-
tions, Hill Memorial Library, LSU. Other manuscript
collections at this repository which show aspects of the
daily life among the levee builders in Spanish Louisiana
include: Bourgeois (Lillian C.) Papers, a collection of
copies of documents concerning the Acadian settlement of
Cabanoce in the parishes of St. James and Ascension;
Bannon (Lois E.) Papers, consisting of research on the
history of Magnolia Mound Plantation, 1796-1983, in East
Baton Rouge Parish; and the Mather (George) Account Books
from St. James Parish, including a journal from 1782 to
1845. Other relevant collections include the Bouligny-
Baldwin Family Papers, 1710-1900, and the d'Auberville-
Bouligny Family Papers, 1618-1873, at the Historic New
Orleans Collection, New Orleans; as well as the Cruzat
Family Papers and Pontalba Papers, Howard-Tilton Memorial
Library, Tulane University. Gilbert C. Din, Francisco
Bouligny: A Bourbon Soldier in Spanish Louisiana (Baton
Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993) deals more
with politics and public affairs rather plantation life.

75 The wealth of the Macarty family may be judged from
the probate inventory of Jean Baptiste Macarty (1764), who
died possessed of more than 100,000 piastres in cash. His
land measured 74 arpents on the Mississippi and 40 arpents
deep. The plantation held 400 cleared arpents, an elegant house 25 feet deep and 80 feet wide, and 80 slaves.


Din and Harkins, 238-39; Acts of the Cabildo: vol. 3 (2), 96-97, 9 April 1790; vol. 3 (2), 99, 7 May 1790; vol. 3 (2), 149, 18 Nov. 1791; vol. 3 (3) 19, 31 Aug. 1792; vol. 3 (3), 45, 11 Jan. 1793; vol. 3 (3), 73, 28 June 1793; vol. 3 (3), 85-86, 6 Sept. 1793; Governor Esteban Miro, to the inhabitants of Bayou Tchoupitoulas, 27 April 1790, Archivo General de Indias, Sec. 11 A, Leg. 204.

Din and Harkins, 239-41; Cost proposal for levee at Macarty's, Archivo General de Indias, Sec. 11 A, Legajo 211.

Ibid.; Burns, 568; Ledet, 226.

Din and Harkins, 242-43; Holmes, "Economic Problems of Spanish Governors, 539-42.
83 Holmes, Gayoso, 204, 207, 213-16, 219; Governor Manuel Gayoso de Lemos, Report on the levees, roads, and bridges of Louisiana, 28 Aug. 1797, Henry Remy Papers, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, LSU.


85 Robert Bush, "Foreward," in James Pitot, Observations on the Colony of Louisiana from 1796 to 1802, trans. Henry C. Pitot (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press for the Historic New Orleans Collection, 1979), xi-xxii. Pitot said Spain did not deliberately antagonize Louisianians, but its "indifference and neglect" fooled the people (having no other standard by which to judge) into thinking nothing could be better. They were satisfied with mediocrity. Pitot, 3. The original of Pitot's manuscript, "Observations sur la Colonie de la Louisiane," 1796-1802, is Mss. 355 in the Historic New Orleans Collection, New Orleans, La.

86 Pitot, 3, 72-79, 116-117.

87 Pitot characterized Napoleon as a hero, whereas the cession of Louisiana to Spain in 1763 was "the crime Versailles committed." By throwing responsibility for the cession onto the Ancien Regime, he hoped to interest Napoleonic France in the colony. Similarly, Pitot did not deny the pitiful condition of French Louisiana in 1763, but said Imperial France could do better. Ibid., 13, 60-64.

88 Ibid., 29-32, 65-67, 105. For pure cattiness, however, nothing can match Pierre-Louis Berquin-Duvallon's malign observations on the character of Louisianians. See Berquin-Duvallon, 201-47.

89 Ibid., 132-34.

CHAPTER THREE

NEW CROPS, NEW GOVERNMENTS, NEW LAWS: LOUISIANA
LEVEES, 1795-1820, WITH A LOOK AT LOCAL ADMINISTRATION
IN THE PARISH OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST

In the days of household levee construction, when planters built embankments to protect their own farms, the value of leveed real estate varied with the worth of the crops they produced. If these crops, grown on converted swamplands, ceased to be valuable as export commodities, a planter's incentive to stay in the floodplain of the Mississippi would be considerably lessened. The Spanish government wanted its colonists to build levees and an adjacent road on each bank of the Mississippi. Numerous advantages would attend the completion of the project, because the works promoted communication and defense, and also protected from overflow. Indeed, through its control of land titles and its instructions to commandants which aimed at the exclusion of squatters, the government meant to prevent people from settling away from the river until the improvements were finished.

For most of the eighteenth century, administrators of colonial Louisiana had little difficulty in persuading the colonists to stay on the riverside. Much of the swamp interior overflowed deeply and could not be improved for farming. Beyond the floodplain, in hills and uplands east
FIGURE 3.1

THE PARISHES OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST AND ST. CHARLES, SHOWING BONNET CARRE AND THE EFFECTS OF A CREVASSE, BY MEANS OF CROP DATA FROM 1849-50, AFTER AN OVERFLOW

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and west of the Mississippi, Native Americans controlled much of the land and made it unsafe for Europeans to settle there. It would have been illegal, imprudent, and potentially suicidal for a Lower Louisiana colonist to claim or improve property outside the leveed floodplain. However, in the 1790s, challenges arose which threatened Spain's control of settlement patterns in Louisiana. For example, Americans of British descent moved into outlying parts of the colony, such as the Ouachita, Natchez, and Missouri Districts. They farmed or grazed cattle on high ground which did not require levee protection and lived in a dispersed manner, without much supervision. Although they gave lip service to Spain to acquire land titles, these settlers were not loyal to Spanish interests. International affairs also put pressure on Spain and drove the expense of colonial defense to unsustainable levels. Such factors as the outbreak of the French Revolution, the French invasion of Spain, and demands from the young United States for the use of the Mississippi as a trade outlet compromised the integrity of Spanish sovereignty over its own possessions. Citizens of the United States were also shattering the power of Native American tribes, so the Indians' role as a buffer between Spanish and American settlements could no longer be counted on. Fully as important as these political matters, the prime plantation crops of Spanish Louisiana tumbled into obscurity in the 1790s—one from disease, the other from a need by the
central government to economize and suspend its subsidy programs. For the levee builders themselves, economic salvation took place around 1795 through the introduction of new crops which made their reclaimed swamplands valuable again. As for Spain, its days as the arbiter of fortune on the Mississippi were growing short.

Indigo had been the main export of Louisiana's large planters in the late eighteenth century, but was never popular. Small proprietors could not afford to grow it, and there were several drawbacks to its cultivation. For example, indigo needed dry soil, levee protection, extensive drainage, and the installation of ponds and factories for processing. The infrastructure cost considerable sums in money and labor, but a worker could only tend about two acres of plants. Producers with few or no slaves could not spare the hands to grow it. Too, the making of dyestuff from indigo leaves entailed a rotting process in artificial pools which made a revolting stench and toxic wastes. The seepage of its by-products into streams even poisoned cattle. This provoked Spanish ordinances in 1793 and 1794 which became some of North America's first anti-pollution laws. Other profitability factors such as weather, flooding, trade restrictions, and competition from Guatemala or other tropical colonies kept Louisiana's indigo growers in constant anxiety. Yet, they were the core levee builders of the most prosperous planting district, and they had no better crop available. In the two decades before 1790,
Louisiana's processed indigo output averaged around 200,000 pounds per year. Attracted by profits, proprietors in Natchez and the Felicianas entered the business, and by 1793, Louisiana's production reached a high of 450,000 pounds. At that point, insects ruined the crop and lingered to prevent its recovery. Historian Charles Gayarre said bugs "devoured the leaves with incredible rapidity," leaving "nothing but the naked stems . . . to mock the eye of the farmer." By 1795, production in Natchez dropped to half that of 1792, virtually ceasing thereafter. In Louisiana, the indigo blight arrived in 1794 and 1796. By 1803, its growers shipped only 30,000 pounds. If a substitute crop had not been found, mere foodstuff production would probably not have offered the opulent planters a sufficient return on their investment to justify the continued occupation and improvement of the leveed banks. To be subsistence farmers, they might just as easily live in the hills without the worry of levees and crevasses. The sudden unprofitability of farming on the reclaimed swampland threatened the levee-building community's very existence.1

Tobacco, the other crop that failed, disappointed growers for different reasons. Physically, the crop appealed to many farmers. One or a hundred workers could grow tobacco on a plantation, depending on the owner's land and labor resources. There were no significant economies of scale, and it required a minimum of equipment. The
price of the crop, however, was tied less to demand than to politics. Agents of His Majesty bought and sold tobacco in Spanish colonies as a royal monopoly, and the Crown disposed of it in whatever way seemed best for the Empire as a whole. Cuban tobacco went to European consumers who paid well because of its high quality. Louisiana and Natchez, on the other hand, were allowed to ship an inferior grade to colonists in Mexico. In the 1780s, the Crown offered higher-than-market prices for Mississippi Valley tobacco. Ministers of the King hoped by this to curry favor with frontiersmen and seduce them into a self-interested loyalty to Spain. As a result, tobacco production boomed in the leveed districts. Unfortunately, His Majesty's finances could not sustain this largess, and Prime Minister Manuel de Godoy withdrew the tobacco subsidy in 1792 in a program of retrenchments. Planters on the Mississippi who went into debt to buy additional land and slaves now found themselves without a market. Prices fell and growers faced a prospect of ruin. This setback joined with insects, floods, and hurricanes on a list of discouragements that made them eager to find a better crop. If cotton had not appeared on the horizon, leveed lands in the tobacco region might well have been abandoned.²

Events on the French island of Saint Domingue helped the planters to make a transition to cotton. By the late 1780s, planters in Saint Domingue had become some of the world's most important suppliers of cotton. Although their
island colony was small (equivalent in size to the state of Vermont) and contained many mountains, the proprietors who leveed and irrigated its alluvial plains brought the flatlands into a remarkable state of fertility. Unfortunately, slavery was unusually brutal there. With so much wealth streaming in from the production of export crops, planters in Saint Domingue came to view slaves as expendable. Many owners lived in France, and their overseers worked slaves relentlessly. Farming in Saint Domingue featured much profit, but little sense of community and a blatant disregard for human suffering. Thus, on the eve of the 1790s, Saint Domingue's 789 cotton plantations could export the huge (for that day) sum of about two million pounds of raw cotton annually. Much went to Northern Europe, or slipped to Jamaica for transshipment to mills in Britain. Yet, by 1791, the slaves had had enough. Bondsmen on the Turpin plantation rose to massacre their masters, and others followed their example. Soon, retribution, killing, and burning spread throughout the colony. Within weeks, the rebellion of workers, the flight of the master class, and the destruction of property took more than a thousand cotton, sugar, indigo, and coffee plantations out of production. Soon, Saint Domingue's exports ceased, the slaves declared independence, and slavery was abolished. Napoleon's government tried to recapture the island and reinstate slavery, but the army he sent died of yellow fever. On January 1, 1804, the French admitted defeat and
recognized Saint Domingue as the Republic of Haiti, but its status as a leading supplier of plantation goods was gone forever. This made an opening for new producers. By a fortunate coincidence, Saint Domingue's productive capacity ended just when planters on the Mississippi needed a new crop and textile mills needed new supplies.3

Cotton proved to be a viable crop for colonists on the Mississippi, because it flourished on the light, dry, and sandy "creamland" soils that composed the riverbanks. Since this is precisely where most indigo and tobacco producers had made improvements on their French and Spanish grants, the coincidence of an indigo blight, canceled tobacco subsidy, and Caribbean revolt formed a perfect match. Levees already stood in place to protect improved lands from overflow, and even Governor Miro recommended cotton to the planters. The main drawback, of course, was the labor involved in separating the seeds from the fiber. In some cotton varieties, seeds pulled easily away, but the type which could reach maturity in Louisiana presented formidable obstacles. Indeed, it could take a whole day for someone to separate a pound of lint from its seeds by hand. Price differentials between raw and cleaned cotton testify to the difficulty of seed removal. For example, New Orleans merchants in 1792 paid four cents a pound for cotton with seeds, but twenty five cents for that without. Fortunately, a technological breakthrough allowed growers to move past this dilemma. In 1793, tutor Eli Whitney
invented a mechanical gin in Georgia which removed seeds more quickly. His hand-cranked prototype cleaned about fifty pounds a day and took eight workdays to clean a bale (instead of four hundred workdays). Daniel Clark, an ambitious American merchant/planter/land speculator in New Orleans, read a newspaper report on the Whitney gin in 1795 and commissioned a local mechanic to build one based on the description. Soon, variations on the Whitney gin spread upriver, and cotton plants sprouted in the former tobacco fields. Unfortunately, the humidity of the indigo region did not sit well with cotton plants. Those growers had to wait for another "savior." Nonetheless, the introduction of cotton and new technology provided a welcome alternative. The first roller gins used in Louisiana cleaned about seventy five pounds of lint per day, or one bale per five and a half workdays. Planters in Natchez had private gins as early as 1795, and David Greenleaf built a public gin in Mississippi in 1796. The following year, he constructed a screw press to compact lint for shipment overseas. Prominent planters like William Dunbar of Natchez and Baton Rouge experimented with better presses, gins, and baling techniques. The turning power of draft animals was employed, and on the larger plantations, slave gangs could be scheduled to perform tasks more quickly. Newer, larger gins cleaned five hundred to a thousand pounds a day, so that the cumulative impact of these innovations was enormous. For example, whereas in 1794,
the Natchez District produced 36,351 pounds of cotton, by 1798, this figure had risen to 1,200,000 pounds.4

Natchez cotton in the 1790s was a black-seed, long-staple Siamese cotton. From 1795 to 1798, it sold for approximately thirty nine cents a pound in New Orleans. Louisiana cotton was described in 1802 by traveler C. C. Robin as a tree-like plant, six to seven feet high. He said an arpent of leveed land produced 250 to 300 pounds a year, and a worker could pick about sixty pounds a day at harvest time, of which twenty pounds was seeds. Robin estimated that a slave could grow and harvest two thousand pounds of ginned cotton per season. To process it, two horses turned spiked cylinders which tore the fiber away from the seeds. Planters then compressed the lint in cloth wrappers to save space on a boat to Europe.5

The growing of cotton was not like indigo, restricted merely to those who could afford numerous slaves and expensive equipment. Cotton was seen as a democratic crop, like tobacco, because women, children, and the elderly could perform many of the tasks of cultivation, picking, and processing. Small proprietors, even families with few or no slaves, could raise it with the labor of their own households, and growers who lacked gins or presses could pay or barter to use a neighbor's. Moreover, European and British textile factories were eager to buy cotton. Under these conditions, the leveed parishes of St. John the Baptist, St. James, Ascension, Iberville, and East and West
Baton Rouge began to prosper again. Cotton also became the chief crop of the upland Felicianas and alluvial Pointe Coupee, not to mention Natchez. Small proprietors, like many who lived on the Acadian Coast and the Second Coast of the Germans, added cotton to the crop mix for supplemental income. Those with adequate slave gangs introduced cotton on a plantation scale. By 1802, cotton planters in Pointe Coupee were said to be making returns of up to 30 percent on their investments, and James Pitot commented that cotton had "snatched" even the poor Acadians from "misery and despair." Of the eight million pounds that landed in New Orleans by 1801, about six million came from Louisiana, mostly from leveed districts. The success of the new crop confirmed and enhanced the value of the embankments.6

In sugar production, as in cotton, the demise of Saint Domingue as a plantation colony worked to the advantage of levee builders on the Mississippi. Just when bugs were set to devour the economic base of Louisiana's Indigo Coast, the cane cutters of Saint Domingue rebelled. The island colony produced more sugar than any other place on the globe, its eight hundred or so sugar plantations supplying half the world's crop. In 1791, Saint Domingue's sugar exports to France alone amounted to about 192 million pounds, excluding tafia (a cheap rum), and some planters made up to a third of their income from tafia. For example, in 1787 the colony produced 66 million pounds of molasses for tafia making. The drink found a ready market...
among Americans, Caribbean islanders, Germans, Dutch, pirates, and negroes. Refined sugar found its way into medicines, jams, preserved fruits, and polite table drinks such as tea, coffee, and chocolate. Since these former luxuries were becoming staples for the urbanites who labored in Europe's emerging industrial economies, the collapse of Saint Domingue created a market void into which other growers could easily insert themselves.⁷

First, however, prospective sugar growers in Louisiana had to make some adjustments. Caribbean canes required fourteen to eighteen months to mature, but the climate on the lower Mississippi could only be counted on for a nine-month growing season. A few planters tried and abandoned sugar in Louisiana in the mid-1700s, because their cane froze and lost its sugar content. This meant the loss of a year's investment in land and labor, plus the death of the starter plants—"ratoons," or rooted cane segments—they needed for future cultivation. It was most discouraging. However, Etienne de Bore, a blight-stricken Louisiana indigo grower, gambled on sugar again in 1794. He purchased starter canes from a tafia maker. The weather cooperated, and he raised a large crop with only thirty slaves. Contrary to expectations, De Bore's sugar matured, milled, and granulated adequately, and sold in 1795 for $12,000. Indigo planters with empty fields called him "the savior of Louisiana" and rapidly imitated his experiments.⁸
As a group, large commercial planters on the Mississippi were always looking for ways to increase efficiency. Fighting constantly with less-than-optimal environmental conditions, they adopted any tool that would improve operations or profits. For example, Louisiania planters introduced the plow to cane culture to replace the traditional Caribbean mattock hoe. Plowing reduced the manpower requirements of a plantation and made it possible to grow sugar with fewer slaves. Further advances occurred in 1797 when Louisiana planters adopted the Aheite, or Tahati, cane variety from Spanish Santo Domingo. It withstood cold better than Creole cane and produced more sugar. (Ribbon cane, introduced in 1817, offered even greater advantages and quickly became the industry standard). Louisiana planters also recognized the expertise of sugar makers from Saint Domingue, whom they welcomed as immigrants and hired as supervisors. One such refugee superintended the construction of the first sugar houses in Louisiana.9

Thus, sugar replaced indigo as the chosen export of planters from English Turn to the upper German Coast, and sometimes as high as Bayou Manchac or Baton Rouge. Above that point, frosts came too early to guarantee a harvest. The core indigo parishes of Orleans and St. Charles turned to sugar with particular zest. Their climate, too humid for cotton, was adequate for sugar, and the established planters already owned the levees, ditches, and slaves they needed. With credit, they obtained grinding mills and
boiling equipment. Profits even led some of the more adventurous to open plantations in riskier areas where land might be too low, storms too violent, overflows too regular, or frosts too threatening. Cane spread down to St. Bernard and Plaquemines Parishes, south into bayous west of the Mississippi, and even partly up Red River. An interest in better flood control naturally followed. Indeed, levee improvements and sugar cultivation advanced simultaneously—one to make money, the other to protect it.

De Bore made at least two contributions to sugar growing which promoted sugar's success on the Mississippi and, therefore, enhanced the value of the levees. To hasten the speed at which cane would ripen, he put small sluices in his levee to fill the ditches and irrigate his fields. When the river was high and rain scarce, as was often the case from March to May, his cane would have water. This helped the plant to mature faster and defeated the bad effects of Louisiana's shorter growing season. Irrigation also increased the sugar content. Since virtually all of Louisiana's plantations were on the river, the owners could follow de Bore's irrigation procedures with their own levees. The opening of levees for irrigation proved that embankments were useful for a multiplicity of tasks, just as they could also power sawmills and serve as roads. Most importantly, de Bore's experiments gave proprietors on the lower river a new cash-crop export in places where cotton would not grow.10
Small planters in the sugar region also adapted to the new crop. High start-up costs kept them from having their own sugar houses, but it was possible to grow sugar with as few as four slaves where one could use another's machinery. Thus, the picture of sugar planting being restricted to the richest of the rich has to be qualified. Consolidation did occur, like when marriages united planter families or when small proprietors sold out to big planters, but fragmentation also took place. Often, planters died and lands were divided among numerous heirs. In mature sugar communities, sizes of landholdings varied a great deal. The same tasks of cultivation applied to large landowners with many slaves, small landowners with few or no slaves, and every status of sugar grower in between. In a sense, levee-building sugar communities drew closer together as landholdings diminished in size, because people had to help each other in so many ways. Even for the rich, there was much social interaction among the classes. For example, they hired in and hired out extra hands (slave and free) at various times of year. They bought livestock, provisions, and ratoons from small producers, and earned extra money by renting their mills and boiling vats. To build and fuel a sugar house, hire a sugar maker in grinding season, maintain levees, dig drainage and irrigation ditches, and feed a large slave force took considerable capital. Planters like those of Orleans and St. Charles had a definite advantage. However, even in relatively poor areas like St.
John the Baptist, sugar provided employment and an income which preserved and renewed the value of the leveed land.\footnote{11}

A letter from one testy Saint Domingue refugee can serve as a comment on the level of agricultural progress achieved in Louisiana by late 1804. The writer, Pierre Collette, was a dispossessed coffee planter. On the island, he and his mother had owned three plantations, almost six hundred slaves, a warehouse, a store, and a private landing on the coast. Collette refused to leave until just before the French troops evacuated in October of 1803. Fleeing initially to Cuba, he detested that place for its arid soil and high rents. Collette found the Cuban government's restrictions on business to be odious. "One would have to be born Spanish to . . . tolerate them," he said. Besides which, he considered Cubans to be ignorant, superstitious, and "truly hideous." Had he known of Louisiana's advantages, he said, he would never have gone there. In regard to Louisiana's agriculture, Collette explained that its planters had begun to grow sugar, but it was not well suited to the climate. They only had about two months to grind what grew in five or six. However, he saw that planters combated adverse weather conditions by irrigating their fields through the levees in high water. Each controlled overflow left three to five inches of sediment, he said. Thus, Collette explained, irrigation fought soil exhaustion and sped the growth of cane at the same time. According to Collette, it worked so well that
Louisiana cane was five feet tall at the age of a sprout in Saint Domingue.12

In regard to cotton, Louisiana's other major crop, Collette made a similar report. He found that ingenuity could mitigate some of the natural disadvantages that attended the growing of cotton in a subtropical climate. For example, the fiber of Louisiana's cotton variety, already a short staple, brought a low price per pound because of the mechanical tearing process used to remove the seeds. It lowered the grade of the lint. Nonetheless, the losses they incurred from the sale of a cheaper product were more than compensated for in the increased volume of production. Collette wrote that the cotton gin "does as much work as forty Negroes. If ever I should return to Saint-Domingue, this is the machine I would use." Cotton grew in a larger expanse of territory in Louisiana than sugar did, and Collette judged it would ultimately be of more real value. Rice seemed to him to be the most natural crop, because of the terrain and seasonal flooding, but its value as an export commodity did not repay a producer's efforts. Most only cultivated rice for their own households. The valuable crops needed the complete exclusion of overflows, or strictly regulated light floodings for irrigation. Therefore, for Louisiana's commercial farmers, levees were an economic fact of life.13

Export statistics in Jedidiah Morse's American Gazetteer of 1804 confirm Collette's impressions. Overall,
cotton was Louisiana's most valuable production. In the most recent year (presumably 1803), Louisiana had shipped 20,000 bales of cotton. With the staple valued at twenty cents a pound, the total worth was $1,344,000. Louisiana's sugar output (from 78 plantations) was 4,500 casks at six cents a pound, worth $302,000. Three hundred casks of molasses worth $32,000 were a marketable by-product.14

Writers who sought to popularize the development of Louisiana never tired of speculating about the amount of sugar and cotton that might be grown if the available land were better protected from flooding. They factored in the depth of the arable land between the levees and the swamps, the extent of the various climatic regions, and the proportion of soil which must be reserved for food crops or pasture. Around 1803, C. C. Robin estimated that 61,500 arpents were available for sugar in the distance between Pointe Coupee and ten leagues below New Orleans. Here, 73 million pounds of sugar could be grown, as opposed to the 5 million Louisiana actually produced in 1802. Morse's 1804 Gazetteer projected an ideal riverfront planting district of ninety miles, with two banks cultivated about three-fourths of a mile deep. If only one-third of it were planted in cane, according to Morse, the output would be 50,000 hogsheads of sugar, rather than the 4,500 most recently exported. Zadok Cramer's The Navigator of 1814 acquiesced in Morse's figures for the Mississippi, but pointed out that the sugar crop could be doubled again if
lands of equal or similar fertility on Bayou Lafourche and Bayou St. John, at Terre aux Boeufs and Attakapas, were included in the equation. Much of this was still subject to flooding, but Cramer noted that the sugar crop would multiply greatly if it were reclaimed. Levees soon appeared on some of the bayous to facilitate this result. Considering that 800 plantations in Saint Domingue shipped 192 million pounds of sugar in 1791, and that Louisiana, with larger natural resources, was shipping only 5 million pounds from 78 plantations ten years later, one can see that the promoters were not merely engaged in wishful thinking. Opportunities for expansion did exist on the Louisiana riverfront, and water management was an integral part of their realization. One could say that levees were, in fact, the key to the region's development.15

Unfortunately for Spain, its myriad investments in the settlement and security of Louisiana brought no lasting benefit to the Empire. Just as new crops were unlocking Louisiana's potential, Napoleon Bonaparte coerced the Spanish government into returning the colony to France. Spain's tenure, which dated from 1762, ended in 1800 by virtue of the Treaty of San Ildefonso. Spain continued to administer Louisiana until 1803. Then, Napoleonic France sold it to the United States. Afterwards, there were many visible changes in the governmental structures of the former colony, but the alterations had little immediate effect on the levees. The Mississippi rose and fell as
usual with utter indifference to the political situation. Its overflows recognized no sovereign but the laws of Nature, and the only things that kept the water in the riverbed from reaching the backswamp were those big, contiguous dirt piles which colonists had built as a royal command. The new American officials knew next to nothing about the Mississippi's habits, or about the public works traditions of levee-building communities, and they permitted the landowners of Louisiana (now citizens, rather than subjects) to continue in the old paths. This *status quo* situation lasted until new crises forced them all to reevaluate the effectiveness of the former system.

One advantage that Louisiana enjoyed under the United States was the economic principle of free trade. The ability to sell goods in whatever market promised the most money meant greater profits for exporters of sugar and cotton. Indeed, a traveler named Alexander Gordon, who left Nassau for New Orleans in December of 1806, commented that the immigration of skilled refugees from Saint Domingue and the cession of Louisiana to the United States had greatly increased the value of land on the Mississippi. He claimed that, especially in the sugar region, alluvial plantations now sold for ten times what they would have under the Spanish. Gordon noted, of course, that these rich fields were all "defended from the inundations of the river by a strong Embankment." The levee also served as the road upon which he traveled. It was adequate for the
purpose in dry weather, but he commented that "recent rains had made it almost impossible to walk on the Levee." Its crown was now "trodden into a soft soapy but very tenacious mud," while the horses of he and his companions sank "to their knees" in the levee's fabric. Creoles were doubtless glaring at the strangers from seats in their pirogues, and if Gordon had understood French, he must have heard plenty of criticism from the levee builders he passed. No wonder parish police regulations so often complained of levees damaged by traffic. Travelers did not build or maintain the dikes, but they certainly abused them! However, the transfer of sovereignty would bring many foreigners to the former colony in future years, and native Creoles had to exercise patience until those newcomers could be schooled in the proper upkeep of the embankments. The expansion of population on the riverside under the rule of the Americans would greatly extend the levee line and eventually lead to profound changes. For now, though, the Purchase made apparently little difference.

At the close of the Spanish era and the time of the Louisiana Purchase, levees stretched along the west bank of the Mississippi from the vicinity of Fort Plaquemine to Pointe Coupee, and, on the east bank, to the highlands of Baton Rouge. John Sibley and Amos Stoddard, in 1802 and around 1811, respectively, noted some spots in this distance which remained unleveed. According to Sibley, several locations lacked inhabitants north of what is now
Donaldsonville, because of caving banks and the consequent difficulty of keeping up the levees. Stoddard, ten years later, mentioned that the east bank levee generally doubled as the "great road" from Mississippi Territory to New Orleans. At some points, however, the levee was interrupted where lands still stood vacant.\textsuperscript{17}

It is difficult to know the precise extent of levees in the early nineteenth century, since no state agencies existed to report on them, and the travelers' written impressions are often unspecific. It seems that at the end of the War of 1812, the line still ran more or less coterminous with that from the time of the Louisiana Purchase. The levees of Concordia Parish constitute an exception to this, but they will be dealt with elsewhere.

Edouard de Montule wrote in 1817 that the levee and its adjacent road began just above Fort Plaquemine and extended northward. Samuel Brown's \textit{Western Gazetteer} (1817) indicated that the west-bank levee started at Fort Plaquemine and reached Pointe Coupee. The "principal levee" as he called it, that on the east bank, ran from Fort Plaquemine to Bayou Manchac, then to the highlands of East Baton Rouge. Within this area, farms and plantations lined the river in single file, in the settlement configuration which France and Spain created through their land grant regulations. Few or none of the proprietors owned land behind those who cultivated the riverfront. As a result, each landowner participated in levee duties and

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each had a direct stake in levee maintenance. Common levee concerns united the levee building communities, and under Louisiana's new territorial laws, parishes became the unit of government charged with the superintendence of levees. Therefore, each alluvial parish became a separate levee building community. No commandant, after the Louisiana Purchase, stood ready on the authority of a king to evict those who would not perform levee duties. Louisiana's laws now reflected a new source of authority—the consensus of the community itself as expressed through laws passed in a republican legislature.¹⁸

In matters of high water, the nineteenth century started quietly enough. Consecutive years of low water in 1800 and 1801 lulled new or naive proprietors into a sense of security. Some said a volcano erupted at the head of the Missouri and permanently diverted its waters into the Pacific. Some even thought the Mississippi would never flood again, but the flood of 1802 drowned their rosy hopes. In that year, for the area below the head of the Atchafalaya, the Mississippi rose higher than ever before. Levees washed away in twenty places. At Crevasse de Porte, where Bayou des Families left the Mississippi, water flowed through a break for two years. Canary Islanders who settled there in 1778 had to abandon improvements and relocate. Finally, in 1804, repair crews closed this crevasse by building a ring levee. In constructions of this type, where water flowed too swiftly to get close to a
crevasse, workers drove piles and erected a circular dam at a distance from the break. By being contained in an elevated pool, the water level on one side of the crevasse would equal that on the other side, and the flow through the break would cease. Ring levees fixed a crevasse which could not be controlled otherwise, but with some sacrifice of arable land. At Crevasse de Porte, the ring levee left a six acre pond.¹⁹

Whatever its local effects, the flood of 1802 convinced many on the river that existing levees were inadequate and needed to be higher. Where levees held, settlers had built temporary earthworks on the crown to raise their height. It seems that higher flood levels resulted from a combination of heavy rain, the shutting off of floodplains by the Acadians, and the clearing of forest watersheds by pioneers in the Ohio Valley. The levee builders further downstream could not control these activities, and for this reason, some speculated that a levee system could never be secure. In fact, there was no "levee system," just a group of levee building communities who independently tried to cope with such problems as they had the jurisdiction and resources to handle.²⁰

For a few years after 1802, the river remained fairly calm. Spanish regulations concerning levees remained current, and U. S. officials admonished the people of Orleans Territory to manage levees according to established customs. For example, Gov. W. C. C. Claiborne sent
Commandant Manuel Andry of St. John "the Babtist" Parish a letter, dated April 16, 1805, in which he said he had heard that the levees in Andry's district needed work in several places. "An early repair thereof, is essential to the Interest of the Farmers," Claiborne said. For the task, he laid down an enforcement procedure right out of Spanish law. As commandant, Andry was to order landowners to renew their levees. If they did not, he was to summon the inhabitants to make repairs at the owners' expense. Furthermore, Claiborne said, "if the Roads of your District should be out of repair, you will cause the ancient regulations . . . to be observed, as these regulations are yet in force." Since Andry was the largest slaveholder in St. John and well-respected by the "ancient inhabitants," it is not remarkable that Claiborne retained he and other such men to perform local duties in the usual way.21

Roads continued to be primitive in most places, and bridges rare. Even when levees held, high water flooded low tracts from the bayous and back swamps. Travelers, and particularly the mail service, suffered chronic problems. Creoles were used to these conditions, and since they did most of their traveling by boat among a confined circle of local acquaintances, the overflows on the roads were not particularly disturbing. Newly arrived American settlers, on the other hand, considered the regular overflow of major thoroughfares to be outrageous, inconvenient, and even unbelievable. For example, Nathaniel Cox of New Orleans, a
transplanted Kentuckian, wrote a friend that the delivery of letters from Kentucky to New Orleans was most irregular. Cox said the Louisianians blamed it on flooding, but he privately thought that "every [post] rider was drunk and behind his engagements, swearing to the most shameful falsehoods about the waters." However, the stories were sometimes true. For instance, the *Louisiana Gazette* of February 6, 1817, warned readers that the mail which left New Orleans the previous Tuesday was lost in Bayou Sara when the horses washed away. Officials entertained some hope that the mail might be recovered, since the corpses were large and the stream rather narrow, but correspondents were told to be prepared to make duplicates of their letters. The Americans thought more effective levees would have prevented such an event, while Creoles chiefly wondered who they would ever need to write to.22

In addition to problems of overland transport, life in or near the swamps also involved health risks, even in the best of times. The medical profession knew nothing of mosquitoes as transmitters of disease, but people recognized that the worst health conditions followed seasons when crevasses and overflows left decaying matter, slime, and stagnant water on the land. Flood victims dreaded the onset of swarming insects, heavy fog, cracking mud, nauseating smells, and violent fevers in the drying out phase after an overflow. On this basis, some argued for the necessity of levee building and drainage as a
health reform. William Darby, a noted American geographer, developed this theme very fully in his *Geographical Description of the State of Louisiana* (1816), drawing on medical opinions expressed by Noah Webster.  

Although best remembered for his dictionary, Webster also wrote a *Brief History of Epidemic and Pestilential Diseases* (1799) which focused on yellow fever. Neither Darby, nor Webster could fully explain how the "deadly effluvia" transmitted itself to humans, but they thought it came from rotting animal and vegetable matter in stagnant water. They said running streams did not generate miasmas, nor did water sealed in casks. Somehow, decaying physical matter in water emitted a "foul air" which united itself to "common air" and made the regular air "more dense." The heaviness of the impregnated air forced it to drop below the pure air, which is why it occurred in low tracts such as marshes, swamps, and alluvial floodplains. Webster believed that water on sloping land produced a light, pure breeze which expelled or diluted foul air. Thus, improvers of public health wanted water to run, not sit, much as if they were hydraulic fitness instructors.

Webster's studies convinced him that marshes, swamps, and overflows were social health hazards. The damp wastes menaced society because impure breezes blew across them, and he cited several examples as "proof." For instance, winds upon the marshes of York Island sickened New York City, and those on the wetlands of New Jersey plagued
Philadelphia. In Europe, air currents from the Black Sea crossed lowlands to inflict disease on Constantinople, while winds over the Pontine marshes wrought havoc with Rome. One day, according to Webster, thirty gentlefolk at Rome made a pleasure excursion to the mouth of the Tiber. A shift in the wind carried marsh air towards them, and twenty nine of the party soon developed tertian fevers. The swamps and marshes of the southern United States (particularly those on the lower Mississippi) were America's Pontine—a perpetual health risk. "There are two modes of rendering marshy lands and stagnating water salubrious," Webster announced. "One by draining the lands, and cultivating them. The other, by turning them into streams of running water."  

Here was prime medical authority for the building of levees, the draining of swamps, and the unstopping of logjams that slowed the flow of rivers. As Webster said,

If there is a possibility of drying any of the lands now covered with poison, or of putting the dead water into motion, the United States have a vast interest in effecting that object; and expenses are not to be put in competition with the health and lives of our citizens.  

In his geographical description of Louisiana, Darby drew a parallel between Louisiana and Imperial Rome. Rome fell to barbarians, but only after its own citizens grew effete, decadent, and immoral. A hot, marshy climate bled the people's energy, (and the Roman climate resembled Louisiana's). In their heroic age, Romans drained the Pontine marshes through a massive outlay of labor. Their
unworthy descendants, vitiated with "wealth, effeminacy, and voluptuousness," allowed the drainage systems to decay. Marshes returned and Rome fell. Therefore, Darby concluded, if Americans (and particularly the people of Louisiana) wanted to prove their integrity as patriots, they had to pursue a program of flood control which would produce a healthy and virtuous climate. Only when stagnant water was either dried up or set in motion could men of correct habits live and adapt to the region. Otherwise, voluptuous negligence would rot their morals, ethics, and mental energies with foul air.27

Webster's scientific prestige and Darby's logic must have convinced many in their day of the necessity of draining swamps and controlling overflows. The gravity of their arguments would have been particularly persuasive to new American planters in Louisiana who worried about the durability of the Republic and the declension of public virtue. The publicity which they gave to the cause of levee improvements, on the heels of distressing overflows, prompted a desire for better embankments. Yet, it still seems peculiar to follow a train of thought that tied health reforms, republicanism, and flood control to swamp reclamation as a civic virtue. According to Darby and Webster, those who allowed water to stagnate could not wear the name of patriot. To leave a swamp intact was to fiddle while Rome burned and to hasten the fall of the Republic.
Obviously, these theorists completely failed to see the mosquito as a carrier of disease. Instead, Darby praised the insect as an angel like the one at the gates of Eden after the fall of man. To Darby, he was "a vigilant sentinel placed by nature at the portals of disease," warning men "to beware" of foul air. In fact, where mosquitoes flourished, people would be healthy, because men would stay out of swamps to avoid them. "Every pond is its native bed; every leaf . . . its dwelling; and the blood of all animals . . . its food," he wrote of the delightful creature. Travel writers never ceased to say clever things about mosquitoes on the Mississippi. Harriet Martineau, for instance, claimed that ladies wore muslin sacks tied at the neck, with smaller ones on the arms, "to sit thus at work or book, fanning themselves to protect their faces."

Again, Darby saw that mosquitoes flew thickest when the land was wet from receding overflows. The summer and fall of "the present year, 1811," a notable flood year, were remarkable both for the numbers of mosquitoes and for the violence of swamp diseases--bilious complaints and yellow fever. That spring crevasses flooded New Orleans.

Many people in the lower Mississippi Valley recorded encounters with swamp maladies. For instance, in 1806, W. D. Nicholson of New Orleans wrote John Close at Opelousas that "I've had a damned spell of fever--got over it--loaded with callomel & jallop--tartar emetic Barks &c &c, and to prevent me from having too sudden a relief, in comes a
toothache . . ." Other than the dental problem, these were typical ailments for the leveed region. Philip Zerban announced the availability of several remedies at his New Orleans store in the spring of 1811. He offered anti-bilious pills, "worm-destroying lozenges," "infallible ague & fever drops," and an "elixir for colds, obstinate coughs, catarrhs, sore throats, & approaching consumptions." The flood year promised a fine market for such an assortment.29

From these circumstances, lands on the lower Mississippi garnered a reputation, partly exaggerated, but too often deserved, which discouraged business excursions and settlement, and even led casual visitors to change their plans. In the fall of 1807, for example, travel writer Christian Schultz on the Middle Mississippi heard that people in New Orleans were dying faster than the city could bury them. Rumor said that slaves dragged fever victims to the levee with poles and hooks to throw them in the river. Schultz promptly decided to go north from Cape Girardeau, rather than descend to New Orleans just then. Nathaniel Cox fled the Crescent City in the summer of 1807 for high ground in West Florida. Although Cox liked New Orleans and praised Louisiana's rich land and economic opportunities, the fever he contracted made him dread recurrences of the disease. He wrote of "excruciating" pain which made him wish "seriously a hundred times for death." In September, Cox wrote Lewis that their friend Daingerfield also went to West Florida to recuperate from fever. He expressed joy
that Daingerfield was showing initiative and enterprise in his business affairs. Soon, Daingerfield recovered and went to Natchez for his slaves, to relocate at Pointe Coupee. There, Cox said, if he would take farming seriously, "he cant fail soon to better his fortune." Instead, in 1809, Cox reported Daingerfield's death.30

Many such fortune-hunters on the Mississippi paid with their lives, or sacrificed those of their households for a chance at the rewards of swamp agriculture. Of countless examples that could be cited, a few random stories must suffice to describe the pathos of entrepreneurs who gambled their all in the leveed floodplain and lost. Consider, for instance, the Louisiana Gazette report of October 16, 1811, which told of the deaths of Iberville Parish's Judge Edward D. Turner and his wife in two consecutive days. Turner, a Bostonian who fought the Indians with "Mad Anthony" Wayne, went into sugar planting upon retiring from the Army, but the climate proved destructive. The dead couple left seven minor children to farm the land. William Kenner of Virginia married the daughter of Stephen Minor, a wealthy Natchez planter, and became a prominent cotton factor in New Orleans. The Kenners married when she was fourteen, had seven children, and were very happy. Kenner prospered in New Orleans, becoming a member of Governor Claiborne's Legislative Council, a founding vestryman of Louisiana's first Episcopal church, and a director of the New Orleans Branch of the Bank of the United States. With his profits,
he purchased a sugar plantation near New Orleans around 1811. Calling it "Oakland," Kenner furnished it with the most up-to-date equipment and managed the planting himself. "Oakland" became his favorite residence, and Martha Minor Kenner adorned it with flower gardens. There, in October of 1814, she died, aged twenty seven. His business partner wrote that Kenner was "inconsolable ... in a state bordering on distraction." Thereafter, Kenner's interest in sugar faded to indifference and his firm went bankrupt.

Another adventurer, civil engineer Benjamin Henry Latrobe, was flush with professional triumphs when he came to Louisiana in 1817. Trained at the University of Leipzig, he reached the U. S. in 1796 as an architect and canal planner. Latrobe designed buildings for the Bank of Pennsylvania and the Bank of the United States, engineered and built the first municipal water system in the U. S., remodeled the national Capitol, the White House, and the Patent Office, and designed North America's first cathedral. In 1812, he joined Robert Fulton, Robert Livingston, and Nicholas Roosevelt to produce a steamboat. After the War of 1812, Latrobe rebuilt the U. S. Capitol. Latrobe's son Henry, also an engineer, went to New Orleans to install a city waterworks, dying there of yellow fever in 1817. Latrobe moved to New Orleans that year to finish the project and died there of yellow fever in 1820.

Another planter and military man, Capt. Richard Butler, and his wife Margaret Farrar, a former ward of Julien Poydras,
belonged to the first ranks of Louisiana society. They owned "Ormond," a sugar plantation in St. Charles Parish, and "Woodstock," a cotton plantation near Natchez. When the Butlers fell ill with yellow fever, they traveled to Bay St. Louis for its anti-miasmic breezes, but died in spite of it in the fall of 1820, leaving no direct heirs. The estate settlement caused quite a snarl between blood relatives and an adopted son.31

Far upriver, in Arkansas, a much humbler family also experienced the trials of life at the river's edge. Clark Ward, an Arkansan born around 1808, reminisced in 1890 about his childhood. His parents had crossed the river into what was then Louisiana Territory from Mississippi. Clark was the fifth child. His father's training as a house carpenter proved useful, if not lucrative, at the new home. Mr. and Mrs. Ward cleared about twenty five acres on the riverside, cut and carried house timbers and fence rails, and built a substantial double-pen cabin. The nearest neighbor lived fifteen miles away, and Clark did not remember ever seeing him. In the early 1810s, the Wards' five children played in the clearing and did chores according to their abilities. Before the family abandoned the river farm (around 1816), son John had died at about the age of seven. Next, the twin girls died of swamp fever, aged seven. Then, son Henry died of swamp fever, aged twelve. This left only Clark, aged six, and a new baby. Clark said, "When my brother Henry died daddy and
mother decided to leave their home and move west... for their health." They loaded what the wagon would hold, leaving behind a crib full of corn and a field of growing grain. "He never went back for anything and we never knew what became of our place," Clark said. Each dead child lay in a row near the river.

When we were ready to drive away my mother went over to the graves, knelt down and said a prayer and then went and stood in front of the house taking a last look... She was crying and I cried because she was crying. Daddy went over and put his arms around mother and they walked over to the wagon and we started away.

It is a strange but true fact that there are no naturally occurring rocks in the Mississippi's floodplain, only sedimentary deposits. In Arkansas, stones appeared as one met the western hills at the edge of the swamp. It is understandable, therefore, that the Wards' new settlement beyond the alluvium was called "Rocky Comfort." The sight of rocks comforted those whose hearts the swamp had broken. A popular motto of the day ran, "Hills for health, lowlands for wealth." Some, like the Wards, decided the prospects at the water's edge carried too high a price. On the other hand, one can see how planters who stayed on the river for profits could still take an interest in levees and drainage as health reforms. Business, affection, and a desire to develop rich properties all united to make people grit their teeth and pile dirt higher on the levees. And, the potential rewards were not inconsiderable. William Darby compiled a table in his Geographical Description of the Mississippi.
The State of Louisiana which outlined the relative benefits one could derive from the use of "Fifty effective workmen on a Farm in Louisiana." At the prices prevailing in the mid 1810s: a sugar planter with fifty hands would make $12,000 on a crop; a cotton planter with fifty hands, $9,000; a tobacco planter with fifty hands, about $4,400; and a rice planter with fifty hands, $4,200. Clearly, sugar was the most lucrative, but cotton could also generate sizeable fortunes. The land in Louisiana so cultivated was in the floodplain and depended on levees for protection. Without a profit potential, new levees would never be built. 33

As to political administration, the government of this dangerous region remained largely as the Spanish had left it in the first year or two after the Louisiana Purchase. Governor Claiborne exercised powers which resembled those of a royal governor, and commandants stayed at their posts. Then, in March of 1805, the U. S. Congress passed a bill to organize the Territory of Orleans along "American" lines. It installed a territorial legislature with a popularly elected, twenty-five member lower house and a five-man upper house appointed by the president. In the second session of its first legislature, the territorial government approved Louisiana's first American levee law, on April 6, 1807. "An Act Relative to Roads, Levees, and the Police of Cattle"—or, "Acte Relatif aux Chemins et Levees, et a la Police des Animaux," as the majority read it—consisted of five sections, signed by Claiborne, House
Speaker John Watkins, and President of the Legislative Council Julien Poydras. The act set up an annual meeting in each parish on the first Monday in July to discuss and regulate the roads and levees. Parish judges, justices of the peace, and a jury of twelve inhabitants would attend the meetings. If circumstances made additional conferences desirable, the parish judge could call extra assemblies. The bill, in essence, created the Louisiana parish police juries because of the need in each locality to see to the state of the levees and roads. The legislature did not create police juries and then hunt them something to do. Rather, the clear need for acts of local government generated a mechanism (a police jury) to perform them.

The powers and duties conferred on this body of men reflected the overwhelmingly rural and agricultural sphere of their activities. In a general sense, their decisions would "order and provide for the execution of whatever concerns the interior and local police and administration of the parish." In fact, they performed tasks much like those formerly overseen by the commandant and syndics. Through the 1807 act, parish governing boards received specific authority to say when cattle could graze at large, to require fences and tell how to build them, and to undertake useful community improvements, such as levees, roads, bridges, and clearings of streams or bayous for navigation. Parish governing boards were to distribute the expense of these projects among the inhabitants."in the
manner which shall seem the most just and the most
convenient to their interests."35

In writing this 1807 levee act, the legislature
produced a very conservative document, deeply rooted in the
traditions of the colony. It more or less translated into
American law the way things had always been. Executive
functions devolved upon the parish judge. His role was
strikingly similar to that of the old Spanish commandant,
and he had extreme powers and authority in local affairs.36

The 1807 law does not specify how jurors were
selected, but a supplementary act passed in 1811 indicates
that the parish judge appointed the twelve jurors in the
1807 system. Under the 1807 levee act, the parish judge
placed a circular letter at the entrance to the parish
church and other public locations to inform all parish
residents of the governing body's decisions. Delinquents
could not make excuses that they had not known the law. If
the method of notification and the authority of the parish
judge seemed to derive from ancient custom, the field of
improvements the police jury would undertake also turned
out to be familiar. From the wording of the first sections
of the law, one might envision a parish embarking on bold
contracts and bond issues, paid for by sizeable taxes
assessed on the whole population. In reality, section four
on improvements simply reminds one of syndics and
commandants inspecting the levees. The parish meeting on
roads and levees ordered improvements to be made by
individual inhabitants on their own roads and levees, just as the commandant and syndics did. When the time for the required improvements expired, the judge, accompanied by two inhabitants, would examine the works to make sure the job was satisfactory, just like in the days of Spanish syndics and their technical consultants. If a levee repair failed the inspection, the inhabitant paid a fine, received a second chance, and a new deadline from the parish judge. If an inhabitant failed a second time to satisfy the requirements, the judge would order work to be done at the inhabitant's expense and either grant a contract or summon able bodied negroes from various proprietors. An owner sent slaves in proportion "to the strength of his gang" and obtained one dollar a day for every worker so employed. The pay scale and the source of labor was just like under the Spanish. The delinquent paid "all the expenses by him occasioned, even by seizure and sale of his property, if the case requires it." Again, the first territorial levee system was almost totally as the Spanish had left it.

In a world of strictly honorable people, the old/new system might have worked to the Americans' satisfaction. However, the American political mentality was not prepared to acquiesce in so great a degree of executive power. As it happened, the job description given to the parish judge created some uneasiness. To republican lawmakers, it seemed that he might profit to an unseemly degree through his ability to grant levee contracts to cronies, or even to
himself. Thus, the Second Legislature of the Territory of Orleans passed "An act to explain the fourth section of an act entitled "an act relative to roads, levees, and the police of cattle." What it explained was that the parish judge—the one who inspected the levee work and ordered inhabitants to pay for additional repairs—could not himself be the contractor. They reasoned that the old system left too much room for profiteering, or even for speculative foreclosures, if a parish judge and his picked jurors were unscrupulous. The legislature approved its explanatory act on March 13, 1809.38

As the new police juries and parish judges dealt with negligent proprietors, it soon became obvious that the most troublesome and unco-operative landowner on the river was none other than the Americans' Uncle Sam. The vacant unleveed lands glimpsed by Sibley, Stoddard, and other travelers belonged to the General Government of the United States. In the case of a private individual, the parish judge would have foreclosed. Somehow, though, the acreage of the federal government was beyond the judge's reach. He and the police jury had no power to force Congress to bring the government land up to code. Nevertheless, in 1807 Orleans Territory's first legislature approved a resolution concerning public lands on the Mississippi, and it asked the territorial delegate in Congress to present the petition to President Jefferson. In it, they complained that much of the Island of Orleans, but especially "the
good people of the county of Iberville," suffered a great inconvenience from flooding on government lands at Point Manchac. Water rose through this unleveed section "to such a degree as to destroy their crops and their cattle, and even to endanger their very dwellings." The high road, the sole overland route, frequently sank below the overflows, being "almost at all times impassable and dangerous." Yet, the United States government, the legislature observed, has "made no provision for making levees or roads on the public lands on the river Mississippi." Therefore, territorial lawmakers asked President Jefferson to recommend some way of getting federal levees and roads built on its lands. The national government dismissed the request.39

Another severe flood occurred in 1809, but Lower Louisiana was spared most of the ill effects.40 Partly because of levee protection, alluvial Louisiana prospered in the early 1800s. Its business climate attracted much attention, and people eagerly discussed the prospect of moving there or of making commercial trips. For instance, Samuel Crawford of Breckenridge County, Kentucky, wrote an acquaintance in New Orleans for advice about two flatboats of "living Hoggs" which he planned to sell in the lower country. Crawford heard that in Louisiana money was more abundant "than the chesnuts in Breckenridge." In Kentucky, business was "so dull" he and his brother would be on the dole if conditions did not improve. Another correspondent, Nathaniel Cox, wrote a Kentucky friend in November of 1806,
that no one should pay $25 an acre for land around Lexington when he could buy on the lower Mississippi. "My dear Gabriel what a country I have seen," Cox said, and he gave an account of the money to be made on the riverbanks:

The culture of cotton this year will be worth from 200 to 250 Dollars per hand, as I am informed, but this is not near equal to the cultivation of the sugar cane—a Gentleman in the neighborhood of Mr. J. Brown [']s plantation who works 28 hands expects to clear from 10 to 12000 Dollars independent of the Molasses, which he calculates on to cloath & feed his negroes—it is true they are not very well clad & probably not much better fed,—but a man might do both well and clear a handsome profit—Sugar (they tell me) is a crop that never fails—and as long as tea & coffee is used must be an article of importance as merchandize—the markets can t be glutted with it. Do for God's sake sell your land in the neighborhood of Lexington... bring your negroes to the Mississippi Territory [...] they would certainly make you a hansom fortune in ten years by the cultivation of cotton—for a sugar planter [in Louisiana] your hands would not do—it requires a considerable capital to commence.41

Many in Louisiana hoped to become a state as soon as possible. President Jefferson and Territorial Governor Claiborne, however, counseled delay. They knew the Creoles had no experience with democratic institutions prior to the Louisiana Purchase, nor were they convinced of the former colonists' loyalty. Misgivings multiplied in 1809 when thousands of French-speaking refugees poured into New Orleans from Cuba. These Saint Domingais had gone to Cuba in the 1790s, but when Napoleon forced the Bourbon king of Spain to abdicate, the Spanish Cubans expelled them. Perhaps nine to eleven thousand French-speaking refugees came to Louisiana from May 1809 to January 1810 and doubled
the population of New Orleans. Creoles generally welcomed them as an augmentation of the "French" political faction against the "party" of the Americans. Contrary to expectations, however, the Saint Domingue refugees proved to be more interested in material progress than in factionalism. They made progressive contributions to the sugar industry, and their cultural sophistication raised New Orleans's social tone to new heights in opera, theater, education, and newspaper publishing. Indeed, the Saint Domingais made a good bridge between the rival groups of Creoles and Americans, and they brought with them a familiarity with levees and other devices of water management engineering. They were an important factor in the modernization of Louisiana in the early 1800s.42

Despite the caution of government executives, Louisiana's increased population and business prospects continued to stimulate plans for statehood. In the period 1803 to 1810, it easily passed the population mark required for new states. At the time of the Purchase, the populace was estimated at about 45,000, of whom about 38,000 lived in Lower Louisiana and 7,000 in Upper Louisiana. Settlements at Hopefield and the Fourth Chickasaw Bluff marked the traditional boundary between Upper and Lower Louisiana. Once the territory was organized, in 1805, the present-day border between Louisiana and Arkansas delimited the southern border of Louisiana Territory from the northern edge of the Territory of Orleans. By 1810, Orleans
Territory attained a population of 76,556: 34,322 whites; 7,586 free colored; and 34,660 slaves. Most of them lived in parishes on the river. This number was plenty for statehood, and Louisiana gloried in its prospects. Meanwhile, Mississippi Territory had similar aspirations, without the same qualifications. A New Orleans editor said Mississippi's congressional delegate was making "long winded speeches" in favor of statehood, even though that territory's population was 20,000 short of the requirement. "What an itching our little Territories have to become States," the Louisiana Gazette sneered, "Read the following return of the census . . . and wonder at their assurance." Mississippi Territory in 1810 contained 40,352 people: 23,024 whites; 240 free colored; and 17,088 slaves. They lived almost exclusively in upland, non-leveed areas, and many were subsistence farmers. Louisiana Territory, roughly Upper Louisiana, had 20,845 inhabitants in 1810; of whom only 3,011 were slaves. The Arkansas settlements held 1,062 people altogether, most of them hunters and hunting farmers; while Missouri's districts, dominated by farmers and lead miners, contained 19,783. Clearly, at this time the leveed regions were by far the most populous, wealthy, and productive areas of settlement in the former colony.43

The Louisiana Gazette and New Orleans Daily Advertiser of April 11, 1811, carried a statistical profile of the commercially valuable products of Orleans Territory in 1810. Most exports came from the riverfront and relied on...
levee protection. The territory's 91 sugar works made 9,671 hogsheads of sugar in 1810, each cask averaging a thousand pounds in weight; also, 3,590 fifty-gallon casks of molasses. Seventeen tafia distilleries made 5,065 casks of cheap rum, each about forty five gallons. Orleans Territory's 249 cotton gins cleaned 41,290 bales in 1810, each weighing about three hundred pounds. Forty indigo factories supplied 45,800 pounds of dye, and tobacconists, primarily on Red River, made 20,650 carrots of tobacco.44

Obviously then, by 1810 Louisiana had well-developed riverfront properties and valuable plantations, but planters did not operate in isolation. Small farmers on the river who used the planters' mills and gins greeted them on the levee road and footpath. Small proprietors had narrower wedges of riverfront and fewer slaves, but their improvements were just as precious to themselves as those of the gentry. Each arpent of soil, each stalk of cane, each boll of cotton, and foot of levee represented labor and income. One must conclude, therefore, that a community consensus maintained the levees, for all the proprietors--large and small--knew the consequences of neglect. Indeed, it is obvious that public officials in the leveed regions had popular support from voters for the enforcement of levee codes. How does one know this? In 1811, parish police juries became elective, but even though small proprietors outnumbered planters everywhere on the river, no revolt against levee work broke out when they received a
vote. Elected jurors, when making levee laws, were representing the wishes of their constituents. Slaves, of course, did the bulk of the physical levee work without making a choice. Yet, one imagines they liked the clean-ups and repairs from crevasses as little as their owners. Too, if proprietors experienced financial distress from flooding, the slaves might be sold off and perhaps separated from their families. They probably desired strong levees as fervently as the planters themselves.

Table 3.1 indicates the statistical makeup of this alluvial society, broken down into categories of large, small, and no slaveholdings for the year 1810. As the table shows, large planters were not the sole inhabitants of the riverfront and they had to "rule" with the consent of the masses.

Planters in Saint Domingue considered forty five slaves as the basic labor requirement for an efficient sugar plantation. Some Louisiana slaveowners began operations with fewer than that, and a Spanish ban on slave imports after the Haitian rebellion left a slave shortage in Louisiana which lasted for several years. Nonetheless, by 1810, eighty eight Louisiana proprietors had at least forty five slaves. Many of these owners' names, such as Fortier, Destrehan, Livaudais, Boulingny, De la Ronde, Macarty, Poydras, Bringier, Labranche, Roman, Porche, Ternant, Andry, Cantrelle, Minor, Kenner, Trepagnier, and Villere are familiar to students of the Louisiana levees,
TABLE 3.1

HOUSEHOLD SLAVEHOLDINGS IN THE LOUISIANA RIVER PARISHES, 1810

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parish</th>
<th># Hshlds</th>
<th># Hshlds</th>
<th># Hshlds</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>with 20+</td>
<td>with 0-5</td>
<td>Owning No</td>
<td>Population of Parish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plaquemine</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>1,549</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Bernard</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>947</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orleans</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>24,552</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Charles</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3,291</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. John</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2,990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. James</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>3,955</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ascension</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>2,219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iberville</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>2,679</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baton Rouge</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>1,463</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pointe Coupee</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>4,539</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoyelles</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>1,209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concordia</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>2,895</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catahoula</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>1,164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ouachita</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>1,077</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Orleans Parish, being an urban center, had many households with a few slaves, but these could be urban families with house servants. Large slaveholdings in Orleans were obviously plantation households, so those figures are given and the small households omitted.

**The river and alluvial parishes listed above contained 71 percent of the Territory of Orleans's population in 1810.

because they were also among the Territory of Orleans's leading agricultural exporters. Arranged by parish, northward from the Gulf, the number of large slaveholders (those with 45 slaves or more slaves) were as follows in 1810: Plaquemine Parish (2), St. Bernard (4), Orleans (27), St. Charles (18), St. John the Baptist (3), St. James (6), Ascension (3), Iberville (3), [West] Baton Rouge (0), Pointe Coupee (14), and Concordia (7). East Baton Rouge and the Felicianas were still in Spanish West Florida, but this list suffices to show where wealth was concentrated on the river. Sugar planters on the erstwhile Indigo Coast were accumulating the most wealth because of their large
workforces and valuable crop. Due to the size of their capital stake and operations, these farmers and the larger cotton planters had the most to lose if levees failed.46

Real estate advertisements from contemporary newspapers describe the attractions of alluvial plantations. Note the range of improvements that such large proprietors stood to lose if their levees broke. For example, the Moniteur de la Louisiane of January 14, 1804, carried a notice from the Widow Trepagnier offering her property in St. Charles Parish. This was "Ormond," purchased by Capt. Richard Butler of Natchez in 1805. The house still stands. According to the newspaper, this concession with a twenty arpent front stood on high ground. The house had eleven rooms heated by fireplaces. Outbuildings included a kitchen, tool shed, and sugar mill. The garden stretched to the levee, enclosed by a vertical picket fence for protection from the cows that grazed on the embankment. Madame Trepagnier's asking price included the plantation's labor force of 27 slaves, 12 horses, and 12 pair of oxen, with one hundred arpents of cane. The plantation also had a grove of fruit trees, indigo processing equipment (decidedly out of date), and two brick-lined wells.47

Another interesting sugar estate appeared for sale in the Louisiana Gazette and New Orleans Daily Advertiser on December 29, 1810. The Peter Grymes plantation lay on the Mississippi about 4 1/2 miles east of New Orleans, on the same side of the river as the city. Its front measured 16
arpents, 11 toises, 3 paces, and stretched back to Bayou Bienvenu. Because of the depth of the property, it was called a "double concession." The advertiser stated that the place was an ideal residence for gentlefolk. Its "elegant mansion-house" had eight rooms, plus servants' quarters. Outbuildings included a large stable, corn house, magazine, kitchen, laundry, and brick sugar house. Grymes admitted that cane cultivation at his place had "been attended by many unfavorable circumstances," but a crop of 120 hogsheads was now expected. Cane occupied 180 acres. The planter also operated a water-powered saw mill on a sluice from the levee to Bayou Bienvenu. According to the advertisement, if the place did not sell by January 1, 1811, it would be auctioned at the Exchange Coffee House. With approved credit, a buyer could pay in one to four years for this "turnkey" property, unless, of course, circumstances such as overflows destroyed the crops and interrupted his cash flow.48

A travel journal kept by Duke Bernhard of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach gives glimpses of leveed plantations in the area between New Orleans and English Turn. Leaving New Orleans, Bernhard rode along the levee to "Conseil," the sugar estate of General Jacques Villere, eight miles east of the city at the edge of St. Bernard Parish. Villere had purchased the property in 1808 for $34,000. Bernhard found the house somewhat small and plainly furnished. Curtains hung between the pillars on the gallery to shield the
family from the sun. Brick buildings for boiling and milling sugar stood behind the habitation; nearby, the yard, stables, and house servants' cabins; behind them, the field hands' huts, arranged "like a camp;" then fields, about a mile in depth, and, finally, the cypress swamps. Although Bernhard visited in 1826, his description can be taken as typical of sugar plantations in the 1810s, because Villere's losses at the Battle of New Orleans prevented him from modernizing. He could not afford the new steam-operated sugar equipment and used an old-fashioned, horse-powered mill, consisting of three upright iron cylinders. Horses turned the center cylinder from underneath and moved the other rollers with gears. While workers shoved cane stalks between the vertical rollers for crushing, juice ran through a groove into a reservoir. Drawn into three successive kettles, it boiled until the liquid evaporated, and each batch produced half a hogshead.49

On the trip, Bernard enjoyed dry weather, but observed from the nature of the land that the road "must be bottomless," in rainy conditions. The most fruitful soil, the Duke learned, was that reclaimed from swamps by levees. As he rode through what is now Arabi and Chalmette, plantations protected by levees succeeded one another rather thickly. Each country house sat about a hundred paces from the levee road at the end of an avenue of laurels (pruned into pyramids), pride of China trees, or pecans. In this
area, planters called their dwellings "habitations." The homes generally had two stories, piazzas, and galleries.50

Because of the profits from sugar planting and the small geographic area where the climate would tolerate its cultivation, plantations in the prime sugar district became very expensive. Some entrepreneurs gambled on cheaper locations where the climate was less reliable, and they converted upriver cotton farms to sugar, as is seen in the following example. An advertisement dated June 1, 1811, presented the plantation of Alexis Braux, in St. James Parish, to the buying public. It had a front of 7 3/4 arpents with 150 arpents cleared and 100 arpents enclosed in a park. The seller pointed out that his plantation still had a great deal of cypress for use as fuel or for lumber sales, unlike plantations downriver which had already lost their forests. Braux's field hands grew corn and cotton at present, but "if the purchaser were desirous to enlarge the premises, with the view of planting sugar," he would have no trouble doing so. "The soil and situation are well adapted." A substantial dwelling house, overseer's house, and cotton gin came with the property, as well as horses, mules, cattle, farm utensils, and seventeen slaves. The seller extended credit on the following terms: land to be paid for in three installments due in 1812, 1813, and 1814; slaves in payments due in 1812 and 1813; everything else to be paid for in 1812. The seller required an endorsed promissory note and mortgage for
security. Nature, the Territorial legislature, the police jury of St. James Parish, and the public opinion of the levee building community required a levee.51

A third type of offering existed for those who wanted a "handyman's special": partially improved lands, within the leveed region and not virgin wilderness, but needing further development. These often belonged to small farmers or speculators who lacked the funds for extensive improvements. A tract nine miles above the mouth of Bayou Lafourche can serve as a typical case. The seller represented it in April of 1811 as a large swath of land on the west bank, 23 arpents and 13 toises in front, with a depth of 80 arpents. He claimed that most of it could be cultivated. Seventy acres had already been planted, and the timber was burned away on an additional two hundred acres. According to the advertisement, the burning made clearing so easy, it was almost ready for the plow. Here too, the seller offered liberal credit terms.52

On the other hand, the flood of 1811 injected new variables into the plans of buyers and sellers. For a landowner who wanted to divest, damage by flooding might entail heavy expenses in repairs and greatly decrease the value of the property. One wonders, for instance, how cheaply Grymes had to sell after admitting that his plantings often failed. A purchaser who expected to make payments from a crop that flooded might sacrifice whatever equity he had invested. In transactions involving such
large sums, both purchaser and lender had much to lose when flooding occurred. Buyers floated, after all, on a river of credit and juggled payments with shipments of goods. Anything that compromised their ability to pay threatened the plans of buyers and sellers. Squatters simply moved, but owners had to protect fixed assets.

Consequently, reactions to the flood of 1811 varied according to the circumstances. Monette's encyclopedic article on "The Mississippi Floods" reveals little about the 1811 flood, except to say that it heavily damaged plantations below Walnut Hills and spread itself in the American Bottom of southwest Illinois. William Darby, however, complained a great deal about the great flood and disastrous crevasses of 1811. Henry Marie Brackenridge added credence to Darby's account and stated that "for six weeks [in 1811] the coast presented a scene of continual anxiety . . . the hands withdrawn from the fields, and kept watching day and night." To combat the danger, residents added height to their levees. In another report, a correspondent of Julien Poydras wrote from Pittsburgh to Pointe Coupe about the news of flooding in Poydras's vicinity, and he expressed hopes that the damage was not too severe. Also, the Louisiana Gazette and New Orleans Daily Advertiser of May 20, 1811, told of great alarms for sixty miles above and below New Orleans. It said the river was swelling higher than for ten years past; and yet, continued to rise. In an apt display of localism, the
The Louisiana Gazette blamed settlers upriver who had enclosed new parts of the riverside with levees. This, it charged, had raised water levels on the older inhabitants. "What appears to strengthen this opinion," the paper said, "is, that the river is not unusually high at Natchez," where levees had not been built on the opposite shore. However, according to former Territorial Governor Winthrop Sargent, the river peaked at Natchez on June 4th at a very high level. Thomas Butler, at St. Francisville, wrote his cousin, Capt. Richard Butler, on June 14th that the river was rising south of Natchez at Fort Adams. He attributed it to an influx of waters from the Missouri. As for New Orleans, the Louisiana Gazette furnished information on June 3, 1811, saying that the levee had broken in several places above and below the city, with one "crevice" as close as 1 1/2 miles from New Orleans itself. This crevasse ran for several days before it could be closed. The water's height terrified the inhabitants, and newspapers expressed a fear that much damage had occurred.  

The repair of a crevasse was not only complicated, but expensive, particularly after a severe levee break. A proprietor might not be able to fix it quickly enough, and breaks sometimes spread beyond the confines of a single estate. A good example of the closure of a major crevasse took place in Iberville Parish in 1811 and incurred considerable expense. The question became, who should pay the cost? When the police jury and parish judge tried to
distribute the expense and make residents pay shares, claims for payment were protested and people disputed the authority of the parish judge to execute the police jury's decision in the matter. The state legislature had to intervene six years later to support the local officials.54

In spite of the fright and drama that accompanied flooding on the Mississippi, some riverfront inhabitants managed to keep a sense of humor. A good example is from a correspondent of Thomas Butler of "The Cottage," who sent a letter about flooding in Pointe Coupee, dated November 1, 1811. Butler's friend assigned the name "Hazard Farm" to the place he occupied in Pointe Coupee, and on the letterhead, he drew an alligator eating the word "Hazard;" doubtless an allusion to the indigenous fauna that now found its usual haunts disturbed by high water.55

The friend apologized to Butler for being so long in answering his letter. In fact, their correspondence seemed affected by Jefferson's "non-intercourse act." But when Butler's letter arrived on July 14, 1811, he was fighting "a vigorous defense against the high water." The flood and its after-effects kept him "constantly at home in order to save that part of my crop which the Deluge had spared." Post-overflow sicknesses also plagued the writer, made worse by intemperance. Travel writers who recommended a sojourn in Louisiana to their countrymen, in spite of its health record, often commented that the chief victims were unacclimated men who drank too much. According to Butler's
friend, "I had shaken off my old fever, was growing fat & more vigorous than I ever have been since I left the Land of Roast Beef," when a minor recurrence of bilious fever caught up with him at Fulwar Skipwith's. He would have recovered quickly, he said, had it not been for Satan. This malignant Being seized upon a tool, Mr. Devall, who followed the friend home, "where having nobody else to drink with, he kept me up three whole nights." As the friend understood it, liquor and lack of rest threw bile into his blood and left the swamp fever in full sway—as he phrased it, "the damn'd, old, emasculating, lingering" calling card of the River. When and if the friend recovered, he promised to visit.56

One must keep in mind that the writer's bantering tone spoke of a state of mind approximately four months after a flood. Real apprehension about water levels was a constant of river life, and residents could not take security for granted even in low water years. For instance, in 1812 the river barely overflowed its unleveed banks. Nonetheless, a storm that blew for an entire day hit one neighborhood so violently that churning waves ripped several holes in nearby levees. As a result, plantations in the vicinity suffered considerable damage. "Had that storm occurred at the same season the year before," Henry Brackenridge remarked, "the whole country would have been under water." A tempest of fifteen minutes' duration in 1811 threatened to do just that. A witness told Brackenridge the storm
produced a "universal panic." "Man, woman, and child, involuntarily ran to the levee as it were to support it with their hands."57

Fears about levees in the high water of 1811, as well as damage to property, danger to life, and the expense of repairs, may well have contributed to the passage of a law which reorganized Louisiana's parish governments. This act of the territorial legislature, which was approved April 30, 1811, supplemented the 1807 law on roads, levees, and the police of cattle, and it gave concerned citizens more input into their local governments. Prior to the 1811 act, the parish governing board consisted of a parish judge and justices of the peace (appointed by the governor) and a twelve-member police jury (appointed by the parish judge). After the 1811 act, the parish judge presided at meetings of twelve jurors elected for a two year term by popular vote. Jury elections took place from 9 A.M. to 3 P.M. on the second Monday in June. Candidates had to be respectable freeholders with property in the parish. Since virtually everyone lived on the river, this requirement insured that levee maintenance would be of vital interest to the jurors. The parish judge and twelve jurors observed a regular meeting schedule, but if requested by at least twelve inhabitants, the parish judge had to summon the jury for special meetings. This allowed the local government to respond to the citizens' concerns promptly, and in time to order the performance of whatever tasks were necessary.58
Another flood occurred in 1813 which confirmed the fears of many proprietors that the general water level was rising. Brackenridge said the water crawled six or eight inches higher in 1813 than in 1811, and that if planters had not prepared and repaired their levees in 1812, the subsequent flood would have "totally destroyed" them. According to William Darby, even the strong levee at Pointe Coupee broke in 1813. He remarked that this crevasse poured enough water into the Atchafalaya to submerge interior settlements. At the lower end of the Atchafalaya, Grand Lake rose four or five feet higher than anyone could remember, at least since 1780. Yet, it could have been worse. Darby said the various rivers could have flooded simultaneously in June, as often happened. In that event, a truly impressive inundation would have resulted, as the water of 1813 lacked only four additional feet to flood all the ridges from the Mississippi to Bayou Teche.59

Flood heights in 1813 hit the lower river particularly hard, and many individuals had to look carefully to the levees. For instance, a May 31, 1813, business letter to Stephen Minor of Natchez, from the factorage firm of his son-in-law, William Kenner, explained that Kenner had not written personally because he was at his sugar plantation. "His Levee has broke & occasioned a considerable crevasse, but [we] trust it is by this time stopped," the clerk explained. At least proprietors like Kenner had good levees in place, monitored by police juries and carefully
watched. Much of the river in newly settled "American," or non-creole regions, still lacked these protections.®0

Outside the leveed region, the flood of 1813 caused enormous damage, even though the highest water occurred further downriver. At the Natchez bluffs, Governor Winthrop Sargent recorded water a foot higher than in 1811. John Monette spoke of terrible devastation in Concordia Parish, across from Natchez. According to Monette, Concordia settlers in the area above Natchez had not yet constructed continuous levees, preferring to take chances on high lands they had identified from plant life. But even the most elevated alluvial lands overflowed at times such as this. After all, every land form in the region came from sediment, and none could be truly "above overflow." Concordia Parish extended along the Mississippi as far north as Lake Providence in 1813. Much of it remained unsettled, but get-rich-quick frontier planters had made primitive improvements in advance of the levees: clearing land, building fences, planting crops, and raising cabins, without levees. Perhaps they thought a few good crops would establish their finances, and they could undertake to build embankments at a later date. Or they would simply make fast profits from swamp cotton and move to more congenial surroundings. Whatever their reasons for planting before they built levees, the river punished Concordians in 1813 for their audacity. Monette said, "the whole of this parish suffered severely," and he estimated
its losses "at one million of dollars, including crops, cattle-stock," and other goods destroyed.61

The 1813 flood even affected the pace of progress in the wilds of the middle river. Zadok Cramer always listed the river settlement of Point Chicot in southeast Arkansas in his handbook, The Navigator, because it was one of only a handful of settled areas between Missouri and Natchez. According to Cramer, four families clustered at Point Chicot, each of whom tended a three acre corn patch. Travelers could sometimes obtain milk, eggs, and other products there. Point Chicot had excellent soil and a rather high bank, but after the flood, Cramer wrote, "I fear the overflowings of 1813 have destroyed all present attempts to continue the settlement."62

In the aftermath of the flood of 1813, as in 1811, it appears that the fears and damage caused by the overflow prompted additional refinements to the structure and function of local government in Louisiana. At least, it produced a willingness to expand and clarify the role of local government.

On April 30, 1812, Louisiana had joined the Union as a state. It was formed from Orleans Territory and the Florida Parishes of Spanish West Florida. In the second session of the first state legislature, Louisiana lawmakers passed "An Act further defining the organization, authority and functions of police juries." Julien Poydras, erstwhile flood victim and a leading alluvial planter, served
as President of the Senate in this session. Louisiana's first popularly elected state governor, W. C. C. Claiborne, who also planted, approved the act on March 25, 1813, during the high water. Because the law modified Louisiana's local governments, it necessarily affected the management of levees.63

The 1813 police jury law provided for the division of parishes into jury wards to insure a more specific representation of local interests. In accordance with the new provisions, the parish judge and justices of the peace in each parish partitioned its terrain into as many wards as they saw fit. Residents of each ward would elect a juror to represent them in the police jury. The juror had to be a freeholder within the ward, and he received no compensation for his service. Although he represented the ward, individual jurors were not officials within their wards. None had more authority in his own ward than in adjoining wards, and jurors's decisions only carried weight when made in concert with the whole jury in official parish meetings. To prevent radical or overly hasty shifts in parish policy, the 1813 act stipulated that jurors would receive staggered terms, with only half of the jurors coming up for election each year. Under this arrangement, continuity of leadership would be maintained, and the residents' ability to intimidate the body was curtailed. Jury elections took place near the end of the traditional high water stage of the river, on the first Monday in June.
Still, the jury only met once a year on a regular basis, the first Monday in July, under the presidency of the parish judge. In this meeting, justices of the peace joined the jurors as associates. Jurors and justices cast one vote each, and the parish judge voted in ties. At least two thirds of the jury had to be present if new taxes were to be laid, old taxes changed, or new expenses undertaken. Members who missed meetings, or left early without sufficient reason, paid fines. New Orleans received special consideration from the legislature. The 1813 document prevented the police jury of Orleans Parish from interfering in the government of New Orleans, but gave the city corporation the powers of a police jury within its own corporate limits.64

Since experience showed that local officials needed authority to handle crises of various descriptions, the legislature conveyed a broad range of specific powers to the police juries in the 1813 law. Enumerating the powers served to channel the juries' activities and to reduce public outcries against their decisions. The legislature placed the police of slaves and the apprehension of runaways as the juries' first obligation. This seemed particularly important because of the 1811 slave revolt in St. John the Baptist Parish. Second came the traditional priority of local governments in Louisiana, the power to direct the construction and repair of levees, roads, and bridges. In the sections that followed, the legislature
listed other jury powers dealing with the development and maintenance of the community's infrastructure. For instance, the 1813 law instructed juries to enforce the clearing of banks of navigable streams for the free passage of boats and tow lines. (Improvements to the bed of navigable streams belonged only to the state). The 1813 act also authorized juries, if they chose, to close flood-prone, non-navigable waterways; to make landowners reopen "ancient natural drains;" and to compel cooperative ditching projects among neighbors whose lands did not immediately touch the backswamps. Juries could make decisions about fences and determine "the time in which cattle may be suffered to rove... so that such roving may not be detrimental to the crops." The act directed juries to appoint treasurers, constables, and other officers, as well as to choose a parish seat, and erect a courthouse and jail. Juries could grant monopolies to ferry-keepers to help create an overland transportation network. A very important provision gave juries the power to tax. The body could lay taxes to defray the costs of public works and could have these taxes assessed at equal rates upon real and personal property in the parish, including slaves. The phrase "public works" had a nebulous quality about it, but the community understood what these would be. They were the traditional tasks that individual proprietors performed as a public service. Nevertheless, the 1813 act was a great step forward in organizing and
empowering the administration of public affairs on the lower Mississippi. It "Americanized" Louisiana's local governments and supplemented their authority with the backing of the state.65

Few transcripts remain from the meetings of Louisiana's early police juries, but the records of St. John the Baptist Parish constitute a welcome exception. These amply illustrate the kinds of specific actions police juries could take within the guidelines established by Louisiana's legislature in 1813. Written in French, the documents consist of minutes of jury sessions from July 11, 1814, to August 3, 1818, and a compendium of parish regulations compiled around 1819. The session minutes show that the police jury of St. John created a basic parish code at its meeting on July 12, 1813. This was the first regular annual meeting of its reorganized police jury. The jury convened on the first Monday in July, as dictated by the state law of March 25, 1813. Subsequent sessions altered, amplified, or amended the 1813 parish code, but did not repudiate it. Recurring legal phrases in the minutes stipulated that, apart from specific items addressed by the jury in its official decisions, the jury retained its other regulations without change.66

The session minutes of St. John the Baptist Parish report its jury deliberations without any particular topical order. The compendium, on the other hand, arose from the jury's desire to "recast and compile" its
accumulated decisions into one orderly document. Around 1819, the jury appointed Hubert Darensbourg, Ursin Perret, and J. P. Morel Guiramond as a compilation committee. Their finished work contained fifteen sections of regulations which had been decreed, over time, by parish officials. Section two reported the fact that the jury consisted of two representatives from each of the parish's six wards—or, "arrondissments"—plus the justices of the peace. Section three, "on the Levees," contained fourteen articles from decisions made over several years. It drew on four ordinances passed in 1813, nine from 1815, four from 1818, and one from 1819. The compilation's fourth section dealt with roads and bridges. Section five explained parish policies on barriers at the front of properties, while section six defined rules for boundary ditches between neighbors. Animals received the jury's attention in sections seven through ten, for items such as the abandoning of animals, animals on the roads, owners' liabilities for damages inflicted by livestock, and obligations to dispose of carcasses. In section eleven, jurors regulated taverns, cabarets, and billiard tables; then, ferries in section twelve, and "bourgeois [citizen] patrols" in section thirteen. 67

The stilted, official wording of the session minutes often makes it difficult to understand what the jury was requiring, but the unfolding of decision-making at the parish level can be seen through the minutes in a way that
is impossible in the compendium. Problems with high water, ineffective levees, and public discontent provoked the jury to take up difficult questions. Session minutes show them halting towards equity; to do the right thing by individuals charged with levee and road construction, yet to have "public works" done well, for the protection of all. The conscientious maintenance of such vital installations as levees and roads invoked an air of solemnity in jury proceedings. Reading the minutes, one is reminded of the stately wording of the official road jury oath from the Louisiana Legislative Acts of 1818:

I do solemnly swear that I will lay out the road now directed to be laid out . . . to the greatest ease and advantage of the inhabitants, and with as little prejudice to inclosures as may be, without favour or affection, malice or hatred, and to the best of my skill and knowledge, so help me God.  

Such oaths as this revive an awareness on our part of the physical emptiness the people inhabited, and of the importance of "impartiality" in the layout of levee lines. When their ancestors arrived on the scene, everything that was needed to domesticate this swamp environment remained to be done, except for whatever changes the Native Americans had effected. Yet, human settlement preceded the building of roads, levees, and bridges. In constructing these devices, many proprietors lost painstakingly cleared acreage when a road or levee ran through his fields. The placement of levees and roads could easily have been
accomplished with malice and partiality, if locators were so inclined. Hence the required oath.

In the session minutes, the St. John the Baptist police jury displays caution, solicitude, and a genuine searching for workable solutions. For example, in the meeting of July 11, 1814, Justice of the Peace Gabriel Fontenot moved for a revision of levee regulations approved July 12, 1813. He judged that the execution of the former provisions had been insufficient to accomplish the desired effects. First, Fontenot focused on the problem of compensation for work done on the levee of an inhabitant who could not finish repairs in time. The jury agreed that the parish judge could order inhabitants to work on the tardy proprietor's levee, in proportion to their slave forces, but only if they lived on the same side of the river. Second, the jury decided that the parish judge could take a jury of six inhabitants in each ward of the parish to assist him with levee inspections in that ward. Where six could not be gathered, he could use four landowners, or even two, if no more were available. Third, the jury reiterated that only the parish judge could allow landowners to open their levees, presumably for irrigation or milling purposes, and that he alone could say when such levees could be opened or closed. At some point, an open levee during high water became a hazard. Hazard reduction was the jury's "bread and butter."
In their efforts to protect the community at large, jurors sometimes had to lay down principles that worked a hardship on individuals or that infringed on what other regions of the country would have viewed as "personal rights." For instance, at a session on July 11, 1815, St. John the Baptist's police jurors declared that repair work on crevasses could not be abandoned without an order from a meeting of the neighboring inhabitants, presided over by the arrondissement's justice of the peace. Where no justice resided, a syndic had to consent. Violators would pay a fine of fifty to one hundred piastres and appear at the Parish Court. Simply put, quitters were not allowed to quit! Later that autumn, fears about high water generated three special meetings of the police jury. These centered around the parish judge's ability to farm out levee repair contracts when delays in completion were causing the community unease. Legally, all levee work had to be finished by December 1st. When a jury of inspection informed a proprietor of his duties, but he could not meet the deadline, the judge was authorized to offer a contract, either by public biddings or by "enterprise with discount," at the delinquent's expense. Nevertheless, the price agreed upon could not be in excess of the sum proposed by three different estimates. This provision somewhat protected a proprietor against exploitation or cronyism in the granting of public contracts.70
Some must not have believed the jury and judge would really saddle slow levee builders with a lien for repairs. The session of October 30, 1815, vowed that in cases of urgency and absolute necessity, contracts truly would be let out, at the delinquent landowner's expense, to the lowest legal bidder. Yet, it appears some levees did not even attract bids. For example, the session of November 20, 1815, less than two weeks from the deadline, announced that "beginning from this date" and in all future cases of urgent circumstance, the parish judge could grant extensions for the completion of the levees. The urgency had resulted from such items as the refusal of contractors to bid on the works--"the default of bidders at the first, second, and third cries to the bidders"--and the legitimate improbability of completing them within the specified time limit. The jury agreed that in some cases it was impossible to finish levees by December 1st. However, it still maintained that contractors who received extensions from the parish judge, and then found their incomplete levees overwhelmed by the river's rise, could not demand payment for partial completions. Disclaimers of this type at least saved the parish the expense of subsidizing those who were deliberately fraudulent or lazy.71

By custom and in law, the parish judge of St. John the Baptist reigned supreme in some executive matters, but subordinate officials enforced police regulations at the ward level. This localization of authority even progressed
and intensified over time. For example, the St. John session minutes of October 20, 1817, reveal that the parish judge was supposed to make an annual inspection of the levees before July 15th. This year, however, the jury had not convened until the levee building season was far spent, in spite of having been duly summoned at an earlier date. The lack of timely assistance from the police jury prevented the judge from executing some of his levee obligations. Thus, in its October 20th meeting, the jury decided to help the judge by having justices and jurors, in their respective arrondissements, to make the levee inspection reports and serve proceedings on the delinquents. The following year, the jury said, matters would revert to the former system. Nonetheless, records show that this is not what occurred. Instead, the jury relieved the judge of primary responsibility for levee inspection and delegated his powers to lower officials. Was this a conspiracy to subvert the parish judge's authority, or simply a matter of convenience?72

The St. John session of August 3, 1818, described justices of the peace and their associates, the syndics (using the traditional creole title), as being in charge of "all that concerns the execution of the regulations of the Police Jury." Having designated the house of Germaine Ayme on the middle left bank as the courthouse, the jury then proceeded to name six syndics, "adjoined to the Justices of the Peace." Hubert D'Arenbourg, Benjamin Becnel, and
Pierre Becnel, Jr., were named as syndics in the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd districts of the right bank, while Francois Olivier Forcelle, Jean Baptist Marchand, and Noel Wills were given charge of districts on the left bank. Also at this meeting, the jury decided that "starting from today" the levees, roads, and bridges in the parish would be supervised by justices of the peace "in their corresponding districts." At this point, immediate oversight of the levees went from a judge with parish-wide executive authority to six justices of the peace, or syndics, each with markedly local identifications. They were divided from each other not only by the river, but also by geographical neighborhoods on the same bank. Thus, fragmentation of supervision, rather than executive unity under a single judge or commandant, became a fixture of St. John's levee administration. A trend to decentralization had been set in motion which would be hard to reverse.

Admittedly, the office of parish judge, as originally conceived in Louisiana, had far too many duties to operate efficiently. Perhaps he could not make inspections as thoroughly as one ought; on the other hand, the idea of dividing the parish into six levee wards entailed dangers of another kind. Localities within the parish had varying interests in the matter of flood control. Most importantly, river people knew that in high water a crevasse on the east would save land on the west, and vice versa. Therefore, at especially perilous times, armed
patrols paced the levees to prevent vandalism from the opposite shore. Marcia Gaudet, in her folklore study of St. John the Baptist Parish, found that residents of each bank strongly distrusted those across the river. According to a humorist, natives on both sides claimed to be the favored of Jehovah, while those of the other shore were strange, wilful folks to be avoided.\textsuperscript{74}

In light of this distrust, it is no surprise that the St. John the Baptist police jury minutes of August 3, 1818 outlined new levee inspection procedures for the parish. Justices of the peace would give the parish judge copies of their "process verbals," or inspection reports, for deposit in the parish clerk's office. Now, the jury only asked the judge to make a general inspection at the time the levees had to be finished. If the judge found any levee repairs improperly completed or abandoned, at the terminal date, he ordered and enforced repairs as usual, but the routine and preliminary orders came from justices of the peace.\textsuperscript{75}

The compendium of St. John the Baptist police jury ordinances makes the end result of the session deliberations even more clear. It contained all decisions of the police jury arranged in topical sections. The third section, "On the Levees," described levee management at St. John in precise detail for the period around 1820. A close examination of the articles is well merited for the light it sheds on mundane levee operations at the lowest and most personal level of jurisdiction.
The first article specified that justices of the peace would be charged with direct supervision of the levees, roads, and bridges in their own arrondissements (wards). Article two required this justice and the two police jurors of each arrondissement to inspect levees, roads, and bridges each year before the 13th of July. After inspection, they had to compile written proceedings--the so-called "process verbals"--telling landowners exactly what to do to their levees, roads, or bridges, and in what order to approach the tasks. Proprietors had until December 1st to comply. The justice and jurors gave each landowner a signed, written copy of his inspection report. One copy of the process verbal went to the parish judge, who filed it with the parish clerk. This saving of an official copy was of the utmost importance. In cases where legal proceedings had to be instituted against a landowner for non-compliance, the parish had to have proof of what he had been ordered to do.\textsuperscript{76}

Articles three through ten of the Compendium's levee section dealt with subordinate officials, dates of inspections, and deadlines for contractors. According to regulations, St. John the Baptist's police jury was the designated appointer of syndics at its annual sessions. Syndics' terms lasted at least until the jury's next session, but could be continued beyond that point at the jury's discretion. While justices and syndics had to make annual inspections in the wards, the regulations invited
them to inspect the levees more often than that. The parish judge made at least one inspection annually to verify compliance with the justices' and jurors' demands. Article six empowered the parish judge to let contracts if he received information that a proprietor was unlikely to finish on time. If the damages from incompletion would cause large-scale flooding in the parish, the judge could grant levee contracts with a shorter term of completion, at a price higher than the lowest estimate. The proprietor would be bound to pay for the work. On the other hand, if the judge believed a delay in completion would not endanger the public, he could grant extensions to individual inhabitants beyond December 1st, which was the normal deadline and the customary last safe date of low water. Article nine allowed the judge to convey the same privilege to "awarded bidders" who were behind schedule. However, article eleven warned contractors who lingered beyond December 1st of the consequences of an extension. If either the swelling of the river, or the onset of low water, ruined the partial earth works, contractors could not recover their cost from the delinquent landowner or anyone else. Article ten stipulated that the parish judge could only award one portion of a levee line, if he also awarded all the others. This discouraged the awarding of easy contracts to chosen cronies. The embanking of the whole parish had to be simultaneously provided for.77
The last three articles of the St. John compendium dealt with routine maintenance, but point up interesting mechanical aspects of levee work which are worth noting. For example, article twelve told proprietors to anticipate crevasses. Even their slaves had to learn the signs of impending breaks. The twelfth article specified that when the river is high and makes one fear the breaking of the levees, landowners with exposed (endangered) levees were obliged to hold day and night a "good negro" on the levee, equipped with a spade, axe, bowl and other necessary utensils; as well as a heap of "piquets" (stakes), moss, and "fascines" (bundled sticks), to reinforce the sides of the embankments. These preparations would enable inhabitants to watch accurately, and with exactness, to anticipate all casualties. Lacking a more specific description of the methods and tools of crevasse fighting, one can only speculate on how the articles were used. Perhaps slaves carried dirt in the bowls in emergencies, in lieu of wheelbarrows. Probably, slaves would carry the bowl on their heads like a water vessel. The stakes, moss, and bundled sticks were used like revetments to fill small breaks and to matt eroding surfaces of the levee, thereby to guard the soil from the force of the current.  

Article thirteen dealt with drainage, an oft-neglected subject in early levee legislation. It said that all inhabitants of the parish whose lands drained into the same bayou had to furnish hands, in proportion to their ability,
to clean the bayou for better drainage. If a landowner did not provide laborers voluntarily, the justice of the peace of his arrondissement could fine him twenty dollars. The fine would compensate those who cooperated with the order for the extra work their people had in carrying it out. Article thirteen reveals that the police jury understood the relation between flood prevention and drainage. After all, much damage occurred even when front levees held, because backswamps rose over cultivated fields. Unless a proprietor kept his drainage system in order, he courted a private disaster which might become a general one.  

The provisions enumerated above showed wisdom, foresight, and the accumulated experience of generations of alluvial life. These measures could not have been figured out in a short time or without mistakes. Clearly, the leaders of St. John the Baptist Parish learned the craft of levee building, not through formal schooling, but through trial and error. They learned what worked, what had not, and how best to goad their dilatory neighbors and cousins into action without destroying the amity that was necessary in maintaining a sense of community.

What experience could not teach them, however, was how to make their levees benefit the whole Lower Mississippi Valley. This type of planning required a freedom from local interests and a willingness to prioritize among the reclamation projects of various regions. A parish police jury, no matter how diligent and enlightened, could hardly
sacrifice the interests of its own constituents for those of another parish. Nevertheless, given their limited authority and lack of training in hydraulic engineering, it is admirable that the judges, jurors, syndics, justices of the peace, landowners, and slaves of the Lower Mississippi performed as well as they did in a difficult time of political change and economic transformation. Somehow, they all struggled toward the common good of the levee-building community and crafted a system that worked, within reason, for their own localities, without the need for outside funds. By any reasonable standard, they were successful. But would they stay dry?

ENDNOTES


2 John Hebron Moore, The Emergence of the Cotton Kingdom in the Old Southwest: Mississippi, 1770-1860 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 4-5; Clark, 188-92; James Pitot, Observations on the Colony of Louisiana from 1796 to 1802, trans. Henry C. Pitot (Baton

3 James E. McClellan, III, Colonialism and Science: Saint Domingue in the Old Regime (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 15, 64, 67.


5 James, 51-52; Robin, 200-201.

6 Robin, 200; Blume, 136; Pitot, 77, 101, 114, 116-23.


10 Blume, 101; Le Gardeur, 7, 13.


13 Ibid.

14 Morse, entry "Louisiana."

15 Robin, 109-110; Morse, entry "Louisiana;" Cramer, 338-39: see also, Darby, 162. The same type of territorial boosterism can be seen in Amos Stoddard, *Sketches, Historical and Descriptive, of Louisiana* (Philadelphia: Mathew Carey, 1812; reprint, Baton Rouge: Claitor's Publishing Division, 1974).

16 Alexander Gordon, Journal, December 16 & 17, 1806, manuscript in Walworth (Douglas, and Family) Papers, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University. Referred to hereafter as LSU.

17 Whittington, 475-77, 491; Stoddard, 165.


20 Pitot, 131-32. Darby's Geographical Description of Louisiana is critical of levees, due to his horror of crevasses. See esp. Darby, Appendix: "Note to Page 128."

21 William C. C. Claiborne, to Manuel Andrey, St. John the Baptist Parish, April 16, 1805, in Letter Book of William C. C. Claiborne, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, LSU.


23 Darby, 242-61.

24 Pitot, 110-11; Darby, 235, 245.

25 Darby, 242-44.

26 Ibid., 245. See also, Jabez Heustis, Physical Observations and Medical Tracts and Researches on the Topography and Diseases of Louisiana (New York: T. and J. Swords, 1817).

27 Darby, 260. Louisiana had not been in the Union long, and the Battle of New Orleans focused attention upon it. Businessmen wondered about the new region and needed data on its resources. Darby supplied it, and to insure a good reception for the book, the publisher incorporated a list of important subscribers. They included political and military leaders: A. J. Dallas, President Madison's Secretary of the Treasury; Albert Gallatin, President Jefferson's Secretary of the Treasury; Major Gen. Winfield Scott; Gen. Andrew Jackson; Gen. Edmund Pendleton Gaines; Gen. William Carroll; Gen. John Coffee; O. Rich, the U.S. Consul to Spain; Adj. Gen. Robert Butler; Commodore Daniel J. Patterson; Louisiana's Gov. William C. C. Claiborne; Louisiana's Secretary of State Barthelmy Macarty; the jurist Edward Livingston; and Louisiana's Congressman Thomas B. Robertson. Merchants and planters also bought it. The largest cadre of subscribers lived in Philadelphia, a city with sizeable New Orleans business interests. Philadelphia's Athenaeum bought a copy, and the publisher listed forty eight private buyers in the city, plus four in Pittsburgh, eight in nearby Washington County, and one each in Carlisle, Harrisburg, Lancaster County, and Chester County. Three lived in New York City, three in Cincinnati, and three in Lexington, Kentucky; with one each in Richmond, Baltimore, and Washington, D.C. Louisianians who bought Darby's book mostly lived in New Orleans and in alluvial planting districts. Some were extremely influential, including: Shepherd Brown, Marius Pons Bringier, Michel
Doradou Bringier, Beverly Chew, Martin Duralde, Robin Delogny, Martin Gordon, Bonneval H. Latrobe, Moses Liddel, Louis Labranche, James Mather, George W. Morgan, John McDonogh, Andrew Milne, Vincent Nolte, Samuel Packwood, Alexander Porter, Julien Poydras, Richard Relf, James Sterrett, Fulwar Skipwith, A. D. Tureaud, Maunsell White, and Levin Wailes. John McDonogh, the noted miser and land developer who left a fortune to endow New Orleans schools, is known to have presented Darby's views on flood control to the Louisiana legislature. A letter from him appeared in the *Louisiana Gazette and Mercantile Advertiser*, May 17, 1816, advocating flood prevention measures which were much influenced by Darby's opinions, particularly in regard to an outlet at Bonnet Carre.

28 Ibid., 257-59; Harriet Martineau, *Retrospect of Western Travel* (Cincinnati: U. P. James, 1838), II, 128.


33 Darby listed revenue per hand (on a fifty-effective-workmen farm) as follows: sugar, $240; cotton, $180; indigo, $140; tobacco, $107; and rice, $84. Darby, 162.

Ibid., sections 1 and 2.

Ibid., sections 3 and 4; "An act supplementary to and amending an act entitled 'An act relative to roads, levees and to the police of cattle, and for other purposes,'" Acts Passed at the Second Session of the Third Legislature of the Territory of Orleans (New Orleans: Thierry, 1811), Chapter 36.

"An act relative to roads, levees, and the police of cattle," (1807), sections 3 and 4.


Resolutions requesting the governor to represent to the president of the United States, the serious evils which are experienced for the want of levees and roads on public lands," Acts Passed at the Second Session of the First Legislature of the Territory of Orleans (1807), 200-202.

A. A. Humphreys and H. L. Abbot, Report upon the Physics and Hydraulics of the Mississippi River; upon the Protection of the Alluvial Region against Overflow; and upon the Deepening of the Mouths, Professional Papers of the Corps of Topographical Engineers, United States Army, No. 4 (1861; reprint, Washington: Government Printing Office, 1876), 169.


Robin (compiled from Spanish censuses), 97-99; Louisiana Gazette and New Orleans Daily Advertiser, April 9, 1811, and April 20, 1811; Jedidiah Morse, The American Gazetteer, Exhibiting a Full Account of the Civil Divisions, Rivers, Harbors, Indian Tribes, &c. of the American Continent, also of the West-India and other

44 Louisiana Gazette and Daily Advertiser, April 11, 1811.

45 Table compiled by the author from the parish returns, Third Census of the United States, 1810, Territory of Orleans.

46 Statistics derived by the author from study of parish returns, Third Census of the United States, 1810, Territory of Orleans.

47 Moniteur de la Louisiane, January 14, 1804; Richard Butler, "Copy of my return [of slaves owned within the Territory on August 1, 1805] made to the treasurer of the German Coast County, Parish of St. Charles for 1805," and [William Thompson]. Baltimore, to Richard Butler, First German Coast, April 28, 1808, Butler (Richard) Papers, LSU.

48 Louisiana Gazette and New Orleans Daily Advertiser, December 29, 1810. The Orleans Parish census of 1810 shows P. Grymes with thirty-three slaves.


50 Bernhard, 65, 69; Villere, 27-33. For an engraving of "Conseil" with gallery curtains, see Benson T. Lossing, The Pictorial Field-Book of the War of 1812 (New York, 1869), 1029.

51 Louisiana Gazette and New Orleans Daily Advertiser, June 1, 1811.

52 Ibid., April 9, 1811.

53 John W. Monette, "The Mississippi Floods," Mississippi Historical Society Publications 7 (1903): 443; Humphreys and Abbot, 170; Darby, 128; Henry Marie Brackenridge, Views of Louisiana (Pittsburgh: Cramer, Spear and Eichbaum, 1814), 178; [Thomas?] Butler, Pittsburgh, to Julien Poydras, Pointe Coupee, April 3, 1811, Butler (Thomas, and Family) Papers, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, LSU; Louisiana Gazette and New Orleans Daily Advertiser, May 20, 1811, and June 3, 1811;
Thomas Butler, St. Francisville, to Capt. Richard Butler, Natchez, June 14, 1811, Butler (Richard) Papers, LSU.

54 "An act to explain certain acts relative to roads and levees," Acts Passed at the First Session of the Third Legislature of the State of Louisiana (New Orleans: J. C. De St. Romes, 1817), 80.

55 [?], Hazard Farm, Pointe Coupee, to Thomas Butler, Pinckneyville, Mississippi Territory, November 1, 1811, Butler (Thomas) Papers, LSU.

56 Ibid.

57 Brackenridge, 179.

58 "An act supplementary to and amending an act entitled, 'An act relative to roads, levees and to the police of cattle, and for other purposes,' Acts Passed at the Second Session of the Third Legislature of the Territory of Orleans (1811). Significantly, in the low water year of 1812, the legislature produced no acts concerning levees.

59 Brackenridge, 178; Darby, 129-30.


61 Monette, 443; Humphreys and Abbot, 170.

62 Cramer, 200. Point Chicot was also called Ilelechecko.


65 "An Act further defining the organization, authority and functions of police juries," (1813).

et comparer les reglements de police, de les refondre et
reunir en un seul, en y ajoutans les amendements qui yont
ete faits et suprimant les articles rappelle, a Arrete, et
arrete ce qui suit, Works Progress Administration
Transcripts, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley
Collection, LSU. Hereafter, referred to as Session
Minutes, St. John the Baptist Parish, La.; and Compendium
of Parish Laws, St. John the Baptist Parish, La.

67 Ibid. The 1820 census of St. John the Baptist
Parish provides information about the men chosen to recast
the police jury's decisions into a single document.
Guiramond, a mature man with a small family, owned a slave
woman for domestic help. One male in the household engaged
in agriculture. If Guiramond was educated and worked
primarily as a parish official, this would explain his
inclusion on the committee. Ursin Perret was younger, with
numerous children. He owned seventy five slaves and his
household contained six free colored persons. He was the
wealthiest male planter in the parish at that time. His
presence placed the influence of the large planters behind
the police jury's decisions. In 1820, Perret employed
fifty seven persons in agriculture-the fourth largest
establishment in the parish, after those of the Widow
Deslondes, the Widow Becnel, and the Widow Marmilion. In
company with the Landrauxs, Haydels, Boudusquies,
Vinprennes, Jacobs, and Webres, these were the ranking
gentry of the parish. Hubert Darensbourg was an older man
with sizeable family and only nine slaves. He employed six
persons in agriculture. Although lacking in wealth
relative to the large planters, Darensbourg was descended
from the Charles Darensbourg who led the original
settlement to the German Coast. This heritage, plus his
age and experience, gave him influence beyond his material
means. See Helmut Blume, The German Coast During the
Colonial Era for an account of Charles Darensbourg.

68 "An act to provide further and more effectually for
the police of the public roads in this state," Acts Passed
at the Second Session of the Third Legislature of the State
of Louisiana (New Orleans: J. C. De St. Romes, 1818), 54.

69 Session Minutes, St. John the Baptist Parish, La.,
July 11, 1814.

70 Ibid., July 11, 1815, and October 5, 1815.

71 Ibid., October 30, 1815, and November 20, 1815.

72 Ibid., October 20, 1817.

73 Ibid., August 3, 1818. Sketchy biographical
profiles of these syndics can be drawn from the 1820 census
of St. John the Baptist Parish. Hubert Darensbourg was
described in footnote 71. The Becnels do not appear in the 1820 census, but the plantation of Widow Becnel & son[s] was the second largest establishment in the parish. They owned ninety slaves and employed seventy three persons in agriculture. The left bank syndics were poorer. On that side of the river, C. Francois Olivier Forcelles was an older man with thirty five slaves; thirty two persons in his household worked in agriculture. Jean Baptiste Marchand, a younger man, had four children and nine slaves, with eight persons in agriculture. Noel Wills seems to have been included to represent the smallest proprietors. He owned no slaves, was a young family man, and did his own farming (and levee upkeep). Germaine Aime owned a store, which is probably why his house was designated as the courthouse--besides the church, it was rare to find a public meeting spot in such completely rural parishes.

74 Calhoun, 88-89; Marcia G. Gaudet, Tales from the Levee: The Folklore of St. John the Baptist Parish (Lafayette: Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1984), 26.

75 Session minutes, St. John the Baptist Parish, La., August 3, 1818.

76 Compendium of Parish Laws, St. John the Baptist Parish, La., Section Three, "On the Levees," articles 1 & 2. A large levee reform bill passed the state legislature in 1816. It gave general authority for some police regulations in the St. John the Baptist Parish Compendium, but the jury did not slavishly incorporate provisions of state laws into its parish code. Local governments had a degree of independence within parameters set by the state. After all, regulations in the Compendium were still in force around 1819-1820, yet the levee reform bill was repealed in 1817. See "An Act concerning the levees and roads on the banks of the Mississippi and for other purposes," Acts Passed at the Second Session of the Second Legislature of the State of Louisiana (New Orleans: Peter K. Wagner, 1816), 106-31; and, "An act to repeal the act entitled, 'an act concerning the levees and roads on the banks of the Mississippi, and for other purposes," Acts Passed at the First Session of the Third Legislature of the State of Louisiana (New Orleans: J. C. De St. Romes, 1817), 78.

77 Compendium of Parish Laws, St. John the Baptist Parish, La., Section Three, articles 3-10.

78 Ibid., article 12.

79 Ibid., article 13.
HOLDING BACK THE WATERS: LAND DEVELOPMENT AND THE ORIGINS OF LEVEES ON THE MISSISSIPPI, 1720-1845

VOLUME II

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in
The Department of History

by

Jeffrey Alan Owens
B.F.A., North Texas State University, 1983
M.A., The University of Texas at Tyler, 1990
May, 1999
CHAPTER FOUR:

LEVEES AS PHYSICAL OBJECTS AND THE GENESIS OF "AMERICAN" LEVEE-BUILDING COMMUNITIES, PARTICULARLY FLOOD CONTROL IN CONCORDIA PARISH PRIOR TO 1820

Citizens of the United States moved westward in droves in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The Ohio Valley and Gulf Plains attracted many settlers, and the Louisiana Purchase doubled the nation's geographic extent. Most people, even on the eastern seaboard, saw the value of the Mississippi as a trade route. However, the physical resources of Louisiana were almost unknown among the mass of the population. Subsistence farmers and small cash-crop producers who readily flocked to new homes in Tennessee or Ohio looked at Louisiana as an outlandish destination. Even the flatboatmen who passed through on their way to New Orleans seldom viewed the territory as a potential home. In neighborhoods along the river, native creoles spoke unintelligible languages, ate peculiar food, worshiped in Catholic churches, and lived in densely settled linear communities rather than cabins in the pines. For most Americans, the deliberate choice of a residence in the Parish of Pointe Coupee or St. John the Baptist would be as unlikely as the prospect of joining a moon launch.

Nevertheless, Jackson's victory at the Battle of New Orleans and the fortunes being made by Louisiana's alluvial
Leading Concordia Planters of 1850

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FIGURE 4.1

CONCORDIA PARISH IN 1845, EXTRACTED FROM JOHN LA TOURETTE’S REFERENCE MAP OF THE STATE OF LOUISIANA (NEW ORLEANS, 1845) WITH ITS LEADING PLANTERS OF 1850 AND THEIR SLAVEHOLDINGS
planters after the War of 1812 did focus national attention on the Lower Mississippi. A few adventurous Americans with big bankrolls or credit lines bought plantations in creole neighborhoods, but these transactions were expensive and relatively infrequent. Too little improved land remained open at affordable prices for a mass migration of planters to take place. However, north of the mouth of Red River, many miles of unimproved riverfront beckoned to would-be swamp planters. Regions of fertile land in what are now northeast Louisiana, northwest Mississippi, and eastern Arkansas overflowed with great regularity, but would grow cotton if overflows could be controlled. Many people who had never seen the Mississippi read about crop yields and planters' incomes and wondered if they ought to invest there for themselves. But prospective settlers needed to know if their labor and financial resources were adequate to meet the requirements of flood control. English-speaking Americans wondered, "What are these levees that fence the riverfront? What do they consist of?" To satisfy their curiosity, writers of travel journals and gazetteers described levees as they actually existed in long-settled Creole/Acadian levee-building communities. They obtained their knowledge not from a study of police jury regulations or acts of the legislature, but by simple observation.

One such author, Henry Marie Brackenridge, included "Levees" as a topic heading in his *Views of Louisiana,*
published in 1814. So did Samuel Brown, in the "Louisiana" entry of his Western Gazetteer: or Emigrant's Directory of 1817. Both writers said that the expense of levee building varied with the topography and the nature of the current at each site. According to Brackenridge, a good levee could be built in most locations for $400 a mile, or, by Brown's estimate, for $500 to $1,000 a mile. Levees in river bends would cost more, perhaps several thousand dollars per mile, because strong currents and lower elevations at these places called for more massive earthworks. On point lands, within the riverbends, the ground was high and the current, weak. Therefore, builders of point levees could make do with lower, less expensive embankments, except that the shallowness and great width of the tracts compelled them to extend levees across a wider front. In either case, Brown assured his readers, the levee was "but a trifling work," relative to the protection it afforded.¹

Brackenridge reported that the typical Louisiana levee stood four to six feet high, with a base of six to nine feet, and a crown wide enough for a footpath. Brown described the average levee as five feet high, with a base of twelve feet, and footpath crown. The greater cost and mass of the levees in Brown's account probably reflects the impact of floods in 1815 and 1816, which led to more bulky construction. In neighborhoods where the levee doubled as a road, proprietors had additional expenses. Road levees had wider crowns and contained more earth, plus the upkeep
was increased by abuse from travelers. For example, on a steamboat trip from Baton Rouge to New Orleans, John James Audubon saw people riding horses "at full speed" on top of the levee. 

The journal of Alexander Gordon (1806) gives dimensions for a levee with a small roadway above Fort Plaquemine. It stood five to six feet high, with a base of ten to twelve feet, which hardly seems adequate, but this was a poor and thinly settled part of the lower Delta. In a richer, more heavily traveled district, Christian Schultz (1808) noted that the east bank levee of Orleans Parish made "an excellent road about twenty feet wide." With a base in proportion to the crown, this would have been considerably larger than the average levee. In some areas of Louisiana, the road ran on top of the levee for part of the way and in other places, beside it. In 1826, Duke Bernhard of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach traveled on the west bank in Orleans Parish. The road slipped up and off the embankment, according to the elevation of the land.

Unlike the routine plantation levees of rural proprietors, the New Orleans levee occupied a class by itself. As a practical measure, the city corporation built and maintained the municipal levee out of public funds. Therefore, its costs were distributed among those who received flood protection and among those who used the levee commercially. An observer in 1819 said that the New Orleans levee measured about fifty feet thick, sloping gradually to a
banquet, or sidewalk. Much larger than necessary for mere flood control, the New Orleans levee also served as a dock and promenade. As a bazaar peopled from around the world, the levee was New Orleans' most popular gathering place.4

Donald Macdonald, a Scottish tourist, attributed the lack of wharves at New Orleans to the extreme depth of the river. Duke Bernhard, a German nobleman, remarked that docks could not be fixed in place, because the river and its driftwood "would sweep them away." Vessels tied directly to the levee. Macdonald saw at least twelve steamboats docked there at all times on a visit in 1826, and he heard a steady booming of guns to inform businessmen of arrivals and departures. Goods like cotton, sugar, rice, and tobacco sat about the levee in crates. Roustabouts loaded and unloaded them, and draymen trundled them to warehouses. Benjamin Latrobe, a civil engineer, noticed in 1819 that mussel shells and small stones covered the New Orleans levee like the pavement of a terrace. This hard skin protected the earthwork from the wear of traffic. Also, workers stuck closely spaced fans of palmetto into the river face of the levee, as a revetment to shield it from water abrasion. Latrobe said water commonly rose against the New Orleans levee four feet high, to within a foot of the crown. Since the baseline of houses only two hundred feet away stood four feet below the river's crest, it is obvious that without the levee, four feet of water would have stood in the houses. As the elevation declined
still further away from the river, the back neighborhoods would have been completely submerged.5

On the New Orleans levee, a double row of vendors cried their wares as far as the eye could see. Peddlers either walked, occupied stalls, had tables under canvas awnings, or sold from cloth and palmetto pallets. Slaves and free folk, truck farmers and vendors all operated on the levee, paying rent to the city. According to municipal records, the corporation renewed the levee's fabric, and that of the adjacent city market (the French Market), in 1808 to accommodate increasing business. The New Orleans levee also served a critical social role. Christian Schultz observed in 1808 that "the Levee after sunset is crowded with company." People confined all day in un-air-conditioned houses "seldom miss this favourable opportunity of breathing a little fresh air." After dark, however, the New Orleans levee could be frightening, like the wharf of any major port. German businessman J. G. Flugel crossed the levee with trepidation at 10 P.M. in 1817, knowing that assaults and murders occurred there with regularity. The levee's bad name endured for years. Henry Morton Stanley, later famous for finding Dr. Livingston in Africa, landed as a young stowaway at New Orleans in 1857. In his memoir, Stanley depicted the levee in lurid terms, citing its "reputation for sling-shots, doctored liquor, shang hai-ing, and wharf-ratting, which made it a dubious place."6
The care and police of the New Orleans levee lay with the City Council and Mayor, who made many regulatory ordinances. For example, in the summer of 1808, the Council expressed concern about wear to the embankment caused by flatboats being left tied to it in great numbers. The Council thought of designating certain places on the river for the dismantling of flatboats, to reduce crowding and abrasion. In December of 1808, the Council deplored another source of damage, namely the use of *ponts volans* or, "flying bridges," in unloading ships. These portable catwalks pounded the levee, both in the initial impact of throwing the bridge and in their rocking motion while freight was unloaded. In 1812, it is recorded that the Council paid to repair hurricane damage to the levee, and it routinely let contracts for levee cleaning, along with contracts for cleaning the streets. The corporation even collected a levee tax as a wharf-usage fee. This provided a substantial part of the city's revenue. In 1819 alone, receipts from the levee tax amounted to well over $12,000.7

While the bulk and mass of the New Orleans levee made it an impressive structure by Mississippi River standards, visitors who looked at plantation levees often marveled at the flimsiness of the works. Thomas Nuttall, an English botanist who studied plants and birds in Arkansas Territory in 1819, wrote brief comments about Louisiana's levees in 1820. He commented favorably on their utility. They reclaimed incomparably rich fields and protected from
inundation "an almost uninterrupted line of opulent settlements," from Baton Rouge to fifty miles below New Orleans, as well as less-developed areas from Fort Adams, Mississippi, almost to Fort Plaquemine, in the lower Delta. Yet, according to Nuttall, the embankments were "thrown up with about the same labour as that which is bestowed [in England] upon a common ditched fence." Brackenridge described the majority of the levees as "rude and trifling" in their construction. He said a person who imagined a resemblance between Mississippi River levees and the dikes of Holland would be much disappointed, because there was no comparison in scale or quality. In his opinion, the absence of coordinated funding and planning for levees in Louisiana suggested that its people lacked public spirit. However, for people who built the levees, comparisons to dikes beside the North Sea were not terribly relevant. Mississippi River levees had to function in their own environment, in consonance with its own special conditions --one of which was that farmers' households built their own works without outside assistance. The structures had to be affordable and within their means.®

On the ground, levee lines on the Mississippi formed irregular, serpentine shapes to match "the sinuosities" of the waterway. As the river meandered, the levee line changed direction alongside it. Most levees in the 1810s stood thirty to forty yards from the natural banks. Keeping pace with the river's edge, the levee layout
shifted or curved as often as every sixty to ninety feet. Bear in mind that rural levees were seldom over four or five feet high. Being too light and insubstantial to hold the Mississippi in a set channel, levees had to "yield to its caprices." As cavings and accretions altered the river's course, proprietors rearranged their levees accordingly. But it was unpleasant to sacrifice improved land in levee setbacks. Left to themselves, planters would lay out their levees in convoluted patterns, as near the bank as possible, to save acreage from overflow. Improvements such as fences, cleared fields, and ditches, if thrown outside the levee, would be swept away in the spring rise. Labor spent in reclaiming land would go for nothing, if levees moved behind it. Therefore, a light, moveable levee line, close to the banks, served the landowners' purposes. On the other hand, responsible public officials had to act in the best interests of the parish, and they could not countenance a levee left too near the river. A caving bank might carry such a levee away and flood the whole neighborhood. The same result would occur if the river smashed a badly located, "exposed" levee in high water.9

Somehow, individual and public interests had to be satisfied simultaneously. As a compromise effort to reconcile the parish government and private interests, landowners sometimes constructed a new levee further back, as parish officials directed, but also retained the original levee nearer the river. Double levees provided at
least temporary protection for improved acreage which would otherwise be lost, and they reduced the resentments that landowners felt for local officials who "condemned" their land in levee setbacks. Double levees gave planters a few more growing seasons. By the time the land actually tumbled, men would know that the river, not the police jury, had dispossessed them. Brackenridge and Brown said the riverfront featured many double levees in the mid 1810s. Their use is one example of the way that levee-building communities used tact and flexibility in the performance of public works to reconcile citizens to the demands of the swamp environment.\textsuperscript{10}

Accounts of the physical structure of levees in the late 1810s also emphasized the importance of ditching systems, as an auxiliary to the levee. Although water seldom stood more than two to three feet against a rural levee, it seeped, or "wept," through the porous embankment and puddled behind the levee in great quantities. Left there, it would undermine the levee or cause it to crumble. Trampling livestock would churn it to mire, and when emergency repairs had to be made, the muck hindered the workmen. To offset these bad effects, proprietors made a seep ditch, parallel to the levee on the swamp side, to collect seep water in one place. Lateral ditches, every half mile or so, then drained the seepage at ninety degree angles across the fields to the backswamp. Duke Bernhard remarked on ditches of this sort in his travels across
three sugar plantations in Orleans Parish. The ditches led to Lake Barataria and were used, not only for drainage, but also as private canals for hauling wood from the swamps. Ditching required much of a planter's time in alluvial regions—an onerous and ongoing task. Where the River Road intersected lateral ditches, landowners supplied bridges. 11

Levee and drainage techniques of the 1810s benefited from the abundance of cypress on the Lower Mississippi. Its durability and resistance to rot made it the ideal material for multi-purpose devices with much water contact. Cypress sluices for irrigation carried water down the backside of the levee in chutes. Apparently, sluices were portable and could be dismantled at dangerously high stages of water. On the levee's crown, they were bridged over. Brown and Brackenridge also described lateral field ditches covered, "like the sewers of a city," with cypress planks. Planters sometimes put cypress walls inside levees, at ninety degree angles to the ground, to block the tunnelings of animals. Without such barriers, the muskrats, crawfish, and yelping, eel-like murena sirens ("swamp puppies") might dig through the levee. Burrowing animals were especially rife in levees used as rice dams. After 1812, steamboats intensified the problem of wave wash. When the river was full, waves from paddle-wheels caused water to slosh and run down the levee's backside, which greatly weakened its cohesion. Levee makers sometimes even sheathed earthworks
in cypress, like the siding on clapboard houses, or used palmetto mats, to defeat abrasions.¹²

A coating of grass typically gave further protection to levees. Nevertheless, planters exercised constant vigilance to keep worn places repaired. For instance, in April of 1825, a Monsieur Lavasseur, General Lafayette's secretary, witnessed sodding and revetment as he passed upriver on the steamer Natchez, during Lafayette's American tour. From the boat, Lavasseur frequently observed slaves doing levee maintenance. Proprietors had their gangs "working pickets and masses of interwoven brush, poles, and etc., to protect the river bank against erosion by current and wave." His description calls to mind the police jury ordinances of St. John the Baptist Parish, in which trusted slaves had to be posted to watch in high water with a ready supply of piquets, moss, and fascines, spades, axes, and bowls, to make repairs. In Lavasseur's account, it is unclear whether the slaves were reinforcing the levee or the bank itself. In either case, the use of these items foreshadowed the revetment methods of the Army Corps of Engineers in the latter nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In that era, government levee builders drove stakes into levees and banks at exposed locations and affixed lattice-like panels of willow branches to protect against wear.¹³

Other travelers' accounts provide further glimpses of levee maintenance and the equipment used. Latrobe, in the vicinity of St. Bernard Parish, "saw an overseer directing
the repair of the levee," on January 9, 1819, "with a long whip in his hand." Whips symbolized authority, but also discipline. Naturally, whites supervised the slaves, and levee tasks sometimes furnished a planter with punishments for those who had been rebellious or unruly. For example, in February of 1817, J. G. Flugel saw a black man on the River Road at Pointe Coupee. The slave was "wheeling dirt to renew a ditch along the levee." He belonged to a Monsieur Pierre who had him in "an iron with three hooks around his neck, working in the extreme cold weather." The slave denied he was being punished, but Flugel decided he had probably run away. Flugel's description indicates that the slave was using a wheelbarrow. Louisiana's state levee law of 1816 ordered masters to furnish slaves on levee duty with "hoes, spades, axes, and hand barrows." Records in St. John the Baptist Parish spoke of bowls rather than barrows for carrying earth, but St. John the Baptist was conservative and relatively poor. At any rate, alluvial planters and overseers kept tools in readiness and handed them out for levee work. For example, Capt. Richard Butler, having recently married an alluvial heiress, bought manufactured goods of this type in Pittsburgh on their honeymoon in 1802. Receipts show that he purchased two wheelbarrows, twelve falling axes, twelve hand hatchets, and a broad axe--common clearing and hauling tools. Butler carried the implements, and other purchases, downriver to his Louisiana plantation. C. C. Robin told of "light plows
... ordinary spades, [and] flat wide picks of medium size." These were kept in storage ready for use on every riverfront plantation. Spades and shovels in storerooms at the Villere plantation equipped the American militiamen who served at Chalmette in January of 1815. With them, American troops heaped a levee-like embankment at the side of a lateral drainage ditch, fired at the British across the empty sugar fields, and won the Battle of New Orleans. Villere owned a large stock of spades and shovels because his slaves used them to mend the levees and ditches.14

Planters occasionally hired their levee maintenance from other whites. Records indicate that landowners could arrange these matters through factors or local merchants. A receipt from the Butler papers shows William Kenner and Co. of New Orleans paying $28 to a man named Dupre, in September of 1816, for mending their client's levee. Dupre charged $30, but the firm withheld $2 for reasons not specified. Levee expenditures also appear in an account book kept by a small Louisiana merchant named James Johns. In April of 1823, Johns charged John DuMon $4 for "filling up holes in his Levy." The following month, Johns submitted a bill for $8 for "Leveeing on his Levey."

Afterwards, Johns continued to supply levee services for DuMon, as well as other goods. For instance, in July of 1823, Johns sold DuMon twenty one barrels of corn at a dollar each, charged him $3.50 to haul wood, furnished him with posts in May of 1824 at $7 per hundred, and undertook
more levee repairs the next winter. On January 12, 1825, Johns provided "6 Hands Makeing Levy" for $6, and on the 14th he billed DuMon $2 for "Makeing Levy & Diching."

Other accounts in the records show Johns selling clothes and provisions, and making money on corn grinding, coal drayage, and shirt making. Obviously no "professional" levee builder, Johns could provide this and other services and put the expense on a customer's tab.15

Of course, the failure to maintain levees had legal repercussions under the American regime, just as it had under the French and Spanish. Section four of the territorial "Act Relative to Roads, Levees, and the Police of Cattle" (1807) told parish judges to inspect levees, fix deadlines, and order works at the expense of delinquent landowners. Judges could contract levee work by the job, or requisition slaves by paying one dollar per day for each slave's labor. The debt incurred would bind a proprietor, "even by seizure and sale of his property." Evidence from newspapers shows the process at work. For example, the New Orleans Courier of May 4, 1812, carried a typical notice from the sheriff of Ascension Parish. He stated that the parish had ordered levee work to be done for several non-resident landowners. "Having wrote" them requesting payment "and having received no answers," the delinquents hereby received notice to pay for the work by May 19th. Otherwise, the sheriff said, "I shall expose the lands" for sale at an auction to be held at the courthouse in
Donaldsonville on May 19th, "at 12 o'clock noon precisely."
He cited the Act of April 6, 1807, as authority for his actions. Several landowners received similar attentions in Concordia Parish in 1814.16

Such was the physical appearance and maintenance methods of the Louisiana levees. When American planters dared to become inhabitants of the Creole/Acadian parishes and bought leveed land, they joined a continuum where everyone knew the routine. Experienced local officials ordered work to be done on a strict schedule, and both citizens and slaves were familiar with the accustomed tasks as a matter of tradition. But what about planters and slaves from the United States who stepped across the Mississippi into vacant swamps north of Red River? Moving there did not automatically make them into full-fledged members of a levee-building community. What would it take to train and shape them so that this new task, which challenged habits of independence, became second nature? In other words, how did a collection of self-seeking, avaricious American frontiersmen become transformed into a new levee-building community?

For the student of levees as social history, the parish of Concordia holds a particular interest, because it shows Americans building levees on their own terms, with no entrenched system of colonial flood control already in place. In Concordia, one can see the steps by which a new, "American" levee-building community emerged.
At various times, the region called Concordia occupied the Mississippi River bottoms of nearly all of northeastern Louisiana. As originally created by the Legislative Council of Orleans Territory, in 1804, Concordia began at the mouth of Red River and continued north, to an indefinite and uninhabited terminus. In 1809, the Territorial Legislature put the upper limit of the "county" at a point opposite Walnut Hills (Vicksburg). A shift in 1811 moved the northern boundary to the Arkansas line, with parish divisions within the county. In 1814, after statehood, Concordia Parish was defined as the region from the mouth of Red River to Milliken's Bend. As such, the area contained a huge riverfront, many seasonally navigable internal waterways, and vast tracts of periodically overflowed swamps. The soil was low, flat, forested, and completely alluvial, of great fertility.\footnote{17}

In this area, levees and land development went hand in hand. With flood control, planters were able to protect new improvements, and in the first six decades of the nineteenth century, they turned Concordia into a leading duchy of the Cotton Kingdom. As settlement increased in the 1820s and 1830s, it became unwieldy as a political unit. The legislature struck off Carroll Parish in 1832, Madison Parish in 1838, and Tensas Parish in 1843. In the latter year, Concordia assumed its present shape.\footnote{18}

Essentially, to speak of levees in Concordia Parish prior to 1820 is to speak of the whole set of embankments
on the Mississippi which had been built (at that time) by Americans for their own use. The levees downriver originated as artifacts from an age of monarchy, but in Concordia, American settlers had a blank slate. They could build levees or not as they chose. No levees existed in Concordia prior to the Louisiana Purchase, and land laws from the American legal tradition did not require settlers to build them. While levee construction was an ironclad requirement in Lower Louisiana, in Concordia it was (at first) merely an option. Therefore, Concordia is typical of the Mississippi Valley of the Americans--those flood-plain developers who did not inhabit the "Coasts" of the Creoles, Germans, and Acadians. Concordia's importance, therefore, as a developer of American levees and levee laws, is extreme. "As mighty oaks from small acorns grow," so the history of Concordia's levees from 1800 to 1820 shows how a new community, unschooled in colonial traditions, established precedents for dealing with flooding through private and cooperative efforts. Its response to environmental crisis reveals the creation of a new mentality, one that accepted coercion and regimentation as necessary and good, but one which also submitted to the restrictions voluntarily, as a community, out of its own perceptions of necessity and self-interest, not in obedience to a royal command.

Scarcely any of Concordia's settlers came from the Creole/Acadian region of Louisiana below Red River. They
arrived from English-speaking states, where rivers, more or less, stayed in their channels. While some pioneers must have seen levees during trips to New Orleans, the new inhabitants lacked extensive first-hand knowledge of the Mississippi's habits and had little idea of the magnitude of Concordia's flood problem. Actually, the obstacles to settlement were immense. Around 1815, the geographer William Darby explained Concordia's situation in alarming terms. "In all floods, since 1800," he said, "this part of Louisiana has been more injured than any other near the banks of the Mississippi." South of Concordia, outlets such as the Atchafalaya River and Bayou Lafourche carried off part of the overflows. Outlets had allowed the Creole settlement at Pointe Coupee, south of Red River, to develop with minimal levees and little flooding.19

Concordia, on the other hand, sat surrounded by rivers which rose simultaneously and had no outlets to reduce the water's height. On Concordia's west side, the Ouachita and Tensas Rivers, and Bayou Mason merged to form the Black River. This meandered thirty miles as a western border and joined the Red. The Red ran thirty miles as the southern edge of Concordia and entered the Mississippi. All the water then funneled into the "Father of Waters," which constituted Concordia's eastern edge. When the Mississippi was high, the Red emptied slowly and tended to overspread its banks. Since the Red rose in the same season as the Mississippi, its flooding also inhibited drainage from the
Black. The sluggishness of the Black would clog the Ouachita, the Tensas, and Bayou Mason, and so on. As a result, when the Mississippi rose, Concordia sank. According to Brown and Stoddard, water sometimes blanketed Concordia from the Mississippi to the Ouachita. In its interior forests, floods stood twelve to twenty-five feet deep in the spring.20

Undrained by outlets and unprotected by levees, Concordia in its natural state held water like a bowl. The lack of drainage created seasonal lakes. Myriad bayous and sloughs rose or fell with the rivers and connected all the waterways to each other at high water. Levees on the Mississippi could not even safeguard fields immediately behind the riverfront against backwater from the Red and Black. Darby called this backwater flooding "infinitely more difficult to prevent, than the inundation from the river itself." Actually, the parish needed perimeter levees, around the parish, and internal drainage within it, to be truly secure, but projects of that magnitude were far beyond the abilities of the first settlers. Instead, pioneers confined their efforts to farming the highest ground. Often, it was not high enough. In 1811, 1812, and 1813, Concordia suffered extreme flood damage, especially in the latter year.21

But emigration advisors qualified their warnings about Concordia with praise. Darby said the riverbanks on the Mississippi, from Lake Providence to the mouth of the Red,
stood above normal overflow for a width of 1/4 to 1 1/2 miles. Stoddard averaged the width at half a mile. Such banks, they thought, could be occupied without much trepidation; also the shores of oxbow lakes and the high margins of lesser streams. Clearings on these narrow ribbons of soil would repay a farmer with high crop yields. The main drawbacks, of course, were a sickly environment and the lack of social amenities. Upland communities often had healthier living conditions and a more varied society. Nevertheless, many bottom-land farmers thought that hill farming was a waste of time, when alluvium was both available and affordable. On the riverbanks, planters grew corn and cotton in greater luxuriance than most hill farmers could ever achieve, and the native cane furnished fodder for their livestock. These were solid advantages.²²

Most outsiders misunderstood the nature of Concordia's swamp. They imagined it was eternally submerged and wholly irreclaimable. An example of this idea comes from the pen of Christiana Shupan, who lived in the hills at Grand Gulf, Mississippi. In a rather catty note to a cousin in Concordia, during a flood, Christiana wrote, "I should like very much to know how you are getting along over in the swamp, and if you live on ground or in a floating castle." Actually, Concordia was hardly Venetian in its ordinary lifestyle and flooded only part of the year, even without levees. For seven or eight months, as Darby noted, the land was "hard, solid, and dry . . . in every respect
different from marsh or swamp... the land commonly
called swamp, is merely below the common level of high
water." Maps that showed large lakes spreading across the
region gave a false impression. Concordia's true lakes--
such as Lakes Providence, St. Joseph, Bruin, St. John, and
Concordia--consisted of old riverbeds of the Mississippi.
Their shores exhibited the same fertile qualities as the
river's active banks, without the problem of caving.
Settlers found the shores of Concordia's true lakes
extremely desirable, just as the northern Creoles prized
False River at Pointe Coupee. Concordia's other "lakes"--
like St. Peter and St. Mary--were really sloughs or bayous
that expanded and contracted according to the height of the
rivers. In autumn, winter, and late summer, when seasonal
lakes were dry, they pastured cattle and game. From April
to June, they were ten feet deep in water.23

In the swamps, economic opportunity could take several
forms. Prior to the building of levees in Concordia, some
pioneers used the region as an open range. Polycarpe La
Mothe, a prairie Creole, testified that cattle herding was
underway in Concordia in 1801-02. Its early public ferries
aided drovers in getting cows to market. Indeed, ferry
franchises and range roads were among the first public
concerns raised in meetings of Concordia's police jury.
The pioneers found that cattle could be grown at almost no
expense in the swamp, then sold in Natchez or shipped
downriver. Some drovers obtained a good income and
invested their cattle profits in slaves. The winning equation of cattle plus cotton allowed some pioneers to rise to comfort, and even wealth. For example, at the time of the American Revolution, a man named Jeremiah Routh was on Big Black River in southwest Mississippi, so poor he could barely feed his children. Indians stole Routh's horses, the hogs scattered to the woods, and his last cow went to a creditor. Later, around 1800, Jeremiah and Job Routh harvested cattle from swamp-ranges in Concordia and turned to whatever else would make money. They crossed their cows to Mississippi on a private ferry, planted cotton in the Natchez District, and, in the off-season, improved Spanish land grants on Concordia's Lake St. Joseph at their "winter quarters." The original cabin at "Winter Quarters" (ca. 1800) still exists near Newellton, Louisiana, engulfed in a later mansion. Within a few decades, the Rouths had become one of the most opulent alluvial clans. By 1860, Job's son, John Routh, owned plantations on Lake St. Joseph valued at $825,000; with 13,624 acres; 300 slaves; 82 slave cabins, a mansion house and outbuildings, and an 1859 cotton crop of 1,675 bales worth as much as $147,400. Consistent application, and the prudent use of slave labor and swamp resources, brought them great wealth.24

Successful entrepreneurs like the Rouths inspired those who entered the swamps, and it should come as no surprise that John Routh was one of north Louisiana's major
levee activists. As member and head of the parish police jury, he urged the adoption of local taxes for levee building and secured the passage of these measures "by his influence and energy." Because he realized the interconnectedness of the region's flood problems, Routh even entered the state legislature, to promote a plan for combining three parishes into a levee district for cooperative funding and organization. *DeBow's Review* said, "These parishes are dependent on each other for protection," and Routh's advocacy "was greatly instrumental" in bringing about the levee laws and taxes to develop them.\(^{25}\)

At the time of Concordia's first settlement, however, the enlightened self-interest of a regional developer like Routh lay decades in the future.

One cannot say with absolute certainty when Concordia's first levees were built. Spanish law required levees on riparian grants, and grantees received land in Concordia under these conditions, but evidence indicates that Concordia's levees did not come into being under the Spanish. Nonetheless, the actions of Concordia's Spanish commandant did accelerate the region's development, and Spanish grants formed the core of its improved real estate. Therefore, the Spanish period merits our attention.

Concordia's first Spanish grant occurred in 1796 when Governor Carondelet issued 40,000 interior arpents, on the Black and Tensas Rivers, to Louis Bringier as a favor to the boy's father, Marius Pons Bringier of "White Hall," in...
St. James Parish. Louis grew up to be quite erratic and showed little interest in the land. Anyway, the Bringier grant entailed no levee obligations and remained unimproved for many years, contributing nothing toward the establishment of a levee tradition in Concordia. Carondelet made three riverfront grants on the Mississippi in Concordia in 1797, but the recipients, some Grafton brothers from Natchez, delayed their surveys and confirmations until 1802. It is unlikely that they built Spanish levees. The first plausible improvement in Spanish Concordia took place when the Spanish evacuated Natchez in 1798. Don Jose Vidal, the outgoing Natchez commandant, petitioned Governor Gayoso for lands on the Mississippi across from Natchez. Vidal's request matched well with Gayoso's desire for a post on the west bank to watch the Americans. So, the Governor awarded eight hundred arpents to Vidal and five hundred to each of his sons. Vidal did not immediately move to Concordia, but hired William Gillespie to improve the grant. While it is possible that Gillespie built a small levee to comply with Spanish regulations, Vidal purposely chose the highest spot in the parish for his concession. A levee one-plantation-wide would have been singularly useless, under the circumstances.²⁶

Vidal finally moved to Concordia in 1801 to serve as its commandant. Historian J. F. H. Claiborne described him as a stereotypical Spanish gentleman: "proud, ceremonious, dignified, but generous, hospitable, [and] ever ready to
confer a favor." Actually, Vidal's authority as commandant at Concordia only allowed him to grant preliminary, or de facto, land claims to prospective settlers. To be legally confirmed, grantees had to perform their levee and road duties and obtain royal titles. However, the Concordians ignored these technicalities and chose to consider Vidal's permission to reside to be the same thing as a deed. Whether he encouraged them to think in this way, or whether they simply leaped to conclusions, it is impossible to know. What is clear is that from December 1, 1801, to November 4, 1803, he showered riverfront grants on American acquaintances from the Natchez District. Vidal's "grants" lined the Mississippi from Red River well into what is now Tensas Parish, as well as around the shores of Lakes Concordia, St. John, Bruin, and St. Joseph. Actually, the Treaty of San Ildefonso transferred Louisiana from Spain to France on October 1, 1800, so Vidal, as Spain's agent, was really granting French land to the Americans. Of course, no one "knew" (officially) that the colony's sovereignty had changed, though some suspected it after negotiations commenced in Paris for the purchase of New Orleans from France. In the meantime, Spanish officials administered Louisiana as before. 27

Vidal approved 181 Spanish grants in Concordia after the retrocession to France. A list in Vidal's papers shows 7 undated patents, 4 grants made in 1801, 62 in 1802, and 108 in 1803. Eighty-three of Vidal's grants—totaling
44,697 acres of the finest alluvial soil—transpired after the signing of the Louisiana Purchase. Obviously, Louisiana belonged to France at the time of the Purchase, but Americans in Mississippi Territory liked the King of Spain's land grant terms better than those of their Uncle Sam. The United States sold public land rather than giving it away, and these "midnight grants" were a bonanza for Natchez men in the Spaniard's good graces. Job Routh, the grateful recipient of one Vidal grant, is said to have named Concordia's Lake St. Joseph for Vidal, while Lake St. Peter's name referred to Peter Walker, the Concordia Post surveyor. Stephen Minor, a Pennsylvanian and sometime Spanish bureaucrat, received more than a thousand acres. His brother, John Minor, obtained three hundred, and his son-in-law, William Kenner, almost a thousand. In September of 1802, Vidal even granted eight hundred acres to Winthrop Sargent, who had left office a year earlier as the United States' first territorial governor of Mississippi! Only nine of Vidal's grants went to persons with Hispanic surnames, and five of those to Vidal's. The required fealty oaths to the king of Spain must have been administered with tongue-firmly-in-cheek.28

Vidal served as commandant until the American takeover, and on paper Spanish land regulations continued in full force. For example, Louisiana's last Spanish governor, Manuel Juan de Salcedo, instructed Vidal in October of 1801 to use his authority as commandant to eject...
unauthorized settlers. Salcedo particularly charged Vidal to "cause the person named Pressley to be dislodged," unless the squatter could show a permit. Spanish Wood Rangers stood ready to evict such squatters on Vidal's orders, and the Commandant was to "keep a friendly intercourse" with the governor of Baton Rouge and the commandant of Pointe Coupee in regard to their movements. Simon Pressler was not, in fact, dislodged and never obtained a Spanish grant. He did, however, acquire 640 acres in Concordia between 1807 and 1811, and eventually served on the police jury. In the Spanish twilight, the rhetoric of enforcement did not always mirror reality.29

That levee regulations remained on the books is shown in the text of a grant from Vidal to David Banister Morgan. In correct form, Morgan requested a grant, and Vidal approved it. Post Surveyor Peter Walker marked the grant of 760 acres on the bank of the Mississippi, two and a half miles below Concordia Post, and signed the plat on April 6, 1803. To receive a complete formal title, Morgan still had to apply to the Intendant General, but Vidal's registry of the claim gave Morgan "peaceable possession," free from harassment by the Wood Rangers. Meanwhile, Morgan was to conform to the regulations of "clearing land, keeping up levees, making roads, etc. for the interest of the country and Post." Signed, by Vidal, April 6, 1803. But Concordia had so few inhabitants that the levee building requirement was almost certainly a dead letter.30
Vidal's brother-in-law stated that Concordia Post, directly across from Natchez, contained not more than five inhabitants in January of 1801, and by the end of the year, according to Natchez lumberman Peter Little, only five or six houses. Concordia's interior was even less developed. A Spanish road led track-like from the Natchez ferry toward the Post of Rapides. A ferryman cut another road through dense forest to Bayou Crocodile—maybe twelve miles. By 1802, a similar route, from Concordia Post to Lake Concordia, led through woods and cane about eight miles.31

Concessions to newly arriving Americans did not transform this riverfront into a continuous-village landscape like the downriver settlements. They had too little time. Vidal made his last Concordia grant on November 4, 1803. The French Colonial Prefect, Pierre Laussat, publicly accepted Louisiana for France on November 30, 1803. Governor W. C. C. Claiborne and General James Wilkinson received it for the United States on December 20, 1803. Three weeks later, in 1804, Don Stephen Minor, "Captain in the Royal Army of His Catholic Majesty," relinquished "the Post of Concord with all its dependencies" to Major Ferdinand Claiborne of Mississippi Territory, who succeeded Vidal as commandant. As explained on page one of Concordia's Book A of Parish Deeds & Plats, Claiborne acted as the agent of the French Republic when he accepted Concordia from Spain. French sovereignty came and went the same day in Concordia's records, because
continuous Spanish control had to remain unimpaired in order to protect the land titles. Major Claiborne served as commandant until January of 1805, but civil government of the American type did not finally begin until October 10, 1805. On that date, Concordia installed its first county judge and sheriff, and seated its first County Court. Now, officers existed to enact laws desired by the people—in this case, American people from Mississippi, who had occupied royal Spanish grants with levee obligations attached, duties with which they had not complied. They were not yet a levee building community, nor had they yet seen the necessity of becoming one.32

Minutes from Concordia's earliest county courts—the sessions of October 1805 through April 1807—have survived. These rare instruments show the accumulation of infrastructure in the settlement, as recent immigrants tried to build a functional environment. Its County Court spent the first three sessions in hearing litigation, because the judicial and managerial roles of local courts had not yet been separated. When the legislature redefined the County Court as the executive body for local government, it became the forum for the creation of public works. Concordia's first acts of this type were authorizations for roads and ferries. In July of 1806, the Court and county judge appointed two road supervisors: David B. Morgan received responsibility for the oversight of roads south and east of Concordia Post, and John Bradshaw for those north and west.
The Court told them to open roads next to watercourses which fronted the various concessions, to make a land route parallel to the river, and other roads to circumscribe the inhabited lakesides. Essentially, these road orders serviced the Spanish grants. Many grantees had obviously never conformed to the conditions of the grants; otherwise, roads of the required type would have already existed.

From October 1806 to January 1807, the Court licensed six ferries. The locations identify which areas were settled and the principal lines of traffic in the parish: Ferry 1. from Natchez to Concordia Post; 2. over the Mississippi, seven miles upriver from the Post; 3. across the Mississippi, eight miles below the Post; 4. over "Crockodile" Bayou; 5. at Petit Gulf, on the Mississippi, across from Rodney; and 6. at Tensas River, on the Texas Road toward Alexandria.33

Roads and ferries held an immediate interest for the local traffic, travelers, and cattle drovers of the region, but the 1805-07 court minutes make no mention of levees. Why not? The importance of levees had not been manifested. Concordia's agriculture was still in a primitive state, and no flood crisis had frightened the settlers, during their stay thus far in the parish.

In Concordia, Americans blithely took up their usual settlement patterns. With no royal Wood Rangers to evict them, squatters occupied vacant lands wherever they pleased. Many moved to fertile ridge lands in central and
western Concordia. They traveled by boat on the bayous or by horseback on the primitive roads. Most could be described as "hunting-farmers," supplementing their diet of wild game with vegetable gardens and free-ranging domestic animals. The squatters' use of the land cost them nothing. Their small clearings made room for a house site, food crops, or a little cotton. They were not landowners or permanent residents, and did not really constitute a "community," in a practical sense, because they could not be counted on to perform public works. Even landowners whose last-minute grants from Vidal had given them titles, had practically no public duties connected with ownership. They escaped Spanish regulations, such as levee or road building, by the timing of their claims, and the American government had yet to lay any burdens upon them.

This happy state of affairs changed on July 19, 1806, when a special Concordia assessors' meeting convened to apportion a territorial land tax. Here was innovation, by Louisiana standards! The Spanish king had refrained from taxing Louisiana real estate, except to require levee and road duties, yet here was the American Republic compelling owners of "free" Spanish grants to pay a money tax to retain possession. Is it significant that Americans turned to a money payment, instead of a labor demand, to weed out the undeserving? Perhaps a money tax was viewed as more "republican," and more in keeping with the dignity of men who were citizens rather than subjects. Or perhaps it was
just less trouble. At any rate, with the implementation of a land tax, Concordia's midnight-grant proprietors now had to decide how much their land meant to them.34

Concordia's 1807 and 1811 assessment rolls still exist at Louisiana State University in a collection assembled by Robert Calhoun, a Vidalia attorney, who snatched many records from neglect and destruction. The 1807 roll shows that 164 land units were still possessed by grantees who received them from Vidal and the King of Spain. Seventeen had changed hands, but 91 percent continued in the possession of the original grantees. A short four years later, the 1811 tax list showed only 33 percent still belonging to original grantees. It appears that no less than 105 grants—that is, 58 percent of the original concessions—were either sold or abandoned in the four years after the land tax became effective. This suggests that a substantial portion of those who accepted free land from the Spanish king no longer wanted it when possession bore a cost. In that case, they probably would have been disinterested in the Spanish titles as well, if Commandant Vidal had been able to enforce Spain's levee and road laws. Landowners who would not even pay a small tax to keep the land had no commitment to the type of community Concordia was becoming. Those who replaced them more nearly accepted the conditions that responsible landownership imposed.35

Further evidence of the early population's unsatisfactory character as landowners, developers, or taxpayers
can be deduced by correlating heads of household from the 1810 census with the 1811 tax list. This comparison indicates that many Concordians were squatters. Only 88 of the 260 heads of household in the 1810 census showed up as landowners in the 1811 tax roll. C. C. Robin, traveling in Concordia in 1804, saw these folks "subsisting on corn and salt meat, scorning the luxuries of life," camped like Indians in the alluvial forests. He found that many came from the Natchez vicinity, by foot or in pirogues. William Dunbar, a Natchez planter and scientist, saw them as well, during a trip through Concordia's backcountry in 1804, undertaken at the request of President Jefferson. On Black River, Dunbar saw a typical clearing of two acres planted in Indian corn. The cultivator and his wife lived in an arbor without walls. With game for meat and corn for bread, they met occasional money needs by carrying honey to market.36

Squatters of this type could "sell" improvements to other settlers, by conveying a usufruct interest and a right to a future pre-emption claim. "Titles" of this sort were common on the frontier, and they often received a more formal legal recognition at a later date through depositions. A good Concordia example is Thomas Mitchell's sale of a Mississippi River island in December of 1810. Mitchell testified that he settled Petit Gulph Island on June 15, 1807, and lived there, on the coast of Concordia, until August 4, 1810. "In the course of my settling said
Mitchell "cleared and cultivated four acres . . . [on] which I annually planted and gathered corn, pumpkins, and [one year] cotton, that supported my family." When he moved to the hills of Jefferson County, Mississippi, in the fall of 1810, he sold his interest to Concordia planter Jacob Beiller for $120. Another planter, Job Bass, attested to the transaction's authenticity in 1829. Beiller, owner of 51 slaves in 1810, converted the island to cotton culture and remained in residence nearby until his death in the 1830s.37

Mitchells yielded to Beillers on much of the lower Mississippi as agricultural development intensified. For one thing, Concordia's environment offered few comforts to a small proprietor. Edouard de Montule, traveling upriver from Natchez in 1817, saw houses on Concordia's banks. Each time his boat approached the cabins, mosquitoes swarmed aboard. Montule marveled that families with three or four acres cleared, surrounded by swamps and forests, could endure the pests. "One must always have a free hand to drive them away," he said, "and I assure you that in the woods I scarcely had time to draw a bead on game." No one could "read, write, or sleep" except beneath mosquito nets like gauze tents. Yet, Montule saw rafts carrying whole families "in search of a section where the fertility of the soils will generously repay them for their labors." Some, like Mitchell, stayed only a short time before removing to higher ground. Still, it would be a mistake to think too
little of squatters. The negative connotations associated
with the term were often undeserved. Merchant William
Richardson, on a river trip in 1817, saw a flatboat party
from Kentucky, "decently clad and the pictures of health,"
searching the riverside for vacant lands. The man, his
wife, six children, and two oarsmen guided a boat four feet
wide and thirty feet long, packed with household goods.
They were not paupers.38

Even John James Audubon defended squatters,
complaining that travel writers always described them as
"a sallow, sickly-looking set of miserable beings," who
lived in the swamps "on pig-nuts, Indian corn and bear's
flesh." Audubon claimed that squatters were actually the
backbone of western enterprise and respectability. In his
estimation, squatters made a rational economic choice in
living on public lands, especially in the valley of the
Mississippi. They knew that the western riverfront was the
richest land in the country, that it abounded with game,
that the Mississippi provided transport for marketable
produce, and that selling surplus foodstuffs to river
travelers would add further income. "To these
recommendations is added another, . . . being able to
settle on land, and perhaps to hold it for a number of
years, without purchase, rent or tax of any kind." Here
was the very definition of a squatter.39

To make his case for the respectability of squatters,
Audubon described a family (perhaps hypothetical) in flight
from a hideous Virginia landscape of eroded, red-clay hills. Ecological ruin surrounded them at home, so they moved west. Upon reaching the Mississippi, the family comprehended the soil's fertility. They chose a spot on its banks and prepared for winter by clearing a field, making a cabin, belling cows in the cane-brake, sowing turnips and vegetables, and buying other necessities from itinerant river traders. As to disease, yes, the family sickened with ague, but recovered after the frosts. In the spring, they ate game and fish, planted corn, potatoes, and pumpkins, and raised hogs. Always enterprising, they bought cross saws and made "broad-wheeled 'carry-logs'" to haul timber from the swamp to the river. At the riverbank, they either sold wood to steamboats, or tied logs together with grapevines to make a raft, loading it with shorter lengths for sale in New Orleans as firewood. Returning with their profits, the wood vendors would see their mother and sisters on the shore. "The steamer stops, three broad straw-hats are waved from its upper deck; and soon, husband and wife, brothers and sisters, are in each other's embrace." The ladies, of course, had vegetables and dairy products to sell to the boat when it landed. Over time, improvements and livestock multiplied, marriages occurred, and finally "the government secures to the family the lands, on which, twenty years before, they settled in poverty and illness." 40 Hurrah for the squatters!
Success could be achieved in the way Audubon described. Travel accounts from flatboats and steamboats frequently mention stops at riverside clearings for eggs, milk, butter, ham, and poultry. A letter written in 1814 told of a Concordian's intention to buy "6 likely young men on good terms" for timber cutting on Point Pleasant. Even in the 1840s, Concordians regularly borrowed each others' timber wheels for hauling logs. There were other means of exploiting natural resources for profit, as well. The Routh family's cattle grazing in Concordia has already been mentioned. In 1813, two tanners went to Concordia's interior to harvest oil from the alligators and fish at Lake Shackleford, for use as tanning supplies. When the tanners recognized the fertility of the lake's banks, they abandoned tanning for agriculture. Then they encountered the factor that Audubon glossed over--floods. A local historian of the 1850s said of these tanners, "the high water of 1815 discouraged them, and drove them back again to the hills."41

Where, in Audubon's happy picture, were the levees? He showed the noble squatters founding a river town "on piles, secure from the inundations." Their village of "warehouses, stores, and work-shops" did not require a levee, but stood on stilts above overflow. Here, according to Audubon, one independent family achieved prosperity and reputation, through its own enterprise and judicious use of swamp resources. "Thus," he said, "are the vast frontiers
of our country peopled, and thus does cultivation, year after year, extend over the western wilds." Yet, for all the accurate detail in his message, it seems that Audubon was relating a democratic small-farmer fantasy. Isolated success for one family did not necessarily translate into opportunity for a whole community. Audubon, in his quest to honor independent achievement, made no mention of consensus, cooperation, or coercion as the building blocks of alluvial society. Where, in Audubon's nuclear-family success story, were the slave crews, the mass-produced export crops, the planter-maintained levee systems, and the government's rules on mandatory provisions for flood control? Undoubtedly, individual initiative was indispensible to the riverfront's development, but without community-wide levee building, the individual improvements could not have survived. In politics, it was fashionable to praise small farmers as Audubon did, because small farmers voted in large numbers. But small farmers did not develop the swamps, and in Audubon's story, realism seems to have been sacrificed to a popular ideal of "democratic" western improvements.42

Actually, it is difficult to determine what sort of village Audubon was describing. Travelers noted ramshackle huts on stilts at the Balize, but "Pilot-town" was hardly a beacon of development. Villages in plantation regions moved back toward the swamps as their frontlands caved in the river. Villages on the Upper Mississippi moved to the
bluffs when flooding damaged them—but not on top of piles. Sometimes mercantile compounds accumulated outside the levees on the lower river, with warehouses on poles and elevated runways leading to the docks. Maybe this was what Audubon saw; but the produce shipped at these landings was grown in fields protected by levees.43

Audubon's seemingly innocuous tale has been harped on at this length to prove a point. As a rule, squatters who remained squatters did not build levees—landowners did. Squatters seldom stayed in one place long enough to make improvements on the scale of a levee. Their migratory habits, lack of means, and desire for freedom, both from the obligations of society and the responsibilities of landownership, did not equip them to be the permanent developers of the floodplain. One must conclude, therefore, that Audubon's ringing phrase on the peopling of the alluvial frontier rightly applied to planters, not squatters. In places like Concordia, squatters only served, more or less, as topographical scouts for the planters who followed. Unless, of course, the squatters stayed, prospered, made permanent improvements, and became planters themselves. But it was almost impossible to do that without slaves, and how was a squatter to get a slave force? The truism "it takes money to make money" applied as stringently to swamp agriculture as to most other enterprises. When capitalists recognized the intrinsic value of alluvial land, Concordia's real estate became
expensive, and its squatters and small farmers retired to places more appropriate to their status. They did not cease to exist, of course, but they did cease to belong to the levee building community, unless they returned as overseers or as small proprietors on more remote streams.

The census and tax records of Concordia Parish document a high turnover rate among its early settlers, and Table 4.1 illustrates population trends in Concordia Parish for 1810, 1820, and 1830. These figures, and those in the three subsequent tables, are derived from census records of these three years, respectively.

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<td>827</td>
<td>1787</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2626</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1830</td>
<td>1025</td>
<td>3617</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4662</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Table 4.1 points out, twenty years of settlement did not suffice to bring the number of whites in Concordia in 1830 to the amount recorded in 1810. This was the case, in spite of the territorial enlargement of 1814, which added to Concordia the region from Walnut Hills to Milliken's Bend. The 1810s featured a 35 percent drop in Concordia's white population, and only 15 percent of the shortfall was recovered in the 1820s. Meanwhile, from 1810 to 1830, the number of slaves in Concordia rose from 1,581 to 3,617--an increase of 129 percent.44
Table 4.2 breaks the overall population of the parish into categories of slaveholding by household for the census years of 1810, 1820, and 1830.

TABLE 4.2

POPULATION TRENDS IN CONCORDIA PARISH, LA.

Number of Households in Various Categories of Slaveholding in Three Census Years:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of Slaves per Household</th>
<th>No. of Hshlds. per Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1810</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 slaves</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-5 slaves</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-19 slaves</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-45 slaves</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>more than 45</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2 shows that from 1810 to 1820, the number of slaveless households in Concordia dropped from 126 to 71—a decline of 44 percent. Several factors contributed to the out-migration of Concordia's poor whites, notably: floods in 1811, 1812, 1813, and 1815; the imposition of land taxes and levee-building requirements; accelerated mobility because of the steamboat; sustained high prices for cotton and a demand for cotton land; the proliferation of planters; and the removal of subsistence farmers to other regions. Planters sometimes left the area for the same reasons slaveless farmers did, but as a group they showed greater persistence. While the number of Concordia's slaveless households declined in the 1810s, the number of planters with twenty or more slaves remained virtually the same. In the 1820s, the number of slaveless Concordians
remained static, but the planter group increased. In 1830, slaveless households numbered 75—a slight increase over 1820—but a 40 percent drop from 1810. Meanwhile, the number of planters with twenty or more slaves reached 61 in 1830, which constituted a 126 percent increase over 1810, when only 27 slaveowners fell into that category. Moreover, the large slaveowners of 1830 owned twice as many slaves as those of 1810, as Table 4.3 indicates.

TABLE 4.3
13 LARGEST SLAVEHOOLDINGS OF CONCORDIA PARISH, 1810 & 1830

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1810</th>
<th>1830</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of Slaves, and the Owner</td>
<td>No. of Slaves, and the Owner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77 Philip Minor</td>
<td>148 Samuel Davis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59 John Minor</td>
<td>127 Stephen Minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59 David B. Morgan</td>
<td>122 John Routh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58 Charles McLean</td>
<td>119 Henry Chotard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51 Jacob Beiller</td>
<td>112 Job Routh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47 Pennington Tucker</td>
<td>102 John D. Smith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44 William Blount</td>
<td>100 John Perkins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44 Kennedy Cason</td>
<td>92 J. D. Filer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42 Leonard Pornet</td>
<td>85 P. M. Lapiece</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37 Benjamin Bynum</td>
<td>84 Jacob Beiller</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37 Henry Sealy</td>
<td>82 Isaac Ross</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36 Joseph Vidal</td>
<td>81 Francis Surget</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34 James Williams</td>
<td>78 Moses Liddel</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Not only was Concordia's white population declining numerically in the 1810s, it was also characterized by transience. Only 32 of Concordia's 1810 heads of household (12 percent) could be identified as households heads in the parish in 1820. Indeed, less than one-fifth of the 1820 household heads had been heads of household in Concordia in 1810. A high mortality rate among swamp pioneers
contributed in part to the turnover in population. Some of the 1820 households appear to be surviving heirs of 1810 household heads, but it was also common for families to move away. Concordia's non-persisting 1810 household heads and their heirs often showed up in other places in the 1820 census—usually in areas of Louisiana with cheaper real estate, such as Ouachita, Catahoula, and St. Tammany Parishes; or in the high ground counties of Mississippi, particularly in the Natchez District, or in less-fertile interior counties like Franklin, Amite, Marion, and Pike. In most of these places, residents escaped the problems of levees, mosquitoes, and high water. They made smaller crop yields, but enjoyed amenities such as the companionship of other small farmers, pure running water, schools, churches, and overland travel. Other pioneers remained in the swamps for the sake of its free land, abundant game, and forage for livestock. Yet, they moved off the riverfront to relatively inaccessible interior streams, where land values remained low for lack of transportation facilities.

Even planters, like Kennedy Cason and David B. Morgan, sometimes took the escape route to the highlands. They tended to remain in Concordia in greater proportions than the poor whites, but even the wealthy could not take long life and financial stability for granted. In Table 4.3, one notices that the large slaveholders of 1830 were an almost completely different set of men from those of 1810.
Fortunately for Concordia, the institutions of local government provided continuity, even when the population did not. The executive office of parish judge and the legislative body of the parish police jury maintained order, preserved records, and furnished a permanent framework for advancing the interests of the parish. Individuals who made up the leadership personnel and the electorate were transient and fallible, but the institution itself coordinated their efforts and gave a sense of direction to improvements they undertook as a community. By the 1810s, Concordia's leaders wanted to enhance their cotton yields, so they organized to that end. Planters composed the police jury. Its orders to build levees were entirely consistent with the interests of the constituents.

Useful as census records are in suggesting trends, they do not offer a complete picture of the planter group of Concordia Parish, for it was even larger than censuses indicate. Some of Concordia's slaveless men were actually overseers for non-resident planters. Concordia's tax records do not survive in satisfactory quantities, but, fragmentary as they are, they supplement the census and help delineate the extent of non-resident proprietorship in this alluvial floodplain. Therefore, Table 4.4 lists Concordia planters with twenty or more slaves as shown by the 1811 tax records and the 1810 census. Judging only from the census, a person would recognize one group of elites, but with the addition of names from the tax list a
different configuration emerges. The tax list shows that by 1811, Concordia had already developed a sizeable and influential cadre of absentee planters—a factor to be reckoned with. Seven of the ten largest slaveholders on the 1811 list lived outside the parish, and no less than half the owners of twenty or more slaves on the list were non-residents.46

TABLE 4.4

CONCORDIA PLANTERS, WITH TWENTY OR MORE SLAVES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of Slaves</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>No. of Slaves</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th># of Slaves</th>
<th>Resident</th>
<th>Span.</th>
<th>Grantee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>77</td>
<td>Philip Minor</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>William Kenner</td>
<td>NR</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59</td>
<td>John Minor</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>Wm. G. Forman</td>
<td>NR</td>
<td>no</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59</td>
<td>David B. Morgan</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>J. &amp; S. Minor</td>
<td>NR</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58</td>
<td>Charles McLean</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>James Kempe</td>
<td>NR</td>
<td>no</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td>Jacob Beiller</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Ben. Farrar</td>
<td>NR</td>
<td>no</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>H. &amp; C. Middleton</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>William Blount</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>Pennington Tucker</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Benjamin Bynum</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>no</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>William Blount</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Jacob Beiller</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>no</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>Kennedy Cason</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>David Urquhart</td>
<td>NR</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>Leonard Pornet</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Burwell Vick</td>
<td>NR</td>
<td>no</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Benjamin Bynum</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Joseph Vidal</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Henry Sealey</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Edward King</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>no</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Joseph Vidal</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Wm. Hootsell</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>James Williams</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Geo. N. Regan</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Thomas Hamberson</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Aug. Trask</td>
<td>NR</td>
<td>no</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>George N. Regan</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Thos. Freeland</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>no</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Thomas Freeland</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>J. Widerstrandt</td>
<td>NR</td>
<td>no</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>William Hootsell</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Leonard Pornet</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>George Cason</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Nicholls/Scales</td>
<td>NR</td>
<td>no</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Edward King</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Job Routh</td>
<td>NR</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>William Disharoon</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>John Linton</td>
<td>NR</td>
<td>no</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Nicholas Rogers</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>John Perkins</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Edward Shunk</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>James Williams</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>no</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Ph. Widerstrandt</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>John D. Smith</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>John Perkins</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>William Glasscock</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>John D. Smith</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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The absentee aspect of alluvial proprietorship became even more marked in Concordia over time. In fact, non-residents eventually came to own large sections of every leveed area where investors preferred to live elsewhere.

In the early nineteenth century, the properties of squatters and landowners, residents and non-residents, in Concordia Parish, suffered from the absence of levees. Floods in 1809, 1811, and 1813 convinced Concordians that levees were necessary. The French-speakers downriver had already learned this lesson. Now it was the Americans' turn. In a nutshell, this is what occurred. The flood of 1809 covered alluvial clearings opposite Natchez and destroyed crops. It notified recent settlers that this was not an effortless place to live. The flood of 1811 hit Concordia very hard in the area south of Walnut Hills, and proprietors endured heavy damages to crops and livestock. A handful of planters built levees. The Mississippi hammered Concordia again in 1813, and unprotected residents lost about a million dollars in crops, domestic animals, and improvements. Concordia's police jury ordered extensive levee construction. This provided some security for establishments near the Mississippi. When the flood of 1815 took place, leveed proprietors escaped much of the damage. Instead, high water harmed the back settlements, where pioneers of the poorer sort had started to occupy the banks of the Black, Tensas, and other interior streams. The 1815 flood drove them away, and caused such dismay in
the west side of the parish, that similar improvements were
not generally undertaken until the latter 1830s. A Tensas
Parish historian, writing for *De Bow's Review* in 1853, said
that after 1815, "the deep forests in the rear were
considered by many only as reservoirs" to hold the Missis­
sippi's overflow, "and not intended for cultivation." On
the other hand, the Mississippi's banks harbored settle­
ments which "were early made and constantly increasing in
value," because they could be protected with levees.47

From the absence of levee business in the 1805-1807
county court minutes, and traveler Christian Schultz's
failure to notice any levees opposite Natchez in 1808, it
is likely that no significant levees existed in Concordia
to prevent the flood of 1809. The local court exhibited no
interest in levees at that time. However, on April 30,
1811, the legislature reformed the structure of parish
government by making the police jury elective. Under this
arrangement, the parish jury would be elected the second
Monday in June, and, as it happened, the Mississippi peaked
at Natchez on June 4th in the flood of 1811. When
Concordia's elected police jury convened in July with a new
parish judge, it responded to public concerns by ordering
the layout of Concordia's first levee. Extending the
franchise to local affairs gave the community a forum for
changing its environment, and the installation of levees
was among the first items of new business.48
Two levee notices survive in Calhoun's Concordia Collection at LSU which were actually served on riparian landowners as a result of this July 1811 Concordia jury session. One landowner, Isabella Michie, owned 400 acres and 19 slaves, while the other, twenty-five-year-old Joseph Walker, possessed 260 acres and 10 slaves. Both proprietors lived in the second division of the proposed levee route, between Lake Concordia and Price's Bayou, and received orders to build levees, dated August 2, 1811. The instruments were signed by three commissioners whom the jury appointed to locate the levee line. These included Manuel Texada, David Forman, and a third commissioner, whose signature cannot be deciphered. Texada, an early Spanish grantee, owned 400 acres and 9 slaves. Forman only owned one slave and no land, but was connected to Concordia's second-largest planter, a non-resident owning 79 slaves and several thousand acres. The notice to Joseph Walker is quoted below in full:

Sir,

We the undersigned duly appointed commissioners, to lay off mark and superintend the second Division of the Levee from Lake Concordia to Price's Bayou, Have in persuance thereof proceeded to lay off and mark the same thro your Plantation in the following direction, to wit: commencing from the lower line of Mr. Leonard Pornet's [1,600 acres, 30 slaves] and at the lower end of his intended Levee running thence down the River [,] leaving all unmarked trees immediately to the left untill it strikes the upper line of Mrs. Spicer's [320 acres, 0 slaves]. Said levee must be made two feet higher than the last high water marks which is plainly to be seen on trees, stumps, &c. and three times as wide at top as it is high. You will therefore proceed to the making and completing the same thro your Plantation according to
the Regulations of the Parish. If any difficulty should arise in discovering the precise direction of said Levee[,] the same will be Removed on personal application to any Two of the undersigned commissioners.

We are with respect your verry obdt. humble servts.
Manuel G. Texada, ? ?, David Forman

It is interesting to see the procedure the police jury used to prevent undue pressure on individual commissioners. Landowners who wondered about the exact route of the levee line had to ask two commissioners. This reduced the danger of bribery or favoritism being used to move levees closer to the river. To designate the levee line, commissioners marked trees along the route and told levee builders to stay to the left of the unmarked trees--an odd mode of instruction. They required no particular slope or base width, as long as the crown measured three times wider than a height which was two feet above high water.

Thus, by 1811, Concordia's first elected police jury had ordered the building of its first levees. The parish then included the area now occupied by Concordia, Tensas, and eastern Franklin Parishes, but the 1811 levee only protected a segment of riverfront near Vidalia and Lake Concordia. A flood in 1813 resulted in an extension of this levee line. The expansion gave protection to a greater number of proprietors, but also required them to accept greater responsibilities--not without some dissatisfaction. Indeed, the dimensional formula in the 1811 levee notices could have produced massive structures, burdensome to construct. For example, if water rose five
feet above the bank, the proprietor would have to make an embankment seven feet high, with a twenty-one foot crown, and base in proportion. Non-slaveholders would face severe difficulties in meeting such an obligation, and some of them must have sold out rather than make the attempt. Walker's neighbor, Mrs. Spicer, owned no slaves when the levee line was drawn, nor does she appear in Concordia's 1820 census. One wonders how she could possibly comply, without assistance.50

The parish judge, as the executive of local affairs, occupied an important leadership role in levee development. When he failed to inspire confidence or did not identify himself with the interests of the parish, his influence suffered. Concordia's parish judges had special difficulties with their office, because of the inequalities of wealth among the citizens and Concordia's vast size. Rich planters liked to have their own way, while the backwoods-men wanted to be left alone. And, the judge's routine involved strenuous wilderness travel. For instance, when the parish judge settled an estate, he might have to travel to the residence of the deceased, inventory property, and conduct succession sales. His books and courtroom were in Vidalia, but he might just as well attend to legal duties at Lake Providence or Bayou Crocodile.51

Several examples could be given of how various men performed as Concordia's parish judge. Not surprisingly, there was a high turnover rate. The aged Judge Robert

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Ogden, who supervised Concordia Parish from 1826 to 1828, brought learning and integrity to his task, but was too feeble to make the necessary trips. Judge Edward Broughton had difficulty in maintaining the dignity of the office, when he became the butt of jokes by frontiersmen who disliked probate costs. Among other tales, they said Broughton settled a small estate worth five hundred dollars and wrote the Kentucky heirs to send one hundred more to cover his fees. Judge George S. Guion conducted court from 1828 to 1836 wearing pistols in the wilder neighborhoods.52

Judge James Dunlap presided over the July 1811 jury that authorized Concordia's first levee. However, when the flood of 1813 showed the need for more embankments and better maintenance, it fell to Judge John Perkins, Dunlap's successor, to enforce upkeep and provide for the new installations. Governor Claiborne appointed Perkins as parish judge in March of 1813, and Perkins proved to be an ideal choice to lead Concordia at the time, because he was a "venerable [i.e., rich] and respected citizen and model planter." With these qualifications, Perkins would be taken seriously and would garner cooperation when he delegated responsibilities to the planter community. By early summer, Perkins was already involved with Concordia's levees and coping with the season's high water. For example, a surviving document shows that on May 1, 1813, David Lattimore and John Kimball responded to Perkins's request for a report on the condition of a levee built in
1811. The embankment ran from Vidalia down the Mississippi to [Price's] Bayou. Lattimore and Kimball said they looked at it and thought most of it would withstand high water, after proprietors had repaired "such places as have been trodden down by the stock and broken by the fall of trees." However, three sections seemed too weak to endure: a small area near Leonard Pornet's house, parts of Mrs. Spicer's, and all of the "Levey" that crossed the land of Peter Walker's heirs. Armed with this and similar inspection reports, Judge Perkins issued orders for repairs.53

A letter from Stephen Minor to Judge Perkins indicates that letters of notification went to the delinquents the same day the levee inspectors made their reports. Minor's response, on May 2nd, to Perkins's letter, expressed some dissatisfaction. Minor could not be too cavalier with Judge Perkins, but did let him know that he disliked the selective enforcement he saw in Concordia's public works. If Minor had to repair his levee, he thought the overseer and crew in charge of the road to Lake Concordia ought to receive similar attentions. The prose of Minor's letter shows the formal tone that alluvial planters employed among themselves, but with a thinly concealed sneer:

To The Hon'ble J. Perkins, Esqr.,
Dear Sir,
    Your communication under yesterday's date has been rec'd. You are pleased to order that my Levee be forthwith repaired. I deem it correct that every individual should in all cases conform strictly to the Parish Law, and all other laws. I shall therefore examine and attend to the state of my part of the Levee--I must however observe that I have a quantity
of corn to hawl out to my plantation on the lake, and a number of plows &c. to send out there—which I cannot do untill the road & Bridges leading from the river to the Lake are repaired. I beg you to consider this as a complaint made against those it may concern.54

Further in the letter, Minor told Perkins that a small levee ought to be built on Lake Concordia between Minor's land and that of Joseph Vidal. Such an embankment, one foot above high water, would prevent flooding if the river topped its banks and spilled into the Lake. Minutes from the August 9, 1813 police jury session show that Judge Perkins and the jurors acted on Minor's suggestion. They included this section of ground in a levee to be laid out by commissioners John Minor, Manuel Texada, and John Perkins. Indeed, it is likely that landowners frequently made suggestions about the placement of levees. They knew the topography best and had the most material concerns in the prevention of flooding. The selection of levee line locations at this time had nothing to do with decisions based on hydraulic science, but a great deal to do with the desires of influential residents whose slaves would be doing the work.55

A parish judge, however competent, could only execute the laws. For the initiation of new levee policies, the police jury had to be involved. Hence, when Concordia's police jury convened on August 9, 1813, after a spring and summer of watery devastation, the jurors dealt particularly with the creation of levees. The police jury provided additional protection from overflow—not directly through
public expenditure, but by forcing landowners within certain areas to build and maintain levees. Because of the police jury's resolutions, private persons in new levee "districts" had to protect themselves now as a public duty. Refusal or neglect would result in the forfeiture of their private property. The parish government, meanwhile, contributed nothing to the construction except the order to do it. In Concordia, as elsewhere on the Mississippi, the phrase "public works" had a nebulous meaning.

The August 1813 police jury session seemed important enough to the parish leadership to have a jury committee compose the minutes and publish them as a two-page broadside. In eight columns of very small print, a surviving copy of the broadside provides valuable detail on the operation of an early local government in American Louisiana. It contains a list of police jurors, examples of their characteristic methods of "government by committee," specifications for levee construction, and evidence about Concordia's unique early levee layouts. Just how unique, is shown by the following: when the legislature created a state levee law in 1816, it exempted Concordia Parish from the law's provisions. By 1816, this "American" levee-building community already had distinctive levee arrangements of its own.56

Who designed Concordia's levee system in 1813? Planters, of course. In Concordia, as elsewhere in Louisiana, police jury members generally came from the
planter class. As planters, they made the most extensive changes to the natural environment, and had a larger stake in the material development of the parish, than the squatters and non-commercial farmers. Planters had the greatest financial interest in levees, and they owned the majority of the workers who constructed them. And, voters generally elected planters to manage local affairs, even when non-planters made up a sizeable part of the electorate. This was certainly the case in Concordia. Jurors represented jury wards, but were not completely "representative" of the population. For example, the 1813 jury personnel consisted of Parish Judge John Perkins, two justices of the peace, and ten jurors. Two jurors who missed the meeting will be included with them for purposes of analysis. In what ways were they not representative? For one thing, all of the jurors owned land as required by territorial law, but only one-third of Concordia's 1810 household heads owned land (according to the 1811 tax list). All but one of the jurors owned slaves, yet just half of Concordia's 1810 household heads owned slaves. Jury members were not exclusively from the wealthiest group of planters, but did own more slaves than most Concordians. Eight of the fifteen ranked among planters with twenty or more slaves. Table 4.5 describes the parish leaders of 1813 in terms of their offices, property, length of residence, and committee assignments.57
TABLE 4.5

COMPOSITION OF CONCORDIA PARISH POLICE JURY, AUGUST 1813

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Member</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>1811 Acres</th>
<th>1811 Slaves</th>
<th>Came to Parish</th>
<th>No. of Committees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>John Perkins</td>
<td>Parish Judge</td>
<td>934</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1802 grant</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Minor</td>
<td>J. of Peace</td>
<td>3010</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>1802 grant</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arthur Andrews</td>
<td>J. of Peace</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>before 1807</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edward King</td>
<td>Juror</td>
<td>960</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>1807-11</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elijah Cushing</td>
<td>Juror</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1803 grant</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thos. Freeland</td>
<td>Juror</td>
<td>640</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>1807-11</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John D. Smith</td>
<td>Juror</td>
<td>460</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>before 1807</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wm. Hootsell</td>
<td>Juror</td>
<td>920</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>1803 grant</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Blunt</td>
<td>Juror</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>1802 grant</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Walker</td>
<td>Juror</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1802 grant</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wm. J. Offitt</td>
<td>Juror</td>
<td>560</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1807-11</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samuel Phipps</td>
<td>Juror</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1803 grant</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burwell Vick</td>
<td>Juror</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>1807-11</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Bass</td>
<td>Juror (abs.)</td>
<td>1400</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>before 1807</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simon Prestly</td>
<td>Juror (abs.)</td>
<td>640</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1801 squatter</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is interesting to note that these men were in the small segment of Concordia's population who persisted, over time, in one place. Seven of the fifteen, as Spanish grantees, had been associated with the parish since its infancy, and four others were in Concordia by 1807. This suggests that jurors were well-known among the residents, and that they inspired confidence by their familiarity with local affairs. Since jurors made decisions that affected business and bound the community with the force of law, voters usually preferred materially successful men for these positions. One might imagine that class tensions existed between planters and hunting-farmers. Their interests did not always coincide, and their goals in the community were often quite different. Nevertheless, mitigating factors helped to reconcile the poorer alluvial settlers to planter dominance at this time.
For one thing, Concordia planters of the early 1800s, and their Natchez District counterparts, had often risen to prominence from frontier beginnings. They knew what it was to "live hard and shoot straight," and their demeanor to other whites was not unduly haughty or pretentious. Adam Hodgson, a British traveler and economist who met Natchez District planters in the 1820s, praised their simplicity, finding their "plain friendly manners" to be quite pleasing. Hodgson believed that these men acted in the style of the best type of yeomen and second-rank county gentry of the Georgian heyday in Britain, eighty years earlier. Sturdy, useful, "retired, unostentatious, and independent," the river planters served in whatever public capacity the community required. They were indispensable unpaid officials who staffed the myriad committees of local government, just like gentlemen in the shires of England. Unlike the English, however, Hodgson said that planters detested snobbery and even allowed their hired employees to eat with them like family. Religion, the honor code, public opinion, and self-interest helped to keep would-be aristocrats in line, and the material success of the swamp planters inspired their fellows by confirming the republican vision of America as a land of opportunity. If planters demanded attention from the fact that they owned more land and slaves than many of their neighbors, they also received respect that was not based entirely on money, but also on their usefulness, integrity, and independence.
So, even though they were not "typical" people, Concordia's jurors of 1813 exemplified virtues the community admired.\(^{58}\)

Another factor that appealed to the average citizen was that this type of government operated cheaply through the willingness of planters to perform public service for little or no pay. A standing professional bureaucracy, budgeting in advance, and the hurried spending of that budget before the year's end, were not features of their system. In fact, it was common for the parish treasurer to take vouchers during the year for monies owed, to calculate the total debt at the end of the fiscal year, and to figure the tax rate from the assessment list to produce exactly the amount required. Taxes and spending were low.

In 1813, Concordia required a parish tax on land and slaves, at one third the rate of the state tax, to raise a public revenue. The 1813 jury minutes do not include exact figures, but an 1815 document mentions the sum of $517.83 in the parish treasury. Public servants received little compensation for their work. The jury paid $2 each to the men who readied its minutes for publication, promised road overseers $2 per day while they were actually engaged in their duties, and appropriated $10, "or as much thereof as may be necessary," for the upkeep of the courthouse during the year. An 1817 capitulation itemized the revenue: $775 from land; $1,142 from slaves (taxed at $1 each); $7.95 from 2,762 horned cattle (at 3 cents each); $20 on two tavern licenses; and $25 on a lawyer's license.\(^{59}\)
The parish functioned on a system of "government by committee." Table 4.5 on the police jury's composition in 1813 shows that numerous committee appointments went to the jurors. The judge and justices of the peace each received three committee assignments, and jury members sat on a total of seven committees. The sheriff, the constable, a militia officer, and three private citizens were also drafted for committee service. In 1813, Concordia had three levee committees, a road locating committee, a publications committee, a committee to confer with the Natchez city council about ferry rates, a committee to investigate Concordia's ferry options, a committee to petition for a delay in forwarding the state tax (because of the overflow), and a committee to inquire into the disappearance of lumber from the courthouse. None of the committee members received compensation for their services, except the publication committee ($6).60

In the 1813 Concordia police jury resolutions, levees took pride of place. The 1811 levees had failed to provide adequate protection, so Resolution One of 1813 repealed the July 1811 resolution. Resolution Two in 1813 authorized the construction of two levees. Levee A was to be supervised by John Minor, William Blunt, and Joseph Walker (a future governor). This levee ran around Lake Concordia and on Cypress Bayou Ridge. All three commissioners for Levee A owned property the levee protected and slaves who would maintain it. It was natural, therefore, for the police
jury to put them in charge. A fear of conflict of interest was not a guiding principle in duty assignments, rather, men were appointed to tasks in which they had the most natural interest. Assignments followed the stake-in-society approach, rather than that of disinterested or professional impartiality.  

Levee B of 1813, in Resolution Two, took a meandering course, directed by John Minor, John Perkins, and Manuel Texada. It protected part of the banks of Lake Concordia, ran along the division line between Stephen Minor and Joseph Vidal (as Minor requested), followed Bayou St. Joseph to the Mississippi, ran along the Mississippi to Carter's Bayou, and there joined a high ridge, which served in a levee's stead. Properties of wealthy slaveowners such as John Perkins, W. G. Forman, Joseph Vidal, Stephen & John Minor, Leonard Pornet, and George N. Regan lay in this leveed region. Resolution Three of the police jury dealt with Levee C, which enclosed land between the Mississippi and Gooding's Bayou. Burwell Vick, Arthur Andrews, and Constable Edward W. Tyler received responsibility for this levee—a structure which provided ring-like protection. The resolution specified that proprietors within the levee were to pay proportionate shares of the expense of its construction. Levee C also included two cross levees which stretched across properties, rather than down a waterway. Proprietors of these lands had to pay shares "in proportion to the quantity of land each proprietor holds within said
levee." They could pay in labor or money when commissioners asked for it, but in case of default, commissioners were to hire laborers at one dollar per day. The jury even authorized Levee C commissioners to hire a construction superintendent to make the cross levees. Levee D, a less complicated embankment, was placed under a single overseer, Augustine Freeland. It lined the Mississippi and Bruin's Bayou, protecting Thomas Freeland's plantation.62

With these resolutions, levee construction was well underway in Concordia by 1813, but travelers like William Richardson (1816) and Thomas Nuttall (1820), and gazetteers like that of Samuel R. Brown (1817), continued to claim that the west bank levees did not extend north of Point Coupee. The oversight becomes plausible when one examines the routes of Concordia's levee lines. Levees in Concordia did not simply follow the bank of the river, but responded to the topography of the parish, according to where reclaimable lands were located. The portions of Concordia's levees that fronted the Mississippi were visible to river traffic, but some left the river to surround lakes, follow bayous, divide proprietors, and run across fields. Levees on Lake Concordia are a good example. At high water, the lake communicated with the Mississippi, rose when it rose, and was controlled by the construction of levees on both banks. One levee ringed its "O" District, the Lake's interior, while the other guarded the outer bank. A levee of this type would have been somewhat
invisible from the river, yet was Concordia's first levee (1811). Concordia's 1813 levees also coursed into the interior of the parish. Levees A and C, for example, terminated at their points of beginning. People inside the levee were protected, but those outside went under. Therefore, buying a share in these structures, in labor or money, was a very direct form of flood insurance.  

A person who expected Concordia's levees to simply advance up the Mississippi, like those on the lower river, would be astonished. Parishes further down, like St. Charles and St. John the Baptist, lacked the option of a settled interior because their soil dropped too quickly in elevation. Creole plantations that lined the river seldom strayed from it. In those regions, a single line of levees on the riverside protected nearly everything that could be improved. Concordia, however, contained a considerable amount of interior real estate which could be reclaimed. The process of overflow and sedimentation on its bayous, lakes, and streams furnished margins of cultivable, elevated ground in Concordia's interior. The waterways overflowed dangerously on occasion, but infrequently enough to tempt unwary planters inland. Once there, with cleared fields and mortgages, they meant to stay. Then, the protection of their improvements entailed the construction of levees in complex, meandering shapes that resembled road districts. Indeed, settlements, roads, and levees all used the same ribbons of ground, standing above normal overflow.
When floods showed the precariousness of their improvements, interior planters would ask the police jury to declare the whole neighborhood a levee district. Once the parish had done so, the levee became a public work that residents were legally obliged to perform.

Some landowners in levee districts found themselves with more protection than they wanted. At least four of Concordia's proprietors lost lands in 1814 for failing to construct, or help pay for, the cross levees adjoined to Levee C. As law required, the commissioners of the district--Burwell Vick, Arthur Andrews, and Edward W. Tyler--invested labor and money payments to complete the levee, in spite of the delinquents. Then, they informed Judge Perkins of the defaulters' identities. In his public capacity, Perkins auctioned the properties on October 15, and November 19, 1814, to reimburse the commissioners. A forty-five acre tract, "supposed to belong to Stephen Justice," about twenty miles above Vidalia, was sold to Burwell Vick for $49.40. Vick owned the land next door, and Perkins said Vick made "the best and highest bid." Justice had received a Spanish grant for 480 acres in Concordia in 1803 and was taxed for it in 1807, but did not appear on the 1810 census as a parish resident. Non-residents who failed to perform the required tasks received scant sympathy from locals. The 1813 resolutions said four insertions in a Natchez newspaper would constitute adequate notice to non-residents. Obviously, Justice had not done
his part as a responsible landowner in this levee-building community. Folks at the courthouse claimed not even to know for sure that he owned the land. So, Concordia had to get rid of Justice for its own protection. Another tract adjacent to Vick went on the block the same day and was transferred to him for the same causes. Its owner, John Martin, appeared on the 1811 tax list with forty five acres. Martin lost the land, eighteen miles above Vidalia, and Vick bought it for $43.64. A month later, Vick picked up two other properties of levee defaulters. John Stowers, taxed for 170 acres and 4 slaves in 1811, did not pay his share on the cross levee. Vick got Stowers's real estate for $89.40. The fourth tract, 138 1/2 acres "supposed to be the property of Alexander Owens," went to Vick for $79.32. Owens had been taxed in 1811 for 138 acres and 5 slaves. After 1814, he ceased to be a landowner there.64

The 1813 jury session also provided a levee for the "O" District (Levee A) inside Lake Concordia. This is where some of Concordia's richest planters resided or owned property. They built levees on their own waterfronts, as required by law, but were still troubled by a tract of unimproved land, at a place which flooded too often to attract a private purchaser. The site had been granted at one time to Joseph Minor, but he tired of chronic overflows and renounced it. Now, neither the state nor the parish could compel any proprietor to assume responsibility for the land. Yet, without a levee on this tract, other levees
on the lake would be useless. What was the solution? Affected landowners requested the authority to erect their own funding district, then taxed themselves to provide the levee. A police jury session of May 2, 1814, appointed two landowners—James Kempe and Joseph Walker—to estimate the labor and expense of closing the gap. They reported it would take $1,272.60, which sum could be raised by a tax of 20 cents per acre on land within the "O" District. Landowners cooperated with the project, collected the money, and "expended [it] agreeably to the resolution." This was levee work being done on public land by a voluntary association, with the blessing of the police jury. However, initial construction was one thing, and maintenance another. Without continuous oversight, the levee would crumble. Hence, by May 6, 1817, the levee commissioners of the "O" District decided they needed the same sum again to strengthen and renew the embankment. In their report, they subjoined a list of landowners, acreage, and tax shares. As an indicator of the expenses involved in alluvial landownership, the list is included here as Table 4.6. The total cost of the upgrade was $1,272.60, and affected proprietors paid shares according to their protected acreage.65

It should be noted that the largest assessment fell on one of the men who asked for the project—James Kempe. This Natchez resident and absentee proprietor paid more than $800 in three years for his part of this "public"
**TABLE 4.6**

**LANDOWNERS IN THE "O" DISTRICT, CONCORDIA PARISH, OBLIGED TO RAISE $1,272.60 FOR LEVEE BUILDING ON PUBLIC LAND**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Owner</th>
<th>Acres</th>
<th>Amount Due</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>William Lintott's heirs</td>
<td>451</td>
<td>$90.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Blount</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnathan Thompson</td>
<td>550</td>
<td>110.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green &amp; Taylor</td>
<td>586</td>
<td>117.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Walker</td>
<td>346</td>
<td>69.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. B. Green for Mrs. B.</td>
<td>338</td>
<td>67.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Kempe</td>
<td>2,009</td>
<td>401.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexander McInnis</td>
<td>825</td>
<td>165.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John &amp; Stephen Minor</td>
<td>378</td>
<td>75.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles B. Green</td>
<td>380</td>
<td>76.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**$1,272.60**

levee, above and beyond what he spent for a levee on his own land. As a commercial planter, Kempe realized that the point of owning land on Lake Concordia was to grow cotton. If flooding prevented this, his investment meant nothing. Therefore, for Kempe, levees were simply part of the overhead of doing business. His interests demanded the construction of the levee, and his wealth allowed him to bear the expense. Kempe was not too proud to cooperate with neighbors to put the plan into action. Together, they altered the lake's natural cycle of flooding and gave security to their crops and incomes.

In years to come, James Kempe and his type prevailed in Concordia; public works defaulters like Stephen Justice did not. The flexibility, capitalization, and solution-seeking that typified planter entrepreneurs helped them to survive the winnowing process which produced a "levee building community." The community consisted of people who
were disciplined, organized, and aware of the need for an occasionally coercive government. The possession of a slave force, adequate for levee building and commercial planting, became a virtual prerequisite for full participation in the community, and landowners who stayed learned to appreciate a government that could enforce public duties. Floodwater made no allowances, and neither could Concordia. Truly, it was on its way to becoming a frontier for the rich. The bottom line? In the 1810s, commercial swamp planters made enough money from farming the reclaimed land to make levee construction worthwhile. They were an "American" levee building community, but their goals and methods were so similar to those of the Creoles as to be almost indistinguishable.

Records from William Kenner and Co., a New Orleans factorage firm, show explicitly what was at stake in the quest to levee Concordia. In 1818, the firm wrote a customer in Liverpool that John Minor's Concordia properties (protected by levees) were "considered among the best Cotton Land in this Country" and that they produced superior, desirable fiber. Cotton buyers recognized the quality of alluvial cotton, and swamp planters like the Minors could sell virtually everything they produced in good market years. Political conditions in the 1810s furnished excellent markets. Blockades, embargoes, and international trade restrictions interrupted cotton exports during the Napoleonic Wars, but shipping resumed with the
defeat of Bonaparte. Then, British factories rushed to buy American cotton, and the demand caused the price to rise. Steamboat Captain Anthony Gale wrote a friend in August of 1816 that he had sold a bale in New Orleans for an unheard-of 36 cents a pound.66

Table 4.7 shows the course of cotton prices in the 1810s, with comments from William Kenner and Co.'s correspondence about the reasons for the amounts. It shows how firmly the price of cotton was tied to the fortunes of Britain. Concordia planters welcomed Napoleon's defeat, and John Minor named a plantation "Waterloo," in honor of the occasion. Of course, when cotton prices rose, so did the demand for land, slaves, and levees. Land development and flood control were inextricable from the market.67

Cotton prices remained high until 1819. As a result, agricultural developers showed a keen interest in levees that protected cotton fields. The Louisiana Gazette of May 29, 1816, also reported the passage of a federal sugar tariff. This measure increased profits for sugar planters, the other major levee-building group, by enacting price supports to guarantee domestic profits. So, by the late 1810s, the lower Mississippi's riverfront seemed like a capitalist's paradise for commercial farmers. Master speculators like General James Wilkinson bought plantations on the Mississippi to enjoy the boom, and in May of 1816, he advised a wealthy friend, Solomon Van Rensselaer of New York, to imitate his leved investments. Wilkinson said
that Van Rensselear could invest $30,000 in an alluvial plantation, make $5,000 the first year and $10,000 the third. A few seasons of planting would recover the capital, and the rest would be clear profit. Bear in mind that these calculations were from new investors who paid inflated start-up costs. Established proprietors like the Minors, who already owned land, slaves, and levees, really benefited from the windfall of the late 1810s. No wonder they wanted dry cotton fields and a full planting season.

The boom allowed the Minors to buy luxuries such as mahogany furniture from the Mssrs. D'Wolf, Packard, & D'Wolf of New York for their Natchez mansion house at "Concord." An invoice in the Minor papers documents the shipment in 1817 of fashionable and lavish appointments, such as: a sideboard, extension dining tables, pier tables, looking glasses, card and dressing tables, a sofa and bolster, canopied bedstead, 151 yards of dimity drapery, and eighteen lyre-back chairs. According to other accounts in the papers, cotton sales from their leveed Concordia properties also supplied little treats such as barrels of oysters; pots of guava jelly; casks of imported claret, sauterne, champagne, and brandy; cases of pickles, olives, and brandied fruits; and hampers of anisette. Leveed agriculture supplied them with comfort, display, and security. For what else did alluvial proprietors strive? In the 1810s, levees made sense to the sensible and dollars for the wise.
### TABLE 4.7

COTTON PRICE DATA FROM THE CORRESPONDENCE OF WILLIAM KENNER & CO., NEW ORLEANS, TO STEPHEN AND JOHN MINOR, OF NATCHEZ AND CONCORDIA, 1809 TO 1818

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cents per lb.</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Kenner's Explanation of this Price</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>23 Dec 1809</td>
<td>Demand is low at New York b/c U.S.-British relations are strained</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>7 Nov 1811</td>
<td>No sales even @ this price. All ships laid up. Business at a halt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>20 Dec 1811</td>
<td>Prices will rise if a settlement can be made with Britain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>28 Dec 1812</td>
<td>War. Planters cannot sell crops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>13 Jan 1813</td>
<td>Rush and anxiety b/c an Embargo is expected. Kenner learns that it passed U. S. Senate on Dec 18th.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>25 Jan 1813</td>
<td>Few purchasers even @ this. Why buy what cannot be shipped? Some hope to ship in Spanish vessels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>12 Apr 1813</td>
<td>New York optimistic about defeat of Napoleon in Russia--Russian &amp; Swedish ships may carry cotton to Britain this summer. Bad news for Napoleon is good for cotton men who sell to Britain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>6 Dec 1813</td>
<td>Bonaparte is winning, but not his subordinates. Claiborne has laid an embargo to protect U. S. ships. British have Balize and Gulf Coast under heavy blockade.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>1 Apr 1814</td>
<td>Peace is expected; prices will rise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>17 Jun 1814</td>
<td>A high price, but few sales. Gov. Claiborne's embargo was lifted, but Admiral Cochrane's blockade prevents shipment. Horrible news--Napoleon resurgent! Has entered Paris with new army!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>11 Nov 1814</td>
<td>Decent price, no buyers. Peace talks failed; cotton unsaleable. Kenner says, &quot;There is at present no actual price for the article.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cents per lb.</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Kenner's Explanation of this Price</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>2 Dec 1814</td>
<td>No one expects to sell. General Jackson is organizing New Orleans' defenses. Anxiety stalls sales.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>8 Jan 1815</td>
<td>JACKSON WINS BATTLE OF NEW ORLEANS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>10 Mar 1815</td>
<td>Cotton scarce; demand brisk. Kenner advises Minor to buy it for up to 15 cents for resale. An express from Washington tells of peace. Sugar rises to 9 cents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>18 Jun 1815</td>
<td>WELLINGTON WINS AT WATERLOO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>17 July 1815</td>
<td>Short supply. 25 cents @ New York.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>12 Sept 1815</td>
<td>High price, and New Orleans is bare of &quot;the article.&quot; Cotton men rejoice at Napoleon's surrender &amp; U.S.-British commercial treaty. Kenner says cotton is high b/c U.S. lacks specie. Cotton &amp; bills are accepted in exchange for British dry goods.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>13 Oct 1815</td>
<td>Seller of Louisiana cotton at N.Y. turned down 36 cts. and vowed to get 40! Kenner says foreign prices do not justify these, &quot;but the difficulty of making remittances from the Atlantic States&quot; makes people willing to pay any price for New Orleans cotton &quot;rather than give 15 to 20 p cent for Sterling Bills.&quot; 4 Nov 1815, Kenner said cotton @ N.Y. is 40 cts. and sugar, 22 cts. He saw loaf sugar at N.Y. at 54 cts. per lb.: &quot;Enormous&quot;!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>8 Jun 1816</td>
<td>Even poor grades bring 28 cts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>24 Nov 1817</td>
<td>Sales very brisk. In June 1817, Minor family buys expensive N.Y. furniture. In August 1817, the Minors are building a new gin &amp; planning a grand staircase for the entrance at &quot;Concord.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>4 Apr 1818</td>
<td>Account of John Minor shows his plantation is named &quot;WATERLOO.&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### TABLE 4.7—CONTINUED

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cents per lb.</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Kenner's Explanation of this Price</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>6 Jun 1818</td>
<td>Inferior grades are 30 cts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>23 Dec 1818</td>
<td>Sales are part-cash, part on time.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**ENDNOTES**


New Orleans Municipal Records, folder 15, June-July 1808; Dec. 2, 1808; folder 18, Dec. 28, 1811; folder 18, Aug. 1812; folder 24, April 27, 1815; folder 27, Jan. 10, 1819; City Council of New Orleans, "An Ordinance concerning the cleaning of the city and suburbs of New Orleans," Louisiana Gazette and New Orleans Mercantile Advertiser, May 15, 1816. See New Orleans Municipal Records, LSU, for "Reports from the Mayor to the City Treasurer on the Collection of the Levee Tax," 1810-1829, and "Contracts, Leases, and Bids," 1780-1839—especially folder 13, Mar. 31, 1806, Council of the City, Port Regulations, New Orleans, Article 3, "Levee Duty," and June 6, 1806, City Council to the Mayor of New Orleans, "Regulations requiring payments of levee fees of all vessels that land alongside fort St. Charles and extending area of levee in which levee regulations are in effect."


Brackenridge, 177; Brown, 136-37; Hodgson, I, 162-63.

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Ibid. In later years, levees grew too expensive for the double-line solution, and decisions about levee placements, more volatile. A setback for the community's benefit might throw a plantation into the flood plain and destroy a means of production, simply because the banks were likely to cave in the future. Under these circumstances, government bodies and the engineers who positioned levees attracted emotional criticism from aggrieved parties and their supporters. The issue cropped up in earnest with the advent of "scientific" flood control. Hydraulic engineers in the 1850s wanted a rational levee line which enclosed only the land that was practical to save. In scientific layouts, much river frontage where the older plantations stood and the most elite families resided was put outside the levees to give banks a wider berth. Fortunately for the acceptance of levees in the 1810s, the day of the engineer was well in the future. Virtually no one lived more than one plantation deep prior to the 1830s, and no body of riverfront voters would have countenanced extreme caution in the placement of the levee line. While individuals supplied, and the voters' representatives controlled, the dimensions and placement of levees, embankments had to be both flexible and affordable. Humane half-measures like double levees mollified landowners and satisfied the public that flood control policies were fair. See, in particular, Chapter Six, "Location," in William Hewson, Principles and Practice of Embanking Lands from River-Floods, as applied to "Levees" of the Mississippi, 2d edition (New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1870), 106-15. In this professional civil engineer's levee manual, written 1856 to 1858, Hewson complained about "private interest" in the location of levee lines. On page 106, he said, "A Planter has frequently been known to be so short-sighted as to have urged, and in fact obtained, the location of a Levee around three sides of even a 'turnip patch' rather than consent to the necessity" for putting the land outside the levee.

Brackenridge, 177; Brown, 137; Bernhard, 82; Louisiana Legislature, "An Act concerning the levees and roads on the banks of the Mississippi and for other purposes," Acts Passed at the Second Session of the Second Legislature of the State of Louisiana (New Orleans: Peter K. Wagner, 1816), 108; Elida Millet Caillouet, Lions on the River: A Potpourri. St. John the Baptist Parish (Tucson: Alphagraphics, 1989), 28, 40, 43. Caillouet, born in St. John the Baptist Parish in 1906, said that in her girlhood, the cattle roamed at will on the levees, and the syndic could impound cattle left on the levee after 6 P.M. She also said the open range issue debated with vigor in the riparian parishes of Louisiana well up into the 1940s.

Brown, 136-37, 229; Brackenridge, 177-78; Louisiana Legislature, "An Act concerning the levees and roads," (1816), 106-8. The 1816 levee law required cypress
sheathing on new levees and on levees that crossed uninhabited land, with the option to use palmetto.


16Legislature of Orleans Territory, "An act relative to roads, levees, and the police of cattle" (1807); New Orleans Courier, May 4, 1812.


22 Darby, 236-37; Stoddard, 202.

23 Ibid.; Christiana E. Shupan, Grand Gulf, Miss., to Kate Adams, Waterproof, La., Feb. 27, 1849, Adams (Israel) Family Papers, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, LSU.


28"List of lands surveyed by the authority of the Commandant of the Post of Concord, Don Joseph Vidal, the persons names for whom they were surveyed, and the date of the certificate of survey &c.," Vidal (Joseph) Papers, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, LSU; Price, 433; Calhoun, 15 (Jan. 1932): 56-57.

29Calhoun, 15 (Jan. 1932): 56; Manuel de Salcedo, New Orleans, to Joseph Vidal, Post of Concord, Oct. 30, 1801, Concordia Collection, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, LSU. The Concordia Collection at LSU is a group of original, loose documents from the archives of Concordia Parish which were collected, organized, and preserved by Robert Dabney Calhoun, a Vidalia attorney. Calhoun wrote scholarly articles on Concordia Parish history for the Louisiana Historical Quarterly and donated his papers to the archives at Louisiana State University. For Spanish land laws at the end of the colonial period, see Francis P. Burns, "The Spanish Land Laws of Louisiana," Louisiana Historical Quarterly 11 (Oct. 1928): 557-81; also, Governor Don Manuel Gayoso de Lemos, "Instructions to be observed by the commandants of the posts in this province for the admission of new settlers," Sept. 9, 1797, and Intendant Don Juan Bonaventure Morales, "The King Whom God Preserve: General regulations and instructions for conceding lands," July 17, 1799, in American State Papers, Vol. 5, Gale and Seaton Edition, 730-34.

30Spanish grant to David Banister Morgan, April 6, 1803, Concordia Parish, La., Record Book "A-I," 131-32. According to Calhoun, 15 (July 1932): 445, Morgan went on to become senior brigadier general in Governor Claiborne's territorial militia and Concordia's first state senator under the Constitution of 1812.


33 Concordia County Court minutes, Oct. 1805-April 1807, Concordia Collection, LSU; Schultz, 140; Concordia Parish, La., Conveyance Book B, 90.


35 "A Statement of the Taxable lands in the Parish of Concordia, Orleans Territory, as assessed 18th August, 1807," and "Tax List, 1811," Concordia Collection, LSU; List of lands surveyed by authority of Commandant Vidal, Vidal (Joseph) Papers, LSU.


37 Thomas Mitchell, Jefferson Co., Miss. Territory, to Jacob Beiller, Concordia Par., Orleans Territory, Dec. 11, 1810, Snyder (Alonzo) Papers, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, LSU. For a discussion of custom, law, and squatters' titles in the Natchez District, see Morris, 19-20.


39 John James Audubon, Delineations of American Scenery and Character (New York: G. A. Baker & Co., 1926), 137-42. Audubon's 435 double elephant folio plates of Birds of America appeared from 1826 to 1838. To accompany the illustrations, he published five volumes of text, which he called Ornithological Biography. To make the material more readable, he interspersed his scientific observations on birds with "Episodes" and "Delineations" of the frontier. The text volumes included about sixty such essays, written from 1808 to 1834, concerning pioneer life in the Ohio and Mississippi Valleys.

40 Audubon, 137-42.
William Richardson's journal shows that he and his party frequently went ashore to buy provisions at private homes. In one stretch of river, such excursions occurred on April 4, April 7, April 8, and April 9, 1816. Richardson, 26, 29, 31-32; S. Richardson, to John B. Willis, Port Gibson, Miss. Territory, Sept. 8, 1814, Willis (Family) Papers, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, LSU; Thomas Bangs Thorpe, The Master's House: or, Scenes Descriptive of Southern Life, 3d ed. (New York: J. C. Derby, 1855), 125; Audubon, 137-42; Price, 432; Calhoun, 15 (Jan. 1932): 63-64. See also "First Settlement on the Tensas," Concordia Intelligencer, March 14, 1846.

Audubon, 141-42.

Ibid. Descriptions of the Balize at various periods can be found in Philip Pittman, The Present State of the European Settlements on the Mississippi (London: J. Nourse, 1770; reprint, Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1906), 38-39; James Pitot, Observations on the Colony of Louisiana from 1796 to 1802 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, for the Historic New Orleans Collection, 1979), 98-99; and de Montule, 72-73. The Spanish tried to combat the marshiness of the land at the Balize by making an embankment as a building site, but it sank into the marsh. For accounts of St. Genevieve and New Madrid, Missouri, moving to higher ground, see Schultz, 55, 104. For a description of a Lower Mississippi River dock and warehouse complex in St. John the Baptist Parish, Louisiana, see Caillouet, 87.

United States Census of Concordia Parish, Territory of Orleans, 1810; United States Census of Concordia Parish, Louisiana, 1820 and 1830. The section from Walnut Hills to Milliken's Bend was quite undeveloped and remote. When it still belonged to Ouachita Parish, a justice of the peace appended a note to the 1810 census of Ouachita to excuse the census enumerator from blame for completing the count in a second-hand fashion. The justice testified that the population of the alluvial region opposite Walnut Hills had to be estimated, because travel was virtually impossible. "The late heavy rains now render it impracticable without great danger." Note by Thomas B. Franklin, J. P., Dec. 24, 1810, Census of Ouachita Parish, Territory of Orleans.

Observations resulting from searches in indexes to the 1820 census.

Census of Concordia Parish, Territory of Orleans, 1810; Concordia Tax List, 1811, Concordia Collection, LSU.

Andrew A. Humphreys and Henry L. Abbot, Report upon the Physics and Hydraulics of the Mississippi River; upon the Protection of the Alluvial Region against Overflow; and upon the Deepening of the Mouths, Professional Papers of

48 Concordia County Court Minutes, Oct. 1805-April 1807, Concordia Collection, LSU; Schultz, 140; "An act supplementary to and amending an act entitled "An act relative to roads, levees and to the police of cattle,"" Acts Passed at the Second Session of the Third Legislature of the Territory of Orleans (New Orleans: Thierry, 1811), 180-84; Humphreys and Abbot, 170.


50 Mrs. Spicer's slaveless status is revealed in the 1811 Concordia tax list, Concordia Collection, LSU. Dimensions of 1811 Concordia levees are derived from the commissioners' notices to Walker and Michie.

51 Price, 436. J. C. Furnas, The Americans: A Social History of the United States, 1587-1914, (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1969), 256-57, contains a humorous account of itinerant justice in frontier America: "Chances of his being in that office on a given day were low. Much of the time he was away on circuit. The population of the new country was scattered, its legal system primitive. To cope with the settlers' litigiousness and witnesses' reluctance to travel far over atrocious roads, the courts—and the bar practicing before it—had to be as migratory as Merovingian kings. From courthouse to courthouse, county by county, judge and lawyers rode horseback pilgrimages together in an organized circuit. Both bench and bar wore the same uniform." Novelist Joseph Kirkland described their appearance: "tall black hats, 'tailcoats'... and 'biled shirts,' with limp cotton collars rolling over black neckerchiefs tied in single bows." Each judge or lawyer carried spare clothing in saddlebags, along with: "Blackstone's Commentaries, the Revised Statutes... Jones' Forms of Procedure [and] a travelling flask of whiskey," in Joseph Kirkland, The McVeys (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1888), 111-13.

53Calhoun, 15 (July 1932): 450; Calhoun, 16 (Oct. 1933): 597; Price, 436; Levee report of David Lattimore and John Kimball, Concordia Parish, La., May 1, 1813, Concordia Collection, LSU.

54Stephen Minor, Natchez, to Judge John Perkins, [Concordia Parish, La.], May 2, 1813, Concordia Collection, LSU.

55Ibid.; Concordia Resolutions, Aug. 9, 1813, Concordia Collection, LSU.

56Concordia Resolutions, Aug. 9, 1813, Concordia Collection, LSU; Louisiana Legislature, "An act concerning the levees and the roads," (1816), 106.

57Table includes parish jurors, justices, and judge listed in Concordia Resolutions, Aug. 9, 1813, Concordia Collection, LSU; property holdings in Concordia tax lists, 1807 and 1811, Concordia Collection, LSU; and Spanish grant list, Vidal (Joseph) Papers, LSU.

58Hodgson, I, 184-85.

59Concordia Resolutions of May 1815, Willis (Family) Papers, LSU; Recapitulations of Tax Assessments, 1817, Concordia Collection, LSU; Concordia Resolutions of Aug. 9, 1813, Concordia Collection, LSU.

60Concordia Resolutions of Aug. 9, 1813, Concordia Collection, LSU.

61Ibid.

62Ibid.

63Ibid.; Richardson, 36; Nuttall, 241; Brown, 136, 139.

64Concordia Parish, La., Conveyance Book C, 22-26; Concordia tax lists, 1807 and 1811, Concordia Collection, LSU; Concordia Parish, Territory of Orleans, 1810 census.

65"O" District Levee Report of James Kempe and Joseph Walker, May 6, 1817, Concordia Collection, LSU.

66William Kenner & Co., New Orleans, to George Green, Liverpool, Dec. 5, 1818, Kenner (William) Papers, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, LSU; Capt. Anthony
R. Gale, New Orleans, to [Nathaniel] Evans, Aug. 15, 1816, Evans (Nathaniel, and Family) Papers, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, LSU.

67 The table is composed of data from numerous items of business correspondence from the Kenner (William) Papers, LSU. The letters date from Dec. 23, 1809, to Dec. 23, 1818. Most are from William Kenner or his clerks to Stephen Minor, until Stephen's death in November of 1815, and to Stephen's brother and executor, John Minor, thereafter.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE MATURING LEVEE SYSTEM: LOUISIANA'S LEVEE LAWS OF 1816 AND 1829

Prior to 1830, Louisiana's levees comprised virtually the entire flood control system on the Mississippi River. By the time Mississippi enacted its first levee law (for the town of Warrenton) in 1819, parts of Louisiana had been leveed for more than a century. County levees did not appear until the 1830s in the Delta of Mississippi, and Arkansas passed no levee laws until 1840. Therefore, the importance of Louisiana's levee laws cannot be overstated. They served as guidelines for reclamation throughout the Mississippi Valley. Yet, Louisiana actually had no levee "system" in the early 1800s but merely a string of rural levees, administered by parish police juries, and a city levee at New Orleans. The Territory of Orleans levee law of 1807 gave every parish authority over levees within its own borders, but established no central board to coordinate flood control on a regional basis. When flood scares in 1816 and 1828 shook the people's faith in the 1807 law, reformers called not for centralization but merely for better levees. New laws enacted in 1816 and 1829 required expansions in size, but also retained Louisiana's dependence on the parish supervision of levees built by
FIGURE 5.1

HOUSEHOLD AND PLANTATION STATISTICS FOR ALLUVIAL PARISHES OF LOUISIANA, 1820; SHOWING THE NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDS AND PLANTERS (MEN WITH TWENTY OR MORE HANDS IN AGRICULTURE); OR, OR PLANTATIONS (HOUSEHOLDS WITH TWENTY OR MORE SLAVES, WHERE THE NUMBER ENGAGED IN AGRICULTURE WAS UNAVAILABLE)
landowners. Inevitably, these structures could not completely subdue the river because of the lack of inter-parish cooperation. However, within the realm of what was politically feasible, and in view of the resources available, the levee reforms of 1816 and 1829 did constitute an improvement. The question was: when the immediate peril passed, how long would mandates for reform continue?  

In 1816, Louisiana had been a state for only four years and had just celebrated the anniversary of the Battle of New Orleans. Peace brought a resumption of exports. Prices for cotton and sugar soared. As planters expanded and opened new plantations, levee lines rose in parishes north of the old leveed region. This divided the Mississippi from another section of its floodplain and raised the height of water in its channel. Meanwhile, peace in the West brought settlers into the Upper Mississippi and Ohio River Valleys who cleared land for farming. In places like Illinois and Indiana, deforestation caused runoffs which increased the river's volume because of more rapid drainage. Unfortunately for Louisiana, farmers in the Old Northwest contributed nothing to the upgrading of levees. New Orleans flourished on the transshipment of goods that Midwestern farmers produced, but planters on the Lower Mississippi footed the bill for bigger levees. Hence, levees became an object of intense scrutiny in the spring of 1816. Their heighth, breadth, and upkeep were variables that people in Louisiana controlled. So, amid news of
rising water from up north, the state's Second Legislature laid down a new code to guard riparian improvements.²

In view of the importance of the high water of 1816 as a catalyst for levee reform, it is curious that chroniclers of floods on the Mississippi have said little or nothing about it. John Monette's article, "The Mississippi Floods," ignores the 1816 flood, as does Goodspeed's Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Louisiana (1892) in its piece on "Floods, Crevasses and Levees." Even the Delta Survey of Humphreys and Abbott (1861) merely notes that New Orleans flooded in 1816 because of crevasses. In fact, though, that was about the extent of the damages. New Orleans and the left-bank plantations of Orleans Parish suffered, but most of the leveed region escaped unharmed. Thus, the high water of 1816 was not significant because of the destruction it caused. Actually, the reverse is true. The absence of damage in places where levees held proved to people in Louisiana (many of whom were recent settlers) that levees could not be neglected. However, the prospect of permanently higher water levels meant that upgrades would be necessary. Therefore, this flood demonstrated the worth of levees and logically triggered the enactment of reforms to make them more effective.³

Fortunately, scanty secondary sources are not the sole fount of information about the flood of 1816. A journal kept by William Richardson, a Boston-based keelboat trader, documents its course and offers insights into the nature of
its impact on various communities. Basically, his account shows that non-levee-builders fared the worst. Richardson told of overflows on the unleveed banks of the Middle Mississippi, but of life continuing undisturbed in leveed districts downstream. What other proof is needed for the utility of levees? For Louisiana, the lack of flood-year drama was a good thing, and the journal shows that secure development took place where levees existed. Conversely, the unleveed riverfront was a forest, supplying nothing but game, timber, and a marginal subsistence.4

Richardson's journey down the Mississippi in 1816 began at the confluence of the Ohio. Here, Colonel Bird, a provisioner of river travelers, abandoned his stand to high water. Only the peach orchard remained dry, hosting "great quantities of ducks." At New Madrid, Richardson learned that street after street had fallen into the river, leaving two stores, a post office, and a few houses. Nearing the site of Memphis, he glimpsed a house: "the only one we have seen for four days." The lack of development on the unleveed riverside depressed Richardson and his companions to the point of actually hating the environment. For example, at Grand Cut Off, Arkansas, they went ashore for food and met cane so thick they could not climb the riverbank. "Partly for revenge and partly for our own amusement," they set it afire. Richardson relished the results: "Now pops the cane like a skirmish with firearms, now rises the smoke." Flames roared so high, the men had
to flee to their boat. Far from being a timeless Eden, this landscape provoked feelings of frustration and loneliness. Richardson craved to see any sort of broken ground, for the monotony of uninhabited banks left him "gloomy" and "solitary." As a subconscious reaction, he listed the names of all seventeen people on the boat.\(^5\)

In early April, after a week of travel, Richardson passed the mouth of St. Francis River. During the day, he saw scattered huts, "many of which were forsaken, and the water ... flowing about them." At Point Chicot, Arkansas, he saw "small cabins, the water almost in them," and claimed that a few more inches would flood the whole country from Point Chicot to the mouth of the Yazoo. Cotton and corn covered rising land at Walnut Hills (the site of Vicksburg), but water covered the earth at Warrenton, Mississippi, a riverport which lay in the floodplain. The site flooded almost every spring, and this retarded its development. In 1816, Warrenton consisted of no more than twenty flimsy houses or cabins. Until the flooding was corrected, no one would build anything better.\(^6\)

Southern hospitality refreshed Richardson's party at Natchez after "20 days of solitary confinement," and the city's bluffs offered a visual respite from the seemingly endless "low marshy forests" of the floodplain. Finally, at Pointe Coupee Parish, below the mouth of the Red River, continuous levees began on the Mississippi's west bank. Behind levees, farmers and planters were adorning the
riverside with cultivated fields, orange trees, painted houses, and human society. As Richardson grew reacquainted to civilization, he stopped recording every corn patch. Thereafter, the journal conveyed something of daily life in Louisiana's leveed communities. The banks featured long-established French settlements, as well as newly purchased plantations owned by American entrepreneurs. For example, after passing Bayou Manchac, Richardson observed Joseph Erwin's plantation in Iberville Parish. He described the house as the best he had seen on the river. It stood two stories high of framed lumber, landscaped with garden paths, and surrounded by slave huts and sugar houses.  

Erwin, a Protestant Tennessean who bought land among the Acadians, remained an outsider since community life in the old leveed settlements revolved around services of the Catholic Church. On Sunday, French-speaking settlers traveled the levee road to church, strengthened their faith, obtained news, and read about their levees in public notices posted on church doors. Then, congregations broke into groups for dinners at leveed farms among a heavily intermarried populace of levee builders of French and German descent. Years later, a girl from the culture remarked that her family were hardly ever out of mourning clothes, for almost every death was that of a relative. People lived in close proximity, shouted news from porch to porch, and whispered during levee strolls. Children sledded the levee slopes on boards. On the batture, in
front of the levee, they fished and picked berries. Every household maintained its own slice of the levee line. On a Sunday in 1816, Richardson watched some of these levee builders leaving Mass in a group from Manchac Church. The congregation frequently prayed for protection from floods. Faith in God and levees gave confidence to "the Coast" and greatly contributed to its famous joie de vivre. During that Sunday afternoon, Richardson heard fiddles playing in many creole houses. "At one house we saw the man playing and his wife dancing alone" on the gallery. Slaves were also enjoying this Sunday with "great mirth." Richardson saw them fishing in the Mississippi with nets, probably for shrimp and catfish. Crawfish, of course, bore holes in the levee, and slaves pulled them out in order to plug the holes. Crawfish boils logically followed.

In the leveed region, Richardson saw that sawyers and snags became rare because of the clearing of trees from the banks in levee and road easements. Thus, he traveled faster and was even able to navigate at night. On the last leg of the trip, Richardson reported seeing Lafourche Church (near Donaldsonville) at 7 P.M.; Cantrell Church (St. James Parish) at 11 P.M.; Bonnet Carre Church (St. John the Baptist Parish) at 4 A.M., and Red Church (St. Charles Parish) at 9 A.M. This speed far exceeded the progress he made on the middle river. Bear in mind, he was traveling without steam. At 4 P.M., April 15, 1816, Richardson reached New Orleans. He stated that the last
150 miles had been "by far the most delightful." Compact settlement, ample provisions, varied improvements, human society, and healthy living conditions—these appealed to Richardson, and levees made them possible. In the leveed region, he found a landscape altered by industry and regulated by government. The overflows upriver, which chased settlers away from the waterfront in Illinois, Missouri, Arkansas, and Mississippi, were nowhere to be found. Indeed, he saw nothing of the kind to remark upon. Levees were doing their job in South Louisiana, and the riverside's appearance conveyed no sense of alarm. However, news about the coming high water had reached New Orleans before Richardson's arrival, and people were taking measures to meet the potential crisis.

The wealthy cotton and sugar factor William Kenner wrote concerning the water on May 11, 1816. He worked in New Orleans but also owned a sugar plantation at Metairie, several miles up from New Orleans. Although the plantation depended on levees for protection, high ground at Metairie Ridge separated it from the floodplain in the immediate vicinity of New Orleans. Thus, to Major John Minor of Concordia Parish, Kenner wrote that high water had caused no damage to his plantation. Its sixty-something slaves were holding the levees in order. Nor was anything distressing underway at "Linwood," his place in Ascension Parish, where more than a hundred slaves grew leveed cotton. In fact, he reported perfect safety "on the Coast"
with crops "in the most flourishing way." Since he acted as a broker for plantation goods, Kenner was in a position to know about dangers which affected the market, and he had no fears for the plantation sector. Rather, he claimed "a most sublime crop, and the cane looks inchantingly [sic]."

Major Minor reported similar tidings from Concordia. New levees in Concordia now guarded the fields, and he expected stellar returns.10

Notwithstanding, levees could break, and swift destruction followed unless people stopped the crevasses. Hence, Kenner's comments about New Orleans contained less positive news. To Minor, he wrote:

We are now here in this Town in the most horrid situation on account of the water. In a word, McCarty's large Levy has given way, and cannot, I think, be stopped. It has been running now with great violence for a week, and more than one half of the city and suburbs are under water. The poor inhabitants are flying with their goods and chattles in every direction, many of them not knowing where to go--in short it is difficult to describe the unpleasant situation of some thousand of our inhabitants. What adds much to our universal distress is that all have still more to fear from the dire effects apprehended when the water falls--[i.e., a sickly autumn].11

What happened was that the flood of 1816, though contained in most parishes, fractured a large embankment in Orleans Parish on May 6th at the plantation of Bartheleme de Macarty. He and his sister, Marie Celeste, owned about 1,300 acres with perhaps as many as 120 slaves to tend the levee and crops. The plantation reached from what is now Monticello Avenue to present-day Lower Line Street in the suburb of Carrollton. The current of the Mississippi

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strikes here with unusual force, and levees on the site were always subject to stress. As seen in Chapter Two, Governor Carondelet actually gave the land to the Macartys' father in 1795 for building a levee at this troublesome spot. Brown's *Western Gazetteer* described Macarty's levee as "the most considerable on the river," except for the one in front of the city. Either at the time of the crevasse, or soon after the levee's reconstruction, it measured almost fifteen feet high, with a crown of six feet and base of thirty feet. It was huge by standards of the day, but crevasses were probable and the land served as a natural trough for taking floods to New Orleans. Geographer William Darby explained that Bayous Metarie, St. John, Sauvage, and Bienvenu would carry waters from that place toward the city, and the bayous' banks then acted as walls to prevent it from draining away. Overflows would simply sit on New Orleans like broth in a gumbo.\textsuperscript{12}

In rare, but not unheard-of, circumstances, an "unstoppable" crevasse in a plantation levee was allowed to run its course. Adjacent families might lose their crop for the year or suffer losses to improvements and livestock, but the rural community recognized that some crevasses just had to be given up. In these cases, they waited for low water and planned repairs in autumn or late summer. Macarty's crevasse, on the other hand, hit a multi-national city of about 23,000 people, the capitol of the state, at a time when New Orleans and Louisiana as a
whole, was experiencing a bewildering expansion of population, as well as deep political cleavages between the French and Americans. Scholars have characterized the politics of this era of Louisiana history as one of "nativity politics" based on language, religion, and national identity. Creoles and Americans battled for control of state and city governments. Stereotypes and mutual contempt abounded. For example, common wisdom held that Americans were rapacious outsiders who pushed for change; Creoles, genteel insiders who were unprogressive and afraid of becoming outnumbered. Neither respected the other. They could not communicate and even read separate newspapers. Macarty's crevasse showcased some of these social divisions. It even helped to heal them.13

Henry Ker, an Anglo traveler, heard that Creoles were conservative and disliked "Yankeeisms." For example, critics told him of their resistance to a proposed water works. It was said that they preferred to haul water from the Mississippi in casks, as they always had, rather than fund an aqueduct for New Orleans. On the other hand, Creoles may have had reasons for negotiating the terms of the utility's operation, and the designer of the waterworks, architect Benjamin Latrobe, blamed Americans for much of the Creole resistance to change. "Many of the leading gentlemen," he said, "when not talking of tobacco or cotton, find it very amusing to abuse and ridicule French morals [and] French manners." They refused to even

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try to speak French. "Their business is to make money," Latrobe said, and "they are in an eternal bustle."14

Bartheleme Macarty, on the other hand, was something of a Creole planter-prince, which was nice for prestigious social occasions, but did little to endear him to the American business faction. Macartys, though originally Irish, had intermarried with Creole elites such as the Trepagniers, De Lerys, Le Bretons, and d'Estrehans. The family's prominent ladies included the wife of Governor Miro, who was Bartheleme's aunt, and his cousin, Madame Lalaurie, now remembered mostly for torturing slaves in her New Orleans townhouse. Bartheleme's second cousin, Augustin Francois de Macarty, was mayor of New Orleans during the crevasse, and this connection imparted a sense of cronyism to the city's efforts to deal with the flood. At least, that was how it appeared to Americans. While water crawled into their offices, the Mayor's cousin seemed incompetent to close his own levee. But this was not the first or only time Americans aimed their slings at Mayor Macarty, who, as rumor had it, ordered the first ice shipment to New Orleans to be dumped in the river on the premise that cold drinks in summer caused consumption. He was also said to have stood by during a riot on the levee in 1817 while French partisans beat English sailors and killed an American.15

However, in fairness to the Macartys, most Americans in New Orleans had never experienced a crevasse and had no
idea how difficult that area in Carrollton Bend was to levee. American businessmen just knew a rich Creole's plantation levee was flooding the city, and "riff-raff" from the back streets were now roaming all over town looking for handouts and places to camp. Here was ample tinder for class and/or ethnic resentments if the situation could not be resolved.

What exactly existed in New Orleans, in 1816, to suffer from the crevasse? Much. Public buildings, people, houses, gardens, cattle, businesses, and incomes. The city proper consisted of the Vieux Carre, and its principal buildings included: the Cabildo, which served as the convention hall of the legislature; the Church of St. Louis and Ursuline convent; the barracks, custom house, hospital, and city market; the Planters', Orleans, and Louisiana Banks; and Latrobe's water works. The best houses lined streets such as Bourbon which ran parallel to the river. Poor people lived nearer to Lake Pontchartrain on streets of lower elevation. Free blacks occupied much of that area, including Faubourg Marigny, and lived in insubstantial one-story frame dwellings easily damaged by overflows. Macarty's crevasse is said to have flooded the back streets in 1816 to a depth of four feet. Thus, the poorest and most vulnerable people in the city lost lodgings, gardens, property, and pastures to the crevasse, besides having pursuits and incomes interrupted. How would they live while the water receded? Where could they go?16
The *Louisiana Gazette and New Orleans Mercantile Advertiser* expressed sorrow on 8 May 1816 about effects of the crevasse. It reported overflows in the city's western suburbs, now the Central Business District. Later in the day, the editor learned of evacuations from backstreets near Rampart and Dumaine, etc. He wrote, "The honorable mayor has done and continues to do every thing in his power to alleviate the distresses of the citizens." However, the mayor had no authority to order or fund the closing of a crevasse outside the city limits. Meanwhile, planters and slaves labored to mend the break under the supervision of the Orleans Parish police jury, just as the state's levee law of 1807 commanded. Unfortunately, water flowed through the break unabated, and the capitol of Louisiana was in danger of becoming Venetian. Despite the dilemma, the editor of the *Gazette and Mercantile Advertiser* hoped "that a spirit of charity will be diffused into the hearts of all classes" to help the victims. Numerous wealthy citizens voluntarily aided the poor, and this defused the likelihood of riot or looting. New Orleans city councilmen set a charitable tone with appropriations of food and tenements. John McDonogh, a rich miser and swamp developer, opened vacant buildings to refugees on the right bank. He even allowed them to bring cattle to his leveed pastures. A Creole citizen, Monsieur Duverger, also pledged to "receive in his savannas the cattle of persons finding themselves
thus situated." Members of both societies were pulling together to aid the displaced and to preserve order.¹⁷

The depth and scale of flooding continued to intensify. New Orleanian Charles Harrod wrote a friend on May 16th that ferries were taking people on errands throughout the city. Only two streets remained dry—"Royal and Charters [sic]." "The distress is dreadful," he said, "all the poor people turn'd out of their houses, and many have no place to go to." Harrod judged the crevasse to be unstoppable and predicted that "we shall be in this moist way 'till the River falls in June."¹⁸

All efforts to close the crevasse were failing, and on May 17th, the Louisiana Gazette lamented that plantation crews had given up the fight. "It was entirely abandoned yesterday evening, and its dimensions increase." Creole planters might deem it acceptable to withdraw hands and wait for low water, but a commercial city could not, in the opinion of American businessmen, be left to serve as a reservoir. When a Natchez source reported falling water levels, the English-speakers at New Orleans concluded that lower water might arrive within a week. If so, discharges through the crevasse could slacken to three feet and be controllable with pile driving or ring levees. The Louisiana Gazette urged American readers to press the advantage, complaining that "nothing but supineness, and the want of union and exertion" had retarded the effort so far.

Perhaps the editor implied that Creoles, such as the Mayor
and his cousin, could not be depended on to save the city. However, the Gazette warned, "should the present favorable moment be passed without embracing it, we shall lay under water till August!" To Americans, the Venetian alternative was unacceptable, and they blamed the Creole establishment for the insufficiency of what had already been attempted.¹⁹

Surely no one familiar with politics on the Mississippi could imagine a time when the mayor of New Orleans and governor of Louisiana failed to see eye to eye. Yet, the American Governor Claiborne, dissatisfied with measures previously taken by the police jury, planters, and mayor, entered the fray to bring the emergency to a close. In typical "Yankee" style, he chose a preemptory and unconventional way. Claiborne went to the firm of Gorhom and Burton, borrowed $3,000 on his own credit to buy a ship called the Suffolk from one Francis Holland, and promptly sailed it to the crevasse. Whereupon, Claiborne sank it, so that the suction of the crevasse pulled the hull against what remained of the levee. The scuttled vessel stanched the flow of water until other methods could be used to mend the break. In 1815, Andrew Jackson saved New Orleans, and in 1816 his countryman William Claiborne was the hero. Thanks to Americans, New Orleans was saved!²⁰

Yet, even with the closure of the crevasse, water continued to stand in the city. Metairie Ridge and Bayou St. John held the flood captive. The overflow could not cross bayou ridges to drain into Lake Pontchartrain, nor
could it flow across the levee into the Mississippi. Months might pass before the flood could evaporate. In the meantime, refugees and critics would make life miserable for Mayor Macarty unless he took extraordinary measures. Not to be outdone by the heroic Claiborne, Macarty met with a professional consultant and concocted another scheme. He sent the city surveyor, Mr. Tanesse, to investigate, and found that Lake Pontchartrain lacked three feet being full. If water could be channeled into Pontchartrain, the city would drain. Macarty and Tanesse decided simply to cut trenches through the ridges. Sluices would allow water from the city to flow into Bayou St. John and thence into the Lake. Accordingly, on 20 May 1816, Macarty authorized Tanesse to assemble trenching crews and published the City's desire to hire slaves. Recruiters went about the streets beating drums to attract attention, and persons with "negroes to hire" were requested to "apply to the Mayor's office within the shortest delay." The City paid for the use of the slaves, "their food during the time they shall be at work," the boats they worked in, and the wages of their drivers. Indeed, Tanesse was himself something of a slave driver, for the overseeing of slave crews was a regular part of New Orleans's public works.

Meanwhile, back on the Macarty place, Bartheleme's slaves faced the job of rebuilding his levee, as well as refurbishing fields and buildings which had been swept by the crevasse. The destruction was considerable, and sister
Marie Celeste sold her share to Bartheleme on 10 June 1816 to escape the cost of repairs. Apparently the planter was not held responsible for the damages his crevasse caused. He suffered a financial loss, but slaves did the physical labor. Before long, the family sold the plantation for town lots, and its levee became a public work. 22

Unfortunately, Governor Claiborne failed to extricate himself from the effects of the crevasse with the same ease as the Macartys. It took four acts of the legislature to extract money from New Orleans and Orleans Parish to pay him for the Suffolk. Like many other episodes, this experience of flood fighting taught neophyte swamper that there was no substitute for coercion, authority, and a regular source of revenue to handle the needs of a levee-building community.

The state's Third Legislature addressed the problem of Claiborne's expenses in January of 1818. It told the city and Orleans Parish to pay his just claims. Yes, the method used to close the crevasse had been outside traditional channels, but the legislature deemed that Claiborne's expedient was justified. To raise funds for compensation, it bestowed legal authority (but not a direct order) on the judge and police jury to tax all real and personal property in the city and Orleans Parish. However, the legislature granted needy flood victims an exemption from the tax, and officials at the ground level took their sweet time to collect anything. Meanwhile, Gorhom and Burton sued
Claiborne for payment; the Governor died; the shipowner died; both sets of heirs experienced financial reversals; and the Fourth Legislature had to order Orleans Parish to comply with the arrangements. After all, parishes were responsible for levee superintendence, and the crevasse had been in the parish rather than the city. Therefore, the legislature bluntly told the judge and police jury to tax all inhabitants of the parish in 1819. Now the revenue had to cover a payment of $3,000 to Gorhom and Burton, $3,101 to Mrs. Holland, and legal fees for Mrs. Claiborne.23

Still, the matter did not rest. Planters objected to the expensive (and, as it appeared to them, unnecessary) way the crevasse had been stopped. Residents were no longer in danger, and they wanted to elude taxation. Thus, the Suffolk incident became a spectacle of public ingratitude. In 1820, after failing to make the parish pay "voluntarily," the state reimbursed Holland's heirs out of the state treasury. To recoup, the legislature laid a special tax on land and slaves in Orleans Parish. Then, five years after the crevasse, the state paid Mrs. Claiborne $5,447 for legal fees from a tax on Orleans Parish for 1821. Negligence and foot-dragging brought state intrusion into what had been a parish matter. Ill-will was created, and taxpayers paid more than it cost because of their unwillingness to accept the Governor's unconventional solution to a flood.24
Incidents like this showed how scrambled the mores of a leveed community became, once the traditional obligations of landowners on their own plantations became blurred, erased, or expanded. Naked self-interest had been the guiding principle when levee builders made embankments for their own households. Now, a privately-built levee like Macarty's might protect many households who shared none of the expense. Fragmented jurisdictions, multi-regional floodplains, and overflows that crossed political or property boundaries defied even well-intentioned efforts to find fair solutions. The political system of levees, as being tied to property obligations, could not easily adapt to a concept of shared responsibilities. In this case, no one familiar with the circumstances could really blame Macarty for being unable to close the crevasse. Nor was the city supposed to make repairs because it lay outside the city limits. By leaving the closure to a landowner and his neighbors, the parish followed legal requirements. It was Claiborne who, through desperation or impatience, voluntarily incurred an extraordinary expense. No one was legally bound to repay him until the legislature made special rules to suit its own views of justice.

To Creole traditionalists, the Governor's whole performance at the crevasse smacked of Yankeeism. This exhibitionist with his sinking Suffolk was obliquely criticizing the Creole way of managing a crisis. Had not Mayor Macarty extended liberal relief measures to the
unfortunate? Had not planters labored with all deliberate speed at their appointed levee tasks? On the American's behalf, the legislature now forced its way into parish matters. Interventions, special taxes, and compensations angered those who hated change, and Americans always seemed to be tampering with time-tested Louisiana ways of doing things. On the other hand, perhaps the American critique made sense. Could not the tasks of flood control be distributed in a more rational way? For example, to whom was the safety of New Orleans and its suburbs a matter of greater moment: the Orleans Parish police jury, or the Mayor and Council? Was it right for the security of the state capitol to depend on Bartheleme Macarty? Did not Louisiana and its governor have an obligation to help? Clearly, there was room for a definition of responsibilities, but—as anyone could see—the Macarty incident was unusual, perhaps even unique. What made sense for the edge of the capitol floodplain did not necessarily hold true for the whole river. Levee-builders in each parish wanted local autonomy to deal with situations as they saw fit.

Thus, for all the insight it provides into the dynamics of Creole-American rivalry and the thickets of local politics, Claiborne's intervention and the state's intrusion on his heirs' behalf did not set binding precedents for continuous state involvement in the building of Louisiana's levees. Most people wanted to forget about the Macarty crevasse and the possible insufficiency of
local levee systems. They pushed trouble from their minds and hoped that improvement could be postponed to another day. The fact that did emerge from the muck of 1816 was that the state held predominate authority to tell local bodies how levees would be supplied and paid for. The same governor who sank the Suffolk also signed the levee law of 1816, and its provisions applied more or less throughout the state. To that law, we now turn our attention.

On the surface, the 1816 levee law could easily be construed as another manifestation of the restless American desire for reform and improvement. It converted the 1807 levee law of five vague sections into a detailed exposition of levee practice in forty nine sections. One need not lay all the blame for this statute on a stereotypical American need for definition and control. The law was primarily an attempt to reduce the oral traditions of Creole communities to written form. It codified the accumulated wisdom and levee folklore of French-speaking communities as written law for the edification of novices and the enforcement of levee standards. Just as the combined exertions of Claibornes and Macartys, Americans and Creoles, saved New Orleans from overflow in 1816, the levee law of that year also represented an amalgamation of effort. The recognition of a community of interests in the pursuit of security helped pull this culturally fragmented society together. Now that they both knew what to do, Creoles and Americans
became more effective partners in levee-building throughout the state.  

With or without detailed legislation, French-speaking landowners and slaves on the Lower Mississippi knew how to build levees. Newly settled Americans, on the other hand, were unfamiliar with the task and, because of the language barrier, were unlikely to learn from older settlers. Thus, while the details in the state levee law of 1816 probably seemed superfluous to Creoles, they gave useful instructions to American novices who wanted to grow leveed sugar in downriver parishes or cotton on the middle "Coast."

Too, the leaders of Louisiana, who had been accustomed to build levees in their own fashion, found in the law of 1816 a code of construction and upkeep which challenged them to conform to a more uniform standard. Perhaps the use of a state levee code would reduce inter-parish conflicts and inspire a greater measure of quality control in domestic plantation levees.

In text and content, the contrast between the 1807 and 1816 levee laws could hardly be more complete. The 1807 law was sketchy at best and seemed to bestow almost unlimited freedom on each parish to devise whatever levee laws it wanted. For example, it told parish judges, justices of the peace, and police jurors to meet on the first Monday in July to make regulations to suit their own localities. Parish officers were to undertake whatever improvements they desired, and judges would execute the
resulting parish laws. Neither did the 1807 law confine its attentions to levees. It also gave parish officials authority over fences, roads, bridges, and navigation improvements. Levees were not seen as requiring any particular expertise, and the expenses were shared by all inhabitants in whatever way seemed just and convenient to the police jury. The only specifics in the 1807 law dealt with the pay given to the owners of slaves who worked on delinquent levees. They received a dollar a day per slave, just as in the days of the Spanish.26

Of course, what fails to appear in the law of 1807 are the myriad details of levee building which were already embedded in the minds of Creole communities. Levee folklore, if you will, guided their behavior without written rules, because instructions from colonial governors and the experiences of three generations had shaped their thinking. What seemed vague and unlimited on paper, such as the powers of police juries, was actually as constricted as the powers of kings and parliaments in the unwritten (but real) British Constitution. In 1807, Creoles did not need an explicit levee law. Their duties and obligations were understood. Yet, because of the American influx this was no longer the case in 1816. Newcomers had to be told what to do in their own language. Thus, the value of the 1816 levee law in a historical sense is that it not only documents what levee building entailed at the time, it also shows what public opinion, as represented in the
legislature, thought was necessary for an effective levee system. After all, the fact that levees held in 1816 (except at Macarty's) does not negate the fact that the state had faced serious dangers. The law's provisions confirm the presence of serious thinking about levees in 1816 and a hope that future damages could be avoided through better preparation. On this point, Creoles and Americans agreed.

The levee law of 1816 was Louisiana's first attempt, as a state, at a comprehensive definition of correct levee practice. The main topics included: levee slopes and dimensions; construction and placement; inspections, suits, and fines. The law applied to all of Louisiana on the Mississippi and its outlets, except for the parishes of Concordia and Lafourche where special conditions prevailed because of unusual settlement and flood patterns.

Section 1 of the 1816 law clearly affirmed that riparian proprietors were still responsible for supplying levees on their own land. Upon that basic principle, the state erected its requirements. Section 10 described levees as a "gift" which riverfront landowners owed to the public. The duty resembled a tax more than a gift, but that is how lawmakers chose to view it. They also called the river road a gift, as well as the bridges where the road crossed the ditches and sawmill flumes. Riparian landowners of Louisiana were generous indeed! Their work saved the state as a whole a great deal of expense.
The slope and mass of the 1816 levees were determined according to high water marks. Since stains on tree trunks or other stationary objects showed how high floods became, the law of 1816 demanded that levees reach one foot above the high water mark. The state required thicker levees depending on the amount of water the embankments would have to resist. Thus, the dimension of a levee's base was also tied to the stain. According to law, levees which contained one to three feet of water would need five feet of base per foot of height. Levees holding three to five feet of water had six feet of base per foot of height. Levees excluding five to six feet of water would have seven feet of base per foot of height, and levees holding more than six feet of water were told to have "at least" eight feet of base per foot of height. In every instance, the levee's crown measured one-third of the width of the base. The measurement of crown and base, combined with the levee's height, determined the levee's slope. Thus, the law furnished a complete guideline for dimensions and proportions for Louisiana's levees. Under the supervision of parish officials, each proprietor determined the necessary height, width, and slope from high water marks.29

The following examples indicate what size levees the above formula created. For instance, a levee holding only one foot of water would be two feet high, with a base of ten feet and a crown of three feet, four inches. This was quite small as levees go and not too hard to construct.
On the other hand, a levee of the largest size, holding seven feet of water, would stand eight feet high with a sixty-four foot base and a crown of about twenty-one feet! In the days of baskets and wheelbarrows, this would have been quite an undertaking for a plantation crew. Few private landowners could build such a monstrosity, and it is doubtful if many did. The writer Henri-Marie Brackenridge (1813) described the typical Louisiana levee as being four to six feet high, with a base of six to nine feet and a crown the size of a footpath. Gazetteer Samuel Brown (1817) delineated the typical levee as being five feet high, with a twelve foot base and footpath crown. Yet, the law of 1816 told proprietors to build levees of much greater mass. By its rules, a five foot levee would have a thirty foot base and ten foot crown. Quite a contrast to what actually existed! If the 1816 law failed to achieve general popularity with landowners after the flood subsided, its dimensional requirements were probably the reason. The spirit of reform that swept the legislature asked for a great deal more dirt than residents were willing to give. 

The law of 1816 instructed proprietors to dig the earth for levees from borrow pits at least twenty feet from the base on the river side of the embankment. This precaution reduced the river's tendency to undermine a levee as it swirled into a borrow pit. As to placement, the levee line had to stand at least sixty feet from the
river in places where its banks stood firm, but at least one arpent (192 feet) away "in places where the bank is apt to tumble down." Measurements for setbacks would be made from the "summit of the bank," not from the water's edge, since that location ebbed and flowed with the seasons. Proprietors hated to sacrifice cleared frontage in levee setbacks, but the state was more concerned in 1816 with the preservation of levees than with the conservation of acreage. It felt that the general safety of the riverside compensated for the loss of land.31

Planters could still put sluices and canals in the levees of 1816 to flood rice fields, irrigate crops, or transport lumber. However, if they brought water through the levee, it had to run in a cypress chute to keep the water separate from the earthen embankment. Since the levee crown served as a path, sluices through the levee had to be bridged just like the drainage ditches on River Road. Again, cypress was used because it was readily available and impervious to rot. The state also ordered landowners to put a sheath of cypress staves or palmetto fascines on the river slope of new levees or newly repaired old levees. This would help unseasoned levees to resist abrasion. Such revetments were particularly necessary on vacant land, because no one lived there to keep a watch on the levee's condition. Owners of uncultivated and (presumably uninhabited) land had to line the entire levee front with revetments. None of these rules was extraordinary. In the
Spanish period, they were routine. The law of 1816 also
told proprietors to keep a slave or other person stationed
every four arpents (768 feet, or 2 1/2 football fields) at
high water to look for problems. Watchmen were especially
told to find and fill holes made by crawfish or muskrats.
Again, the influence of the Spanish regulations is obvious.
Americans were learning from the Creoles' experience.32

Some innovation did occur in the bureaucratic
structure of levee maintenance. For example, in the law of
1816, a class of officials called levee inspectors achieved
a powerful role in parish affairs and police. Their duties
resembled those of the colonial syndics, but the inspectors
were not appointed. Police juries were told to elect them
at an annual meeting. Each inspector received a one year
term for up to three leagues (about nine miles) of river-
front. During their period of service, they were exempted
from parish taxes and militia duty. Parish judges
administered their oaths of office and awarded certificates
which confirmed the inspectors' authority.33

The task of levee inspector was physically demanding
and required a considerable amount of travel. During high
water, the inspector had to visit his entire section of
riverfront at least once a week to see if regulations were
being followed. He inspected: the construction of the
levee; its condition and position relative to the river;
the adequacy of the slave watch; the depredations of
pedestrians or wheeled traffic; the trampling of livestock;
wave-wash from steamboats; the filling of burrowed holes; ditching, bridging, and road repairs; and the seasonal closures of irrigation sluices. At the conclusion of the inspection, he wrote "verbal processes" (just like the syndics) to record the condition of each proprietor's levee and to document the need for specific actions. These served as evidence if legal steps had to be taken against delinquents. In addition to weekly high water inspections, levee inspectors made non-high-water trips on August 16th and December 16th to check on routine repairs. The law of 1816 told inspectors to decide by September 1st whether proprietors were likely to finish their work on time. Otherwise, slave requisitions would help them. The inspector might even let works to contractors.  

It took a man of strong mind and constitution to perform the job of levee inspector. He had to command the respect of the neighborhood because some of his judgments would offend delinquents. These might be relatives or friends of the inspector, or wealthy and prominent planters. Still, he had an obligation to protect the community without respect of persons. Illiterate men could not serve, and men with debilitating diseases or more than sixty years old received automatic exemptions. Of course, there was not the slightest concept of women being levee inspectors. Most would not have wanted this public role even if they were eligible. While inspectors inspected, someone else had to manage their farms, for there was no
such thing as a "professional" levee inspector. Men who filled these positions were primarily planters.35

Fortunately for those who acted as inspectors, they were only required to supervise levees on their own bank of the Mississippi, but the time it took was considerable. According to law, inspectors had to attend all crevasses, arrange for emergency work crews, keep records of the time each planter's slaves worked on someone else's levee, and issue receipts for the labor. The money that changed hands in enforced labor requisitions was not inconsiderable, and the law of 1816 even required a delinquent to provide the slaves with meals. This eliminated a waste of time in fetching food for the crew, but also transferred the cost of provisions to the person whose negligence caused the conscription in the first place. The food reform was popular with everyone but the delinquent. For him, and especially for his wife, it was very burdensome to feed a levee crew. Basically, the "menu tax" was another fine to encourage landowners to keep levees in order. And, since feeding primarily impacted the wives and daughters of delinquents, it added female fury to the other incentives which impelled men to keep good levees!36

In the carrying out of legal duties, the law of 1816 told levee inspectors to give copies of verbal processes to district attorneys when delinquents were sued. The law also ordered inspectors to give district attorneys "written and correct information" about "all the contraventions" of
the levee law" of which the proprietors of his section may be guilty." Levee inspectors were told, in other words, to snitch on their neighbors to a prosecuting government attorney. This did not add to their popularity, but greatly enhanced the respect that landowners accorded to an inspector's instructions. At his own discretion, an inspector could force proprietors to fill or stop levee sluices. He could open unauthorized closures of outlets at the offender's expense. He could also require setbacks, relocations, or even a complete rebuilding if a committee of planters would cosign to endorse the necessity.37

The latter provision, found in Section 45 of the 1816 law, helped relieve an inspector of the sole responsibility for unpopular demands. The law of 1816 said that the inspector would "cause three neighbouring planters to assist him" if he thought "a levee ought to be made anew either entirely [sic] or in part." Furthermore, "he shall jointly with them ascertain the works to be made, and signify the same in writing to the planter" who "shall be bound to execute the said works, within the time, and under the penalties prescribed." Section 22 told an inspector to take "at least one planter of his section" as a signatory witness to "every inspection or requisition" the inspector made. The planter-escort requirement also harked back to colonial times, as a method of insuring that an inspector acted without fear or partiality.38
Unfortunately, some inhabitants hesitated to help an inspector on his duties, and others objected outright. Thus, the law of 1816 included a fine of five dollars against every planter who refused to accompany a levee inspector on official business, provided that no one was asked more than three times in succession without him asking someone else. Fines were levied on proprietors who refused to witness requisitions, orders, and reports. In addition, levee inspectors also had the power to force planters to release slaves for work on a delinquent levee or to aid in the prevention and repair of crevasses. The law gave planters in the midst of cotton picking or sugar grinding an exemption from requisitions in autumn (the low water season) until they finished their own work. Then, they had to supply workers to delinquents before the onset of floods. In springtime, however, inspectors could commandeer a proprietor's slaves at any time. Whether they were plowing or planting, it made no difference because the safety of the district and parish hung in the balance. Therefore, the act of 1816 laid a $25 to $100 fine on a planter who obstinately refused to obey an inspector's requisition for slaves. If he resisted with force or violence, it added a prison term of fifteen days up to two months. In case an inspector misused his powers, there was also Section 47 which said that inspectors convicted of neglect would be guilty of a state-offense misdemeanor and
be subject to fines of $25 to $100—half of which went to the state and half to the informer.\footnote{39}

Lawsuits figured prominently in the 1816 levee act and the actual possession of property was at stake, for plaintiffs could attach privileged liens to delinquents' land for several reasons. Slaveowners whose slaves had been requisitioned could sue the proprietor as a group for compensation. Contractors who completed levees on a delinquent's behalf could sue him for costs, and the State of Louisiana could sue to recover assessed fines. If a planter's negligence caused his levee to fail, and the crevasse damaged other properties, Section 24 of 1816 said that the planter would be liable "for all damages and losses," as specified in articles 16 and 19 of Section 2 of the state's Quasi-Crimes on page 321 of the\textit{Civil Code}.\footnote{40}

According to the 1816 statute, plaintiffs in levee suits would notify the parish judge and ask for a seizure of the property. If the owner resided outside the parish, they could sue the land\textit{ in rem}, that is, sue the thing itself rather than the person. If it was a labor compensation suit, the evidence had to include the inspector's certified account of dates and amounts of requisitioned labor. If it was a contractor's suit, the plaintiff had to supply a copy of the process verbal of adjudication, as well as an inspector's certificate of the contract's completion. The sheriff of the parish would seize the property on order of the parish judge and publish
notices in French and English, in a New Orleans newspaper, of the impending trial. The levee-delinquent landowner had one month to make a defense to the parish court where the property lay. If no one appeared, the court decided the matter *ex parte*, from evidence presented by one side only. If a defender came within the month, the court would try the case before a jury of resident planters and pronounce sentence in open court. When the judgment went against the delinquent, the sheriff would sell the land at auction. However, the property had to sell for at least half its estimated value. Failing that, a second sale would accept the highest cash bid.41

When the recovery of a fine for levee-related delinquency was the issue, the district attorney or state attorney general sued the defendant in parish court. If the attorney secured a conviction, he received a fee of $15. Otherwise, he got nothing. Appeals from parish courts went to the State Supreme Court. District courts were excluded from levee matters except in the case of landowners suing a neighbor for damages caused by his crevasse. Then, the case went to district court as a quasi-crime in the *Civil Code*.42

The imminent prospect of fines for non-observance inspired fear among the populace. In this 1816 levee law, Louisiana directed penalties not just at delinquent proprietors, but also against parish officials of all capacities who failed to enforce it. On paper, a virtual
Reign of Terror ensued. Planters, sheriffs, inspectors, their called assistants, and police jurors could all be penalized for irregularities in levee procedure, and the minimum and maximum fines aimed a sizeable blow to one's pocketbook. According to Sections 13 and 34, fines on negligent proprietors ran as high as $1,000. Planters who refused to fascine or "palissado" [that is, to install revetments on] their levees on vacant lands, were fined up to $500. Planters who defied an inspector's orders about when to close sluices were deprived of up to $100, and could forfeit as much as $1,000 for failing to fill crawfish holes. Not having one's levee, bridge, or road work done by December 15th could cost a proprietor up to $1,000, and so could an unauthorized closure of a Mississippi River outlet. The refusal to send slaves for a requisition cost up to $100. Negligent police jurors who skipped meetings where levee and police matters were discussed lost up to $25 per offense. A sheriff's refusal to execute orders against persons charged with levee crimes brought a retribution of $100, and negligent inspectors lost up to $200 if they failed to arrange for a deputy to take their place in case of sickness.43

This hailstorm of expensive fines directed at members of the levee-building community suggested that a state-wide crackdown was underway in 1816 against lax levee practices. Section 10 of the act gave landowners just two months to get levees, roads, and bridges up to code. The law passed
on 18 March 1816, and the deadline for compliance was mid-May, the time of the peak high water. After the crisis passed, the cycle of autumn maintenance and spring watchfulness resumed, boxed in by the new provisions and penalties of this demanding and expensive-to-execute law. Unfortunately, the will to reform failed to outlive the crisis before them. As William Darby cynically remarked in his study of Louisiana's geography and population: "Nothing is more dreaded by the inhabitants than . . . Crevasses; yet from the natural carelessness of the human species, no sooner does the flood subside than the danger, and all serious reflections on the means to prevent its recurrence." Basically, when Louisiana forgot its fear, the reforms of 1816 seemed overdone. After all, the flood passed through Louisiana's rural districts with minimal damage. In mid-1816, the City of New Orleans dried out. Macartys continued to be invited to the best parties. The Americans' Governor Claiborne left office without his ship money. His successor, Governor Jacques Villere, was a conservative Creole who planted sugar, built levees, and spoke no English. The Creole faction joyously anticipated a return to past arrangements. Claiborne's Second Legislature disbanded, and when the Third Legislature convened, it repealed the 1816 levee law, and sent the bill to Villere. On 8 February 1817, less than a year after its initial passage, the Creole governor's signature abolished
the levee law of 1816, and Louisiana's former levee practices returned to "vigour . . . [and] full force."45

Lest one be overwhelmed by a sense of anti-climactic uselessness, it would be good to point out that Governor Villere, though a Creole, was an extremely moderate man who refused to act merely according to the wishes of the Creole faction. Insisting that he was the governor of all Louisianians, Villere followed a conciliatory course which went far to heal divisions in this troubled former colony. His personality smoothed political rivalries, and the common interests of the levee builders continued to form a basic community of interests. Likewise, the repeal of the 1816 levee law did not indicate that Louisiana's river parishes were about to swoon into anarchy. Crevasses did not gush forth, nor did levees crumble to the ground. Parishes merely incorporated what they wanted from the 1816 levee law into their own parish laws, through the votes of the police juries. Louisiana's habitual localism returned, and each parish looked to its own levees without regard for the regimentation which had seemed desirable in 1816. It suited them quite well to discontinue the state's attempt to impose uniform levee standards, as long as each parish kept its own levees repaired. Many planters, American and Creole, had felt crushed by the dimensions of the 1816 levees, and also considered the levee-line setbacks to be overly generous. No, in 1817 most planters did not regret the loss of the code of 1816. On the contrary, they sighed
in relief to be rid of its enforced reforms. In their opinion, the state had overreached itself in 1816, and for control to return to the parishes was just and natural. 46

There were several reasons for complacency about the levees in the early 1820s. Prices for cotton and sugar fell at the end of the 1810s, and the Panic of 1819 slowed the availability of credit. This caused the value of leved plantations to decline, which, in turn, led to investor disinterest. Planter migration to the river almost came to a halt, and seven years of low water after 1816 made it seem that there was no need for improvements. Once again, as the urgency passed, so did the stimulus for reform. American levee builders in Concordia Parish, north of the Red, were not asked to follow the 1816 levee law even when it existed, and Creoles, who knew their duties by heart, saw no advantage in a state law. People who settled among them would submit to the rules of native police juries, because Creoles controlled the parish governments below Red River. Therefore, when Governor Villere allowed a reversion to traditional levee habits, the parishes heartily approved. Little had changed anyway, except for sizes and fees.

The census of 1820 gives overwhelming evidence for the continued "Creole" domination of the older leved parishes (though by this time a Creole might be anyone descended from French, Acadian, German, or even Irish colonial ancestors). They were, in other words, largely native-born,
French-speaking Catholics. Among lower- and middle-class planters, Americans were practically non-existent in these regions. The census shows that a handful of rich Americans lived in levee-building communities below the Red, but the bulk of the population consisted of French-speakers and their slaves. Since levee administration was a duty of local government, it is important to identify the kind of people who influenced parish levee policies. The survey that follows, based on the 1820 census, offers a profile of planter ethnicity, parish by parish, beginning at the mouth of the Mississippi. Natives of the United States and colonials of British descent are called "Americans." They shared a common language and often acted as a political unit because of their opposition to, or impatience with, the habits of the Creole establishment.\footnote{47}

The Parish of Plaquemines lay at the river's mouth on the Gulf of Mexico. In 1820, it contained 2,354 persons in 117 households, including military installations at the Balize and Fort St. Philip. The ground was very low, and most Creoles avoided it because of the likelihood of floods and hurricane damage. Plaquemines had hardly any middle class. Its people were primarily trappers and pilots, or adventurous sugar planters who discounted the risks of farming in this Deepest Delta. Anglo-Americans owned 7 of its 15 plantations. Indeed, the wealthiest men were non-Creoles: Morgan, with 138 slaves; Williams, 99 slaves; Edward Livingston, the ex-Mayor of New York and penal
reformer, 86 slaves; and Bradish Johnson, 69 slaves. The core levee-building community consisted of a small number of elites, with little broad-based involvement.48

The next parish was St. Bernard, another Deep Delta parish top-heavy with rich sugar planters. Unlike Plaquemines, Americans had no place among the elite of St. Bernard, for wealthy Creoles from New Orleans developed and controlled it. The population of 2,635 was divided among 104 households, 23 of which held 20 or more slaves. None of the large slaveholders was American in 1820. The richest, Monsieur De la Ronde, had 130 slaves. Other elites included: the Jourdan brothers, 123 slaves; ex-Governor Villere, 91 slaves, and Jacques Toutant de Beauregard, 60 slaves. Americans would have been out of place among its colonial blue-bloods--Jumonvilles, Bienvenus, St. Amants, etc. Creoles here built levees as they pleased, and Gen. Pierre Gustave Toutant de Beauregard--a two-year-old resident in 1820--acquired a lifelong interest in civil and structural engineering from childhood exposure to the flood control dilemmas of the levee-builders of St. Bernard.49

Orleans Parish lay next in line on the Mississippi. Its population of 41,351 comprehended 14,405 outside the corporate limits and 27,176 persons in New Orleans itself. The city contained 13,584 whites; 7,355 slaves; and 6,237 free colored; the parish, 5,875 whites; 7,618 slaves; and 912 free colored. The city maintained its own levees with taxes and wharf fees, but the parish levees were worked by
almost 7,500 plantation slaves on both sides of the river. A careful study of the census shows that the enumerator padded his returns, doubtless to enhance the area's representation in the legislature. In typical Louisiana style, he submitted double entries for 25 of the biggest plantations and counted the crews of 17 steamboats! Other unusual entries included: 81 male and 10 female slaves in the Police Jail; 90 free males imprisoned for debt or misdemeanor; 27 men stationed with the Artillery Corps; 57 at the Marine Barracks; 27 in the Navy Yard; 70 at Fort St. John; 35 at Barataria; and 140 officers, men, and contractors at Petit Coquille. The strong military presence reminds one that the Battle of New Orleans occurred only five years previous. The City contained two orphan asylums—-one Creole, run by Ursuline nuns; the other, American, under a Protestant matron.50

Governor Thomas Bolling Robertson, Villere's American successor, lived in the New Orleans suburb of Faubourg St. Mary, on Tchoupitoulas St., in 1820. His record as governor was one of giving deliberate offense to the Creoles, and his bigotry went a long way to subvert the spirit of unity that Villere fostered. Unlike Claiborne and Villere, Robertson was not part of the levee-building planter community. His father-in-law planted above overflow on the bluffs of East Baton Rouge, but Robertson himself did not farm. Furthermore, he did nothing for levees, rural or urban, leaving the details of flood
control to Creole tradition. Other streets in his Faubourg St. Mary— an American stronghold in 1820— included Canal, Magazine, Camp, Carondelet, and St. Charles. These were by the river. Faubourg Marigny, on the other hand, centered around Esplanade Street, toward Lake Pontchartrain, in the area that flooded in 1816. Faubourg Marigny was home to many free blacks, but part of it still lacked street addresses in 1820, being merely described as "Swamp."51

Outside the city, Orleans Parish contained 502 households in 1820. There were many small slaveowners on the city's outskirts and across the river, but also 56 sugar plantations worked by 20 or more slaves. Six of the 56 planters were American, the most important being: John Holliday, with 100 slaves; Williams and Crowson, 77 slaves; Philip Minor, 65 slaves; and the appropriately named Dr. Flood, 34 slaves. The richest planters, on the other hand, were Creoles: Lucien Labranche and freres, owning 155 slaves; Drausin Delacroix, 150 slaves; Norbert Fortier, 138 slaves; Pierre Sauve, 130 slaves; Bartheleme Macarty, 120 slaves; and Dugas Bouligny, 120 slaves. These and other Creole elites, such as Fortier, Soniat, Lebreton, Labarre, Livaudais, Descuir, De Lery, and Lachaise, descended from influential colonial families. In later years they subdivided their farms as town lots, but in 1820 they still grew sugar and built the Orleans Parish levees. Creole planters outnumbered American planters in Orleans by about
10 to 1. When levees broke in the parish, these were the people responsible for repairs.52

Proceeding upriver, one came to the Parish of St. Charles, population 3,862. Residents of this First German Coast sold foodstuffs to ship captains and indigo planters in the 1700s. The money was reinvested, and by the 19th century, farmers in St. Charles were as rich as Orleanians who had a better start. Its riverfront contained 113 households in 1820, and 37 of them worked 20 or more slaves to grow sugar. All the St. Charles planters relied on levees. Its soil dropped so rapidly in elevation away from the river that no one of consequence lived in the interior. Only 3 plantations belonged to Americans in 1820: Captain McCutcheon of "Ormond," 93 slaves in agriculture; Brown and Humphreys, 72 slaves; and the Smith Brothers, 56 slaves. Creole planters outnumbered American planters 12 to 1, but Americans intermarried with Creoles, so that there was eventually one ruling class. St. Charles planters devoted much money and attention to levees. They were chiefly vexed by breaks in St. John the Baptist.53

The Parish of St. John the Baptist was the Second German Coast. Its people had less money and lived on smaller farms. Their levees held most of the time, but often crevassed at Bonnet Carre Bend. Proprietors at this undesirable location simply lacked the means to build an impregnable levee. St. John's population in 1820 was 3,854, with more whites and fewer slaves than St. Charles.
Of 200 households, only 20 worked enough hands to be designated a plantation. The richest proprietors in 1820 were Creole widows: *Veuve Deslondes et fils*, 75 slaves; *Veuve Becnel et fil*, 73 slaves; and *Veuve Marmillon*, 68 slaves. People like the Labranches, Haydels, and Webres composed the elite. There was only one Anglo planter, a Colonel Croghan, with 28 slaves. Creole culture reigned supreme. No one lived off the river, and all the landowners built levees, in a social mix of rich and poor.54

Immediately to the north, one came to the Parish of St. James. Again, no one lived off the riverside, and all the householders built levees. St. James had a population of 5,660 in 1820—much larger than the other parishes thus far. The reason for its large population was that it was the most southerly, least flood-prone Acadian parish on the Mississippi; hence, the most densely improved. Acadians arrived as refugees in the 1770s, about fifty years after the Orleanians and Germans, so they had less time to acquire slaves or make improvements. Their large families and generous habits often defeated attempts to accumulate wealth. Land and slaveholdings remained relatively small. Some residents grew sugar and grew rich, but many farmed for subsistence. In 1820, the Parish of St. James had 338 households; 28 operated with 20 or more slaves. Only three planters had Anglo names in 1820: George Mather, 69 laborers; Samuel McMaster, 53 hands; and Mr. Bell, 30 laborers. The richest planter was Francois Guerin, with
100 slave hands; followed by French-speaking elites such as: Laurent Fabre, 75; Honore Roman, 70; Armand Duplantier, 62; Robin Delogny, 44; Louis Bringier, 42; Valcour Aime, 40; Monplaisir De Lery, 30; Michel Cantrell, 24; and Chevalier Malarche, 24. These are just a sample--poorer, but more numerous families included such stalwarts of Cajun culture as: Landry, Le Blanc, Le Boeuf, Gautreaux, Boudreaux, and Thibodeaux. Americans had no chance to alter the culture of this parish. Its police jury supervised levees the traditional way, household by household, on narrow plots of land.55

Next was Ascension Parish, another predominantly Acadian settlement. Ascension had a population of 3,728 in 1820, divided among 273 households, just 13 of which operated with 20 or more agricultural workers. Four planters had American names: Anderson & Henderson, 100 slaves; Kenner & Minor, 56; John Minor, 34; and Alexander Boyd, 24. Otherwise, the same people and settlement patterns prevailed as in St. James. It had a few well-to-do planters surrounded by small farmers packed tightly together, each building a slice of levee. However, a difference occurred in Ascension because of an outlet of the Mississippi which led to the southwest. This was Bayou Lafourche. It served as a gateway to bayou parishes--Assumption, Terrebonne, and Lafourche--which later became the home of Acadians who sold land on the Mississippi to richer neighbors or incoming Americans. The town of
Donaldsonville developed at the juncture of the Mississippi and Bayou Lafourche to transfer goods between New Orleans and the bayou settlements. Several men even operated plantations in Ascension Parish on the banks of Lafourche, building levees like those on the Mississippi. When flood waters from the Mississippi entered Bayou Lafourche, the overflow affected parishes downstream. Unfortunately, their police juries had no authority to close the bayou's mouth. Donaldsonville merchants wanted Bayou Lafourche to stay open to promote trade; bayou planters wanted it closed to promote land reclamation and agriculture. Who prevailed? The people in Ascension who voted for the police jury. Topographical and political features like this made flood control in Ascension more complex than in the parishes that lay downriver. Still, Ascension's police jury relied on the same household levee traditions which served other Creole regions. It left bayou Cajuns to fend for themselves.56

North of Ascension, the Parish of Iberville marked a significant climatic shift. The census taker listed 38 cotton mills, but only 1 sugar mill. Cotton became the dominant crop in Iberville because the parish lay too far north for the cold-sensitive sugar cane varieties of the day. Iberville's population of 4,414 was partitioned among 367 households in 1820. Again, there were many small Acadian subsistence farms, but some had already been bought and consolidated into plantations by American
entrepreneurs. For example, 8 of the 14 plantation-sized households in Iberville belonged to Americans in 1820. The largest by far was Joseph Erwin, who farmed with 130 agricultural slaves; followed by John Pemberton, 43; Philip Thomas, 42; Isham Fox, 42; Christopher Adams, 41; and Nicholas Wilson, 31. The wealthiest Acadian, by contrast, worked only 30 slaves. However, there were so many "French," it would have been hard for American planters to dominate them politically. Practically all of Iberville's numerous poor and middle class residents were Acadians.\textsuperscript{57}

Physically, Iberville Parish resembled Ascension in that it contained arable land on interior bayous. Bayou land was low, flood-prone, and usually unimproved, but it often withstood overflows and was quite inexpensive. Risk-takers who felt that improved land on the Mississippi was too costly were tempted to try their luck on back bayous in Iberville, such as Bayous Pigeon, Grosse Tete, Plaquemine, Goula, Jacquet, and Maringouin. It was impossible to protect bayou settlements simply with levees on the Mississippi, and the police jury was not prepared to reclaim the interior. However, if individuals wanted to accept the risk and move there, no one would stop them. Cautious investors confined their attentions to riverfront lands and the levee methods of Creole front proprietors.\textsuperscript{58}

North of Iberville, one met the parishes of East and West Baton Rouge. Parishes below this point extended on both sides of the Mississippi, but from here up, the river
divided east and west banks into separate jurisdictions. This was partly the result of the east having fallen into British hands during the colonial period, while the west bank retained French-Hispanic traditions. However, it is also true that east and west bank parishes north of Iber-ville had divergent interests in regard to levees. Those on the east were largely above overflow, whereas the western parishes flooded just like the Indigo, German, and Acadian Coasts. To charge one police jury with the care of both flooding and non-flooding settlements was impractical. Bluff farmers had little sympathy for swampers, and swampers felt no kinship with uplanders. Therefore, it made sense to divide the parishes on the basis of high or low ground. Accordingly, police juries in West Baton Rouge, Pointe Coupee, and Concordia paid a good deal of attention to levees; whereas parish leaders in East Baton Rouge and the Felicianas gave the subject comparatively little notice.

East Baton Rouge Parish had a sizeable stretch of low land on the Mississippi, but flood control did not involve its whole community in levee building. Most farmers in the parish owned few or no slaves and lived above overflow on highlands east and north of Bayou Fountain. In 1820, East Baton Rouge had a population of 4,808 in 631 households, but only 16 owned enough slaves to be viewed as planters. Twelve of those were Anglo-Americans, such as Col. Philip Hickey (58 slaves in agriculture), Abraham Bird (30
workers), and John N. Duncan (22 workers). Creoles owned just 4 plantations, but there was little social tension on the levee issue between them and the Americans. Planters on the riverfront supplied their own levees, and the upland farmers were exempted from participation.59

West Baton Rouge Parish faced an entirely different situation. It was a smaller parish with 2,338 people. Acadians owned most of the land, and, topographically, it was almost impossible to live off of the riverfront. There were no uplands. Its 172 households included 7 of plantation size, but none belonged to Americans. The richest proprietor in West Baton Rouge, Valerian Allain, had 65 slaves engaged in agriculture in 1820. Other "planters," (but with 30 or fewer slaves in agriculture) were the Widows Patin, Durand, and Meyer; also, Ivan Legendre, Guillaume Wyckoff, and Jean Baptiste Hebert. Americans named Campbell, Lobdell, Stark, and MacDougal had moved to the parish by 1820, but they were far outnumbered by people like the Daigles, Brauds, Babins, and Blanchards. If East Baton Rouge had an ethnically mixed population with an upland orientation, where levee-building was basically a problem for the rich, West Baton Rouge, on the other hand, held a largely homogenous population where all proprietors, rich and poor, were vitally interested in levees. Unfortunately, the planters of this parish had less money and fewer slaves to make good quality embankments.60
The last Creole parish on the Mississippi was that of Pointe Coupee, a long-settled area below the mouth of the Red. Its riverfront featured leveed plantations on the bend known as Pointe Coupee, but many people lived on False River, an oxbow lake that lies several miles to the west. As a whole, the parish was rich and populous. In 1820, Pointe Coupee contained 4,912 people, and 68 of its 224 households worked 20 or more slaves in agriculture. The social mix was like that of parishes near New Orleans. Only 4 or 5 Pointe Coupee planters were American in 1820, whereas 64 were Creoles—outnumbering Americans, 16 to 1. American planters from the Felicianas sometimes bought land in Pointe Coupee, but seldom moved there. Hence, Creole elites remained firmly in control. Not everyone in Pointe Coupee was wealthy, of course. According to the census, 27 middle-class Creole families lived on difficult-to-levee Raccourci Bend on the Mississippi. Another less-than-opulent settlement was on "Bayo Chefalier," the Atchafalaya River, Pointe Coupee's western border, where 18 poor American households were congregated in 1820. Conversely, the richest people lived on False River, like Widow de Ternant of "Parlange," working 188 slaves; Antoine Descuir, 170; and Julian Poydras, 155.61

By living on the lake (for that is what False River is), wealthy planters in Pointe Coupee had access to high ground without the risk of crevasses or levee set backs. They felt little danger from flooding. This was not the
case for the "Bayo Chefalier" settlers of Pointe Coupee and those further down the Atchafalaya in other parishes, because the levees on the Mississippi near Red River broke rather frequently and poured water into the Atchafalaya. When it rose, water flowed southward and spilled over the banks of Bayous Teche and Lafourche. This, in turn, flooded the bayou parishes of St. Mary, St. Martin, St. Landry, Assumption, and Terrebonne. Larger levees on the Mississippi in Pointe Coupee, or a dam on the Atchafalaya, would have spared the downstream parishes much in the way of flood damages, but why should Pointe Coupee supply them? Its riverfront planters were already building the levees they could afford. As for closing the Atchafalaya, even if it were possible, Pointe Coupee stood to gain little by the effort. Hardly anyone of significance in the parish lived on the Atchafalaya, and the drainage it gave was integral to the success of the local levee system. It allowed Pointe Coupee's riverfront proprietors to operate without enlarging their levees, and it prevented spillage into False River, even as it sank the farmers of Assumption. In short, the riverfront of Pointe Coupee, particularly at Raccourci Bend, was like Bonnet Carre or the mouth of Lafourche, a place where the inactivity of one parish adversely affected other jurisdictions which had no authority to correct the situation. But, when crevasses occurred, did people from St. Mary and St. Landry help Pointe Coupee to close the breach? Did they assist the
planters of Raccourci Bend to build stronger earthworks?
No. Louisiana's inherited policies of localistic levee building had yet to devise a solution for such dilemmas.62

Speaking of structural limitations within the Louisiana levee "system," attention is now drawn to events of the mid 1820s. With the general success of the levees and a greater security from overflow, settlement patterns began to change, allowing more people to live off of the riverfront. Population expansion was particularly marked on Bayous Teche and Lafourche, on the Mississippi north of the Red, and on Red River itself. The proliferation of shallow draft steamboats encouraged settlement in undeveloped areas. Better prices for sugar and cotton also revived a spirit of plantation expansion. Since the market could absorb a larger output, planters looked for more arable land. Suddenly, the riverfront properties seemed inadequate. Yet, if people could live off the riverfront, how would alluvial parishes equitably apportion the expense and duties of their levees?63

Some innovations in land tenure threatened to throw the riverfront's established arrangements and levee practices into disequilibrium. For example, on 23 April 1823, the Louisiana Gazette informed its readers that the U. S. Public Land Registrar in Donaldsonville was offering "back lands, or double concessions" for sale. Those desiring such properties were to go to the land office before 28 August 1824 to arrange a survey. Although the
announcement offered opportunities to some, its implications bordered on the stupendous. What it opened for sale were swamplands at the backside of the improved and leveed riverfront. Swamps had traditionally been left open as a commons for riverfront landowners. Levee builders could go to the backswamp for timber and moss, graze cattle in it during low water, use it as a hunting preserve, and dump excess water into it from their drainage, irrigation, and saw mill ditches. Some landowners even built back-levees along the edge of the fields and pumped standing water into the swamp with steam-operated drainage machines. Under the new arrangement, proprietors of improved riparian lands would be given first choice to buy the lands immediately in their rear, but if they had no money or chose not to make a purchase they could easily acquire a neighbor and be shut off from access to the swamp. Contrary to tradition, the backside man would have no obligation to build or maintain a slice of the levee, for he did not live on the river. Yet, in conventional levee-building communities where every household shared the same duties, this offered an undeserved "free ride." Why should a double-concessionee be allowed to deny front proprietors the use of the swamps and then receive the benefit of levee protection without having to share the costs? Yet, the Louisiana Gazette explained, the U. S. Congress had authorized such sales according to an act passed on 11 May 1820. Leave it to Americans to meddle with Creole traditions of equity and
fairness. The stated terms were "$1.25 per superficial acre, prompt payment," and the Land Office counseled readers to make arrangements quickly, for the time limit expired "at . . . the sickly season (August)," when no one would normally consent to enter the swamp to make the necessary surveys.64

In spite of the outrage to their sensibilities, wealthy Creoles might go ahead and buy the land at their backside just to keep an interloper from getting it. If inclined to be fretful or to worry about social implications, such as the dissolution of the Creole system of levee upkeep or the complete subversion of Louisiana by Yankeeisms, they could flee to New Orleans and divert their gloomy minds with a play. The Way to Get Married promised a fun-filled evening with characters such as Dick Dashall, Clementina Allspice, Caustic, and Tangent. Unfortunately, it was playing in English, at the American Theater.65

Meanwhile, Americans and Creoles wrangled in the New Orleans City Hall about the course of the city's public works. According to excerpts from the council minutes of 17 May 1823:

Mr. Allard offered sundry resolutions for improving the highways in the . . . district of the Bayou St. John.

Mr. Wiltz observed, that such repairs concerned the syndics and planters bordering the road; and that the corporation ought not to spend their money for such purposes.

Mr. Allard replied by citing several instances where the city had paid for such things on a former occasion.
Mr. Morse said it was no concern of theirs to put the Bayou road in repair, and that if they did so they would be traveling out of their line of duty. He refuted Mr. Allard's reasoning at some length.

Mr. Davezac observed that his experience of some years past, had been insufficient to make him understand the strange anomaly in the rights and privileges of the city and the suburbs of New Orleans. They had some suburbs paying taxes and sending aldermen, and others electing aldermen, and yet paying no taxes. Again, they had districts entitled to lights and pavements, whilst others had lamps but no footways; and then last of all, those that had neither light, roads, nor bridges.66

In further comments, Davezac noted that other great cities spent money to improve roads which led into them. Why should not the city pay for improvements to this route on Bayou St. John, so heavily used by hundreds of its citizens who flocked to Lake Pontchartrain on weekends? "The trifle now asked for making two or three bridges" could hardly be objected to. Expansion, improvement, and progress required change. For some the acceptance of change was difficult and unpleasant. Defenders of the status quo felt that the promotion of change might even be a dereliction of duty. Once introduced, it was hard to contain. In public works, change might carry their culture's accustomed work arrangements into dilemmas of unassignable responsibility for which their institutions were totally unequipped to solve.67

On taking a vote, the yeas in favor of Allard's resolution came from Abat, Allard, Benitaud, Davezac, Lanna, Montgomery, Rousseau, and Vignie; nays from Morse, Nabad, Shepherd, and Wiltz. The interchange sheds light on
the tension that existed between strict and loose construc-
tionists in the planning and spending of public monies.
Furthermore, the roll call shows that not every "American"
was a forward-looking progressive, nor every "Creole" a
hide-bound reactionary. Both labels more nearly reflected
a state of mind than an ethnic way of thinking.68

If the city of New Orleans and its suburbs could not
agree on rights and duties, much less was there ground for
agreement between the city council and parish police jury.
Macarty's crevasse and the struggle over Claiborne's
compensation showed that conflicting perceptions could not
be easily reconciled. Business leaders in New Orleans
would have liked to tax planters outside the city limits
for bigger rural levees, or to force them to labor more
diligently for the city's protection. However, the complex
arrangements of a local government composed of a parish,
city, and suburbs made it difficult to predict how the
power structure would develop. Some planters, like
Livaudais and Macarty, sold land to be divided as suburban
town lots. Afterwards, their plantation levees became
truly public works, maintained from tax revenues by the
subdivision as a whole. Planters further from town, on the
other hand, had no intention of ceasing to farm. Their
levees were still private responsibilities, and planters
objected to the city's criticism of their levee habits. As
New Orleans grew towards them, they fully expected the city
council to intrude in their affairs through a subversion of
the authority of Orleans Parish. To combat that tendency, the planters took the offensive and got a divorce.

On 11 February 1825, Governor Henry Johnson (a pro-Creole "American" sugar planter) approved an act of the legislature to divide Orleans Parish and create the Parish of Jefferson. Now, the major planters of Orleans had a parish of their own to govern as they saw fit, free from the city's interference. How appropriate to choose the name of Jefferson, the agrarian idealist, who opposed protection to manufactures on the ground that it led to urbanization and the growth of a proletariat! Jefferson was for gentlemen and an export economy based on the labor of slaves. In this sympathy, he was heartily joined by the gentry of Jefferson Parish. Indeed, lest one mistake the interest to be served by its creation, the act of separation obligingly listed the names of committee members who would apportion its police jury districts. Combined with data from the 1820 census, the names speak for themselves: Lucien Labranche, 155 slaves; L. Dusseau, 97 slaves; Jean Baptiste Lebreton, 99 slaves; John Holliday, 100 slaves; F. B. De Labarre, and Volant Labarre (Widow Labarre, 90 slaves); Francois Dorville, 9 slaves; D. Villars, 16 slaves; L. Dusseau de Lacroix, 150 slaves; Joseph Verloin, 19 slaves; and Felix De Lery (Louis and W. Francois De Lery, 87 slaves). Planters nearer the city might subdivide and yield their levee duties to hirelings and tax-payers, but the aristocrats of Jefferson meant to
raise levees (and hell, if they chose) in the time-honored way of the Creoles. 69

A flood in 1823 spread alarm on the riverside and caused considerable damage where levees collapsed. However, prompt action by landowners and levee inspectors contained the flood and curtailed the spread of overflows. For example, on May 9th, the Louisiana Gazette reported a crevasse on the Jumonville plantation in St. Bernard Parish. The 1820 census showed 94 slaves in residence there, and the property lay eight miles below New Orleans in a neighborhood of opulent Creoles. Landowners in this parish knew what to do in an emergency, worked well as a team, and had an ample slave force. The Gazette said that "the rush of water was great about noon and partially injured a large field of young cane," but "efficient aid . . . was speedily obtained from the gangs of the neighboring plantations; about 4 o'clock, P.M., the breach was closed up." This was how a parish levee system was supposed to function, as a mixture of public and private labor, for the benefit of individuals and the community. 70

On the other hand, where landowners had more difficult terrain or inadequate labor resources, a privately built parish levee system might not function so smoothly. For instance, on 10 May 1823, the Louisiana Gazette reported a crevasse in the relatively poor parish of West Baton Rouge. It occurred at a site "formerly intended for the town of St. Michel," where caving banks had caused town planners to
abandon the location. Part of the levee washed away, and some residents just planned to flee to high ground across the river. Households in West Baton Rouge were smaller in size than in St. Bernard, but crews of a hundred or more labored constantly on the St. Michel levee during the week. Probably, these were slaves and free persons alike, working in shifts. By the 17th, the crevasse was nearly closed. Unfortunately, a storm on Sunday night lashed the Mississippi to great heights and caused another break eight miles down at the plantation of Firmin Guidry. He only owned 12 slaves in 1820, and his neighbors owned very few. For example, Eduard Daigle owned 1 slave; Joseph Bittancour, 2 slaves; Widow Michel Bittancour, 4 slaves; August Hebert, 1 slave; Joseph Le Blanc, 1 slave; etc. Here, the newspaper painted a picture of desolation: "the water rushed with such rapidity, as to destroy everything before it; cabins have been swept off and cattle drowned." Levees crumbled for a space of three miles, "notwithstanding all the efforts of the inhabitants to prevent the crevasse gaining way." Why? "Heavy rains render all their vigilance useless." The ground was too saturated to hold together, and repair crews floundered in mud. Meanwhile, in East Baton Rouge, heavy rains were damaging crops even when levees held. John Kleinpeter, who lived on highlands seven miles below Baton Rouge, said that water stood two feet high in corn fields between his house and the Mississippi. The levees inhibited drainage.71
In spite of locally heavy destruction, the flood of 1823 failed to generate a call for state-wide levee improvements because its effects were too scattered. So, landowners and police juries in the 1820s continued their usual tasks. For unusual problems, parishes turned to the legislature for help. However, no general policy of flood control emerged; simply a piecemeal collection of laws treating each circumstance on an *ad hoc* basis.

For instance, in 1825 the legislature addressed the problem of flood control in Pointe Coupee. It passed a law to define the boundaries of the parish and forced the river and lake planters to acknowledge the Atchafalaya as Pointe Coupee's western border. It also allowed the parish to accept a Congressional land donation at the parish-funded *Grand Levee* in Red River Bend. This structure guarded Pointe Coupee and the bayou parishes by keeping Mississippi floodwater from joining the Red to enter the Atchafalaya. The Grand Levee was "public" because no individual could keep a private one in repair at the spot, and no one was stupid enough to buy the land to try it. In this case, Pointe Coupee basically built a levee on public land and dared the United States (which did nothing to supply one) to object to the plan. One should not, therefore, view the Congressional donation as an act of *largesse*, but simply as a means for the General Government (as the national government was known in those days) to escape further criticism or calls for action. Even after the donation, Pointe
Coupee faced the task of building its Grand Levee alone. Indeed, the legislature actually chastised other parishes in 1834 about the expense that Pointe Coupee endured in building and rebuilding. It pointed out that a crevasse in the Grand Levee would flood the parishes of Lafayette, St. Martin, St. Mary, West Baton Rouge, Iberville, Assumption, Lafourche Interior, and Terrebonne. Therefore, it ordered presidents of the respective police juries to call meetings about the need to contribute to the cost. Juries were to render reports of their deliberations in 1835, but as one might predict, nothing came of the proposal. In 1835, the state asked Congress for federal funds to build levees on public land in Pointe Coupee. Then, in 1837, the state told Pointe Coupee to sell or rent its Congressional donation to generate funds. Voters from the bayou parishes wanted no share of the costs, and the state and national governments shunned direct responsibility as well. Pointe Coupee, rich and exploited, had to depend on its own resources and even furnish some protection for the underserving on the backlands. What other choice did it have?72

Well, in 1826, Louisiana created a State Board of Internal Improvements, and one might think that building a Grand Levee to protect multiple parishes would be a natural task for it. But the Board's budget amounted to only $9,000 in 1826, and its assignments in coming years primarily (indeed, almost exclusively) related to navigation improvements rather than levee building. In 1832, the
legislature created the office of State Engineer with an annual salary of $5,000 to plan, survey, estimate, and supervise public works. Again, these were almost entirely navigation improvements. Members of the legislature sent him hither and thither throughout Louisiana to make feasibility studies on Bayou Pigeon and Bayou Podunk in order to placate constituents who wanted shipping facilities. Even with a Board of Internal Improvements and State Engineer, there was little motion toward state-supported levees or planning for regional flood control.73

When the task of levee building surpassed the abilities of private landowners, or more than one parish was involved, the effort to combat flooding sometimes took strange forms. For example, in 1827 Iberville Parish was authorized to hold a drainage lottery to raise $4,000 for digging canals on the east bank. The amount increased to $8,000 in 1828. These steps followed an unsuccessful attempt in 1826 to collect money by private subscription and by public grants from the police juries of Iberville and East Baton Rouge. The object of the fund-raiser was to close Bayou Manchac, which flooded both parishes.74

The most persistent trouble spot for inter-parish cooperation on the Mississippi appears to have been Bonnet Carre. Here, the Mississippi made a sharp turn at what is now the city of LaPlace. Lake Pontchartrain lay just four and a half miles east of the bend, and the intervening ground sloped steeply toward the lake. If water broke the
levees, overflows would rapidly cover land to the south. Crevasses at Bonnet Carre Bend flooded St. John the Baptist Parish, but also the east bank of St. Charles, and even Jefferson Parish as far as Metairie Ridge. Levees on Bonnet Carre Point, meanwhile, were also subject to breakage because of exposure to strong currents. When levees broke on the Point, water poured across St. John and the west bank of St. Charles. Wealthy inhabitants of St. Charles despised breaks at Bonnet Carre because the middle and lower class residents of St. John seemed incapable of building adequate embankments. St. John's proprietors, on the other hand, thought that if St. Charles's sugar princes wanted better levees, they should help with the costs. Therefore, from 1814 to 1850 a series of proposals passed through the legislature to try to please both parishes. Bonnet Carre's point levee progressed from being: a work demanded of householders; to a shared work which landowners in both parishes built; to a work paid for by a tax on slaves (which St. Charles objected to, because it owned the most); to a work maintained by St. John the Baptist as a toll road; to a work subsidized by the State, but designed by a police jury; and, finally, to a work designed by the state engineer, subsidized by the state, and superintended by St. John the Baptist's police jury. As for Bonnet Carre Bend, the solution which ended its flood problems did not come until the land was removed from cultivation and the federal government opened a spillway there in the 1930s.
Nothing was done to expand the scale of levee building until spectacular floods proved the insufficiency of previous efforts. 75

When people in the antebellum era thought of great flood years, 1828 immediately leapt to their minds. The St. Francis and Yazoo bottoms deeply overflowed. Floods in the parishes of Concordia, Ouachita, and Catahoula reached an average depth of seven feet. Water from the Tensas escaped into the Atchafalaya, which then poured into bayous such as de Glaize, Courtableau, and Grosse Tete. Upper Bayou Teche settlements did not flood, but lower settlements did. Bayous at St. Martinville rose as much as 20 feet above low water levels. The usual fluctuation was 3 to 4 feet. 76

The prospect of a flood in 1828 was particularly troubling on account of the economy. Cotton was selling from $32 to $48 a bale in January, depending on the grade; and sugar brought 6 cents per pound in bulk, on the plantations prior to shipment. These were about the best returns since the Panic of 1819, and no one wanted to lose crops at these prices. However, the rains seemed incessant. In somewhat precious language, the Woodville Republican described weather on the Mississippi for February 1828:

Such dodging and drabbing--such skulking and scampering! The water gods seem to be afflicted with a perpetual rheum, and man, poor sublunary man, must weave his way through drizzly distributions, wet, weary, and weeping. Within doors there is nought but dampness, mildew and chills --without all is fog, storm and mizzy. 76
The Natchez Ariel complained that weeks of rain made the road to Natchez-Under-the-Hill impassable for carts and almost so for pedestrians. Failures of the mail took place on the Natchez Trace. The Baton Rouge Gazette reported the Mississippi within 11 inches of high water by February 23rd! Furthermore, General Hamilton and other planters in Ascension Parish had already detailed their entire force to enlarge a new levee, because "the river was . . . running over it."77

As the river rose, so did the price of cotton. By early March of 1828, Louisiana cotton was bringing $76 to $96 a bale, which represented a 100 to 138 percent increase since January. Sugar prices were stable, but tariff protection and the spread of cultivation in back concessions and bayou parishes caused a great increase in production. The New Orleans Bee stated that Louisiana produced 60,000 hogsheads of sugar and 30,000 gallons of molasses in 1827. Its sugar alone amounted to more than $3.5 million in value, and planters did not want their planting interrupted by overflows. With water rising so quickly, the levees could not be neglected. Newspapers throughout the region kept residents posted as to the flood's progress.78

On 1 March 1828, the Baton Rouge Gazette told of the Mississippi being within four inches of high water. A crevasse occurred at Philip Minor's "Waterloo" in Ascension Parish, and the paper quoted him as saying he hoped to
close the break. A post rider reported Minor's success to the paper within the week. Meanwhile, levee breaks took place below Baton Rouge on plantations belonging to Fergus Duplantier and John DeBellievre. Experts thought the water would reach Bayou Manchac, cover the lowlands of East Baton Rouge, and enter Iberville Parish if the river did not fall. The crew of the steamer Florida confirmed a crevasse north of Plaquemines; a breach also happened at Robert Camp's plantation in Iberville. On March 8th, the Gazette even heard that the Grand Levee of Pointe Coupee had given way, endangering all the bayou parishes. With relief, the Gazette reported on the 15th that it was not the Grand Levee, but a plantation levee near Jewell's which dissolved. This meant less danger for interior settlements; nonetheless, its local effects were alarming. Observers from St. Francisville told the New Orleans Bee that Pointe Coupee's riverfront was "literally under water," with residents "forced to throw up levees around their dwellings" to save houses and livestock. Storms increased the stress on the levees, and editors warned that "the safety of immense property . . . depends much upon calm dry weather."  

Critics of Louisiana complained about its apparent indifference to disaster prevention. However, this is unjust. Planters and police juries frequently took precautions about situations that might cause crevasses, and in regions of mixed ethnicity, members of Creole and
American factions alike joined committees to ensure cooperation. For example, on 15 March 1828, the West Baton Rouge police jury convened an emergency session to answer a citizen petition about levees on an exposed point in the Mississippi. Limits on time and resources made it impractical to commandeer workers to aid every household on the point, so the populace called for a levee quarantine. The community called for a second levee to be built across the neck to seal it off. Creole Police Jurors Favrot, Peltier, Babin, Lejeune, Labauve, and Guedry decreed that an ethnically mixed committee (consisting of Messrs. Hebert, Aillet, Broussard, Blanchard, Browrk, Chinn, Sherburne, and Devall) would ask the landowners' permission to build a levee at the neck and accept subscriptions of money or labor to build it. Creole/Acadians far outnumbered Americans in West Baton Rouge, but all of them tended to the levees. 

80

On May 10th, 1828, nine crevasses broke levees on Bayou Lafourche. That same day, a serious break occurred in Iberville Parish on the Mississippi at the plantation of Joseph Erwin, a property noted by some as the finest on the Acadian Coast. We now turn to examine this disaster and its effects on a notable "American" levee builder. 

81

Erwin's consolidation of a planting empire in the Mississippi floodplain was somewhat representative of American planter experiences in Creole regions. His presence among the French-speakers was chiefly attributable
to his wish to make money, but also served as a means to escape unpleasantness back east. Erwin left Tennessee in 1807 after Andrew Jackson killed his son-in-law in a scandalous duel. The very air of Tennessee seemed tainted to Erwin after this event, and he never returned to live there. His first purchase on the Mississippi, two miles below the head of Bayou Plaquemines, was a tract with a front of four arpents purchased from an Acadian, Nicholas Rousseau, for $10,000. The area composed about 160 superficial arpents. From this nucleus, Erwin sought ways to expand. He did not want unimproved lands, but semi-improved places he could buy from subsistence farmers or small planters. With the use of his slave gangs, Erwin would redevelop them as large-scale plantations. Thus, by right of purchase, Erwin became a member of the "Creole" levee-building community with the same duties as his neighbors.  

Purchases of adjacent lands followed. Erwin bought 240 arpents in Iberville from Jacques LeBlanc, 240 arpents from Bartholemew Hamilton, and 280 arpents from Ann Bruneteau. In the 1810s, he and Aubry Dupuy purchased 140 arpents from the government. Dupuy ran the plantation, and Erwin bought him out. A friend of Erwin's said that the Creole partner was "too scary" (i.e., timid) to operate as boldly as Joseph wanted. One nearby farmer, Urbain Gagnie, failed to pay a certain Jacob Babin for levees and roads, worth $882, which Babin built on Gagnie's land. Erwin
bought Gagnie's 240 arpents, and its levees, at a sheriff's sale. These early purchases were made with cash, but later Erwin experimented successfully with credit. For example, in 1812, he paid $500 cash and $2,700 due in 1813 for 200 arpents. Expansion "on the margin" might pay off handsomely. But would the Mississippi allow him to harvest and sell a crop to meet the obligation? Already, Erwin faced problems with flooding. For instance, in 1815, a great flood year, he sold land to Dr. Haley Inge for $3,500. The land lay in bends of the Mississippi, and Erwin warranted it against overflow only as far as Bayou Plaquemines. He sold the land beyond, on the so-called island, without a guarantee, at the buyer's risk and without recourse. Nor was it certain that a crop would be profitable even if it escaped flooding. For instance, Erwin's factor wrote in 1818 that "the proceeds of your crops will fall very far short of your wants." As to quality, "the last 70 Bales are leafy & will not pass for prime; the first 30 were much the same." Yet, with second-class cotton at $124 a bale in 1818, what did it matter? The leveed stage was set for Erwin to become an opulent planter. His final acquisition near his original "Home Place" was 240 arpents bought from Pierre Breaux in 1825. He promised to pay $2,000 a year each March in 1826, 1827, and 1828. Also in 1825, Erwin sold 680 arpents to his slave-trading partner Joseph Thompson for $6,000, in installments, at 10 percent interest. Since he counted on
Thompson's money to pay Breaux, one sees how Erwin was leveraging his operations. Financial dependence on levees, and on the ability of other leveed proprietors to pay, increased apace with his obligations.®®

Soon, Erwin expanded across the river at Point Manchac. Here he combined properties from Joseph Orillion, Auguste Landry, Jean Baptiste Dupuy, Jacques Devillier, and Urbain Gagnie to make a leveed tract measuring 16 arpents in front. The merger involved cash payments, mortgages, partnerships, note endorsements, and suits, as well as the ongoing tasks of levee upkeep. In 1826, Erwin used the "Point Manchac" place and its 34 slaves as collateral for a $21,000 loan from the Bank of the United States. Oddly enough, he did not repay it. Instead, in 1827, Erwin sold the land to a former owner (whose note Erwin had signed before a foreclosure).®^ Erwin bought another river plantation in Iberville in 1821. He paid $120,360 by arranging a cash payment of $9,960, two interest-free installments of $10,000, and the assumption of a note of $79,100 due to John McDonough. In seven months, he sold the place to Ann Waters for about the same price, except she paid $27,527 in cash and assumed the note. Hence, Erwin obtained $17,000 in cash without paying the debts; furthermore, when Waters was unable to make payments, it reverted to Erwin! Maneuvers like this show how he used collateral for profit. Some speculations did not even require planting to make money, but his slaves
were always growing leveed cotton and sugar. The value of the crops supported the price of the land. Speculations of this sort perfectly portray the risk-taking mentality of the upper tier of levee builders. This is how people like Erwin were able to build "big, pretty houses" on the Mississippi.85

Now, Erwin began to overextend himself. In 1823, he mortgaged "Home Place" and 221 slaves; "Point Manchac" and its slaves; "Portage" plantation on Bayou Plaquemines, with 200 arpents and 20 slaves; and a new interior property of 3,680 arpents and 94 slaves on Bayou Grosse Tete in Pointe Coupee, held jointly with Robert and George Bell. In exchange, Erwin received $50,000 from the Fire and Life Insurance Co. of New York City. With the proceeds, Erwin added three places to his holdings: "Irion" plantation; "Grosse Tete" in West Baton Rouge Parish; and 500 arpents at "Portage." Such large loans and purchases required a steady cash flow to meet obligations. Proceeds from crops and payments from purchasers had to arrive in a timely manner in order for Erwin to stay afloat. Yet, risk was an accepted part of the opulent planters' way of life. He and his ambitious, wealth-seeking, levee-building compatriots all operated the same way. For example, part of "Irion" came from a forced sale on a defaulted mortgage; Erwin paid $200 cash with an additional $6,518 due in five payments at 10 percent interest. The second tract of "Irion" came from the wife of the assigned creditor, and Erwin promised
$28,000 at 10 percent in installments due in March of 1826, 1827, and 1828. An interrupted cash flow, whether by flood, fire, drought, or low crop prices, threatened disaster, but these were the parameters within which the large levee builders operated. The acceptance of risk was basic to the game, but so was resilient persistence. For example, the creation of the Bayou Grosse Tete place required the merger of no fewer than 39 tracts!86

Sometimes human unreliability put planters in a bind. For instance, at "Portage," Erwin made a joint purchase with the convivial Edward Douglass White for $6,000 in cash and payments of $3,000 due in March of 1827, 1828, and 1829. Unfortunately, White dissolved the partnership in 1827 to go into politics, leaving Erwin to make the payments. Erwin sold in seven months to an American in Pointe Coupee to escape the burden of the obligation, but had to depend on the buyer to pay the $20,000 payments due annually from March of 1828 into 1832. The buyer, unable to do so, resigned the property to Erwin in 1828, thus unexpectedly absorbing Erwin's cash flow. To meet the crunch, Erwin took a second mortgage of $55,000 from the Bank of the United States on his "Home Place" and 221 slaves, as well as on 90 slaves bought from Warner Washington, and on the Bayou Grosse Tete place with its 65 slaves. He even put "Irion" and "Portage" on the market, hoping to salvage at least part of his empire. Advertisements in the Ariel, September 1827, described "Irion" as

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having a leveed front of 17 arpents (3,264 feet) and 1,300 arpents altogether. Its first 30 arpents of cane would provide starters for planting 200 arpents of cane in 1828. It had 67 slaves and all the equipment needed for sugar; also, two houses, cabins, a cotton gin, and grist mill. "Portage," five miles inland on Bayou Plaquemines, claimed a front of 10 arpents, with 200 arpents in cotton, much cypress, 20 slaves, 2 houses, cabins, a cotton gin, and livestock. Erwin desperately needed purchasers to pay various debts, and by 1828, his affairs were in crisis. The high water only accentuated his panic. 87

In January of 1828, Erwin sold "Irion" for a promise of $20,000 annually from 1829 to 1833. To meet immediate obligations current in 1828, Erwin took a third mortgage on "Home Place," the Grosse Tete land, and 286 slaves in order to get $25,000 from the Bank of Louisiana. Then, on May 10th, the levee at "Home Place" broke and could not be mended. Floodwaters cascaded over the land, ruined crops, threatened neighbors, and damaged his credit, just when he was starved for income. Water also poured into Bayou Plaquemines and flooded "Portage," which he sold in disgust in May of 1828 for only $9,300, much less than the former price. As it was underwater, Erwin just wanted to be rid of it. Finally, in June of 1828, he even sold "Home Place"--his residence since 1807--and its 250 slaves to an Anglo planter from St. Bernard. The buyer assumed mortgages of $20,000 to the insurance company, $28,000 on
the Washington slaves, and $58,000 owed to the Bank of Louisiana. Thus, Erwin only actually got $25,000 in cash, with $30,000 to be received in 1829 and about $20,000 a year from 1830 to 1832. Heartbroken and spent by the water damages of 1828, Erwin wrote a son-in-law that he had sold his "splendid plantation and all my happiness with it." Still, it was not enough. Unable to plant, Erwin borrowed another $59,000 in August.88

Constant stress took its toll on Erwin's nerves, and he became even more irascible than usual. However, Christopher Adams, a fellow American in the Creole region, wrote Erwin, with whom he quarreled, that he had no intention of letting their friendship lapse. "As to you getting mad with me," Adams said, "it is all nonsense, for neither of us have many friends in this country, and we must at least be friendly to each other." The comment speaks volumes about the reluctant cooperation between Creoles and Americans in old Catholic settlements. Levee duties pulled them together, but affectionate unity was more typical of people who were culturally homogenous.89

When dealing with workaholics of the Erwin variety, affection could not be counted on even among intimates. Indeed, Erwin's letters bulged with complaints about his family. For instance, he and his wife lived in separation -- she in Nashville, he in Iberville. Joseph derided her for letting son John Erwin, the "noble sportsman," keep a race horse. "Let him Sport his own money hereafter,"
Joseph said, "as mine comes two hard to Give away." To Joseph's credit, John did appear blase about money. For example, he once wrote Joseph asking him to cosign a $30,000 loan for he and a friend to start them as planters on the Mississippi. "I hope you will Indulge me in this," John said, for "but little can be done in Tennessee."

Joseph frankly told John Craighead, his daughter's husband, that Craighead was too poor to settle on the Mississippi. He should move to cheap land on the bayous if he came to Louisiana. However, it gave Joseph little pleasure to have his children in proximity. He wrote in 1821 that John's advent had been a disaster. "Don't let any of my children come down this winter unless I write. Nothing terrifies me so much . . . I don't sleep one hour in 24, nor sometimes in 48." John was "a troublesome and unfortunate son, a trifling man of no account, nor ever will be." Because of John's debts, Joseph told a business associate, "Don't draw on me for anything. I cant due any thing with him. he has no sense. he actually dont." Nor was John the only problem. The family papers contain a bill for Joseph, Jr.'s stay in the Kentucky Lunatic Asylum in 1825 and 1826, including a charge for four broken window panes. A sister wrote that he wanted out, but advised that this desire be withheld from Father: "I think, poor feller, he is best where he is." As to Isaac Erwin, Joseph wrote, "Is it possable that [he] would act in this simple manner?" His "cold-hearted" wife making him ridiculous, etc. At wit's
end, Joseph flatly turned down an offer from a son-in-law for a vacation in Nashville: "You don't no what I have to due here, and my family is Just as ignorant as Children. When you have to due business through Children and fools you must due the best you can." Writing his wife in 1827, Joseph counseled perseverance. "Let us speak of old times when Love was warm on both sides . . . it's raining, and that is the only moment I have to spare."90

By 1828, Erwin must have felt that nature's harassment in the form of a crevasse was a cruel joke. Lacking other assets, he sold the Grosse Tete property to Isaac in March of 1829. The land on this bayou had flooded horribly in 1828. Even in 1829, Isaac had to voyage there by flatboat and have slaves clear a landing in the canebreak. Ever the optimist, poor Isaac told them, "Clear the way, for here's where we die." Joseph never recovered from the trauma inflicted by his levee collapse in 1828, and the belief that he was ruined was made infinitely worse because of what must have appeared to be divine retribution through crevasse and flood. Why had Joseph's levee been singled out to fail among the properties on the river, and why at so critical a time as 1828? His empire fell like a breached embankment beneath the river's foam. Before long, a son-in-law told shocked relations that "Capt. Erwin's derangement has unfortunately terminated in self destruction." On 14 April 1829, Joseph Erwin wrapped himself in a cloak, walked to the end of the gallery at his
daughter's house, and drowned himself head-first in a water jar—a belated fatality of the flood of 1828.91

Nor was Erwin the only casualty. The flood of 1828 also shook Louisiana's faith in its single-parish levee codes. Once again, in the wake of the flood of 1828, the legislature revived the state levee law with all its rigorous reforms. Parish representatives agreed on the necessity for uniform standards, and on 7 February 1829, Creole Governor Pierre Derbigny signed the law.92

The levee law of 1829, with a few changes, almost copied the statute of 1816. It retained the obligation of landowners to levee their own fronts and kept the sizes and setbacks recommended in 1816. However, the law of 1829 also gave police juries the right to superintend levees on bayous like Plaquemines that ran "to and from" the Mississippi. Sections 4, 8, 9, 11, 12, and 13 now contained clauses that applied to levees on tributaries, outlets, and connecting bayous. This reflected the impact of settlers moving into the interior, because some river parishes now had significant development on bayous and backlands. Police juries had to be given a supervisory capacity in those areas as well, for the sake of public safety, and changes in the powers of the police juries had to be handled at the state level. Other important changes in 1829 included the designation of parish treasuries, rather than the state treasury, as the recipient of fines for levee infractions. Section 21 removed the right of
planters to refuse a requisition for levee work if they were gathering or processing crops. This item sent a message that the safety of the levee was more important than any other activity. Levee work carried first claim on a community's labor, and it was not to be delayed or shunted aside merely so landowners could finish private tasks. The legislature also expanded the powers of parish governments to cope with new situations. For example, section 49 provided for more effective notification of non-residents, and Section 54 authorized police juries to lease school sections to people who would build levees on them.93

Clearly, even though the levee law of 1829 was not dramatically different, the revival of uniform standards was a big change. And, when the trauma of 1828 wore off, there were again some who felt that the state had gone too far. Localism resurfaced, and individual parishes discovered reasons why they should be exempted from the regimented levee codes. Indeed, there were legitimate reasons for variations in public works, because parishes had different topographies. Even within the law of 1829, the state recognized that some laws did not apply equally to every parish. For example, Section 9, dealing with roads and bridges next to the Mississippi, did not pertain to East or West Feliciana, nor to that part of East Baton Rouge which lay above the city. In those parishes and areas, the river was lined with bluffs; hence, had no levees with roads beside them to be worked. Also, the
police juries of Concordia and Ouachita received special authority in the law of 1829 to tax proprietors for levees on public lands, as well as to set their own meeting schedule for levee discussions. These parishes deserved special consideration. They had vast tracts of unsold land in 1829, and Concordia had started building its own public levees as early as the 1810s. Too, flooding occurred earlier there because they lay further north on the river. In matters of time and taxation, it was entirely just for the legislature to make exceptions for these parishes. Their insistence on special treatment was reasonable. 94

Opposition to uniform standards developed more slowly in other regions, as citizens realized once again that state levee codes were not an unmixed blessing. The first amendment to the levee law after 1829 occurred in 1830, when the legislature passed a special law to let the mayor of New Orleans stop the building of levees or buildings on the city's batture. The 1830 law also bestowed levee powers and taxing authority on the police jury of St. Mary Parish, whose settlements lay on Bayous Teche and Boeuf. These modifications did not change the state levee law, they merely clarified or extended it to serve more locations. The next change in the levee system, however, was not quite so benign. In 1831, several parishes protested their way completely out of the 1829 law's provisions. 95
Less than two years after the passage of the levee reforms of 1829, the parishes of Pointe Coupee, West Baton Rouge, Iberville, Plaquemines, and St. Bernard secured a reversion to their old levee arrangements. An act signed on 8 February 1831 by Creole Governor Andre Roman allowed their police juries to return to whatever laws they followed before the reforms were adopted. The new law of 1831 told them to "pass all such ordinances as they may deem necessary" about levees and other works and to "impose such fines and penalties to enforce the same, as they may judge proper and expedient." The judge of Pointe Coupee received particular instructions to convene the police jury to repair the Grand Levee. This levee "rebellion" of 1831 left only six parishes in full compliance with the state law of 1829: Ascension, St. James, St. John the Baptist, St. Charles, Jefferson, and the southeast floodplain of East Baton Rouge. Orleans had special arrangements because of its city and faubourg levees; Concordia and Ouachita were already exempt. For whatever reasons, the reforms of 1829 failed to satisfy much of the riparian region, and in 1832 even St. Mary Parish bailed out. It reverted to the road act of 1818.96

Finally, however, the value of uniform standards was recognized by the riparian majority. In 1833, cotton and sugar were selling at high prices; ample credit was fueling investment and expansion; the legislature was passing myriad charters for improvements; and another flood
threatened to wreck it all. Therefore, on 29 March 1833, Governor Roman signed another levee bill. This one repealed the exemptions given to certain parishes in 1831 and extended the reforms of 1829 to the whole riverfront. Sheepishly, the rebel parishes filed back into the fold to seek protection from better levees. The law of 1833 hastened to state that it was not repealing any specific laws enacted for particular parishes, but simply applying the general levee law to all parishes on the banks of the Mississippi. With this act, the state of Louisiana conformed to a higher standard of uniform construction and upkeep. Subsequently, parishes on the Mississippi in Louisiana followed this basic levee law for the rest of the antebellum period, and with it they prospered greatly. In the decades before the Civil War, Louisiana's levees promoted and preserved the prosperity of some of the richest regions of the South. Wealth poured onto the leveed proprietors from sales of sugar and cotton right up to the point when their slaves were freed and their former levee-building arrangements fell apart. Gradually, and in no small degree because of shared responsibilities in the matter of flood control, the Creole and American levee-building communities pulled more closely together, so that by the end of the century, a casual observer would see only one elite in Louisiana—that of the leveed planters and their heirs.97
ENDNOTES


5Ibid., 27 March-4 April 1816, 18-20, 24-25, 27.

6Ibid., 4 April-9 April 1816, 26-27, 29, 31-32.

7Ibid., 12 April-14 April 1816, 34-37. Richardson thought the name was "Irving," but the context shows that Joseph Erwin's plantation was being described. According to Richardson, the west bank levee terminated at Pointe Coupee and the east bank levee at Baton Rouge.

8Ibid., 14 April 1816, 37. The parish church of St. John the Baptist, originally constructed in 1769, was destroyed by the river in 1821. Data about folk culture and social uses of the levee comes from Elida Millet Caillouet, *Lions on the River: A Potpourri, St. John the Baptist Parish* (Tuscon: Alphagraphics, 1989), 10, 27-28, 40-43, 47-48, 88-89. Leonce Haydel of St. James Parish wrote concerning the levee in front of the Church of St. Michael de Cantrelle: "Before a new levee was built . . . St. Michael Church had a large front yard with beautiful cedar trees on each side, and wooden posts and railings where the people could tie their horse-carriages and buggies. There was a long plank walk leading to the levee, where a long stairway with a railing could be used by all of the people who walked to church on top of the levee." Leonce Haydel, *La Paroisse de St. Jacques: A History in Words and Photographs* (Baton Rouge: Pelican Management Corp., 1988), 17.


10William Kenner, New Orleans, La., to "Dear Major" [Major John Minor, Concordia Par., La.], 11 May 1816, in Kenner (William) Papers, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Special Collections, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University. At the time of
William Kenner's death in the late 1810s, he owned 63 slaves at "Oakland" in Orleans Parish and 148 slaves at "Linwood" in Ascension. Six motherless children survived him, and their mother's family (Minor) served as guardians. Philip Minor controlled the Orleans Parish property in 1820, when it contained 65 slaves. A Kenner and Minor partnership owned the Ascension place in 1820. It had 68 slaves, of whom 56 were agricultural workers. John Minor also ran a place in Ascension in 1820, with 40 slaves, of whom 34 worked in agriculture. Craig A. Bauer, A Leader Among Peers: The Life and Times of Duncan Farrar Kenner (Lafayette, La.: Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1993), 16-19; Fourth Census of the United States, 1820, State of Louisiana: Orleans Parish, Ascension Parish.

11 Kenner to Minor, 11 May 1816, in Kenner Papers, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, LSU.


If religion preserved personal divisions, business promoted social unity. Charters for banks, drainage and land companies; canal, railroad, and gaslight companies, etc., in Louisiana's Early National Period feature liberal mixtures of Creole and American names. For instance, the persons taking stock subscriptions for the Citizens' Bank of Louisiana ran the gamut from Lacistiere La Barre and Ambroise Sompayrac to Ebenezer Miller and John D. Smith—all joined in the common pursuit of wealth, just like levee builders (which many of them were). "An act to incorporate the Citizens' Bank of Louisiana," *Acts Passed at the First Session of the Eleventh Legislature of the State of Louisiana*, 172-94. The Duke of Wurttemburg, touring in 1823, reached the same conclusion. He found New Orleans a "second Calcutta" where "the greatest anti-thesis exists between the Creoles and the Anglo-Americans. Yet, they amalgamate. Widely divergent in their opinions and religious views, they are united in politics and trade." He decided that "the vast and universal interest of world commerce... finally wins over prejudice." Paul Wilhelm, Duke of Wurttemburg, *Travels in North America, 1822-1824*, trans. W. R. Nitske, ed. Savoie Lottinville (Stuttgart und Tubingen: Verlag der J. G. Cotta'schen Buchhandlung, 1835; Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1973), 33

Darby's list of public buildings (1816) included: the Cabildo, northwest corner of Chartres and St. Peter's; the Church of St. Louis on Chartres; the Ursuline Convent, between Levee and Chartres; the Barracks, on Garrison and Levee; the Customhouse, between Canal and Levee; the French Market, on Levee between St. Anne and Dumaine; the Orleans Bank, on Conti between Chartres and Royal; the Louisiana Bank, on Royal between Conti and St. Louis; the Planter's Bank, on Conti and Royal; Government House at Levee and Toulouse; the District Courthouse, on Royal between DuMaine and St. Philip; and Latrobe's water works, on Levee between Ursuline and St. Philip. These were in the Vieux Carre. Faubourgs St. Mary and Annunciation lay upriver from the city, and Faubourgs Marigny, Daunois, and Declouet were downriver. Faubourgs St. Claude and St. John were toward the Lake, and McDonoghville lay across the river. See also MacDonald, 349-50.

Louisiana Gazette and New Orleans Mercantile Advertiser, 8 May 1816, 10 May 1816, 13 May 1816. For a detailed study of John McDonogh, including his philanthropic activities, speculations, and swampland development, see Arthur G. Nuhrah, "John McDonogh: Man of Many Facets," Louisiana Historical Quarterly 33 (Jan. 1950): 5-144. The development of the riverfront opposite New Orleans overtaxed the extant bureaucracy. In 1840, the legislature made a separate police jury for the better government and police of the West Bank. The incorporated areas contracted for levee upkeep and paid for it from taxes. Lots in unincorporated areas were assessed for levee costs in proportion to their value. The value of the land was all that was assessed for levee taxes, not improvements. Creole planters continued to be influential on the West Bank; the act designated Edmond Fazende, Caliste Villere, Casimir Lacoste, J. B. Olivier, and Furcy Verret to apportion it into police jury districts. "An act to create a separate police jury in and for that portion of the parish of Orleans, situate on the right bank of the river Mississippi," Acts Passed at the Second Session of the Fourteenth Legislature of the State of Louisiana (New Orleans: Bullitt, Magne & Co., 1840), 127-31.

Charles Harrod, New Orleans, La., to Nathaniel Evans, Natchez, Miss. 16 May 1816, Evans (Nathaniel and Family) Papers, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, LSU.

Louisiana Gazette and New Orleans Mercantile Advertiser, 22 May 1816. The degree of glitter attached to Bartheleme Macarty's pedigree may be judged by his family tree. Two brothers, Jean Jacques and Bartheleme Daniel de Macarty, came to Louisiana in 1732 as officers, one a marine captain, the other a lieutenant. Noble status, military service, land and slave speculation, marriages,
political networking, and consolidated inheritance furthered they and their descendants' position. Jean Jacques married a Trepagnier, and Bartheleme Daniel, a Pellerin. Jean Jacques had four children who died unmarried (one a high naval man) and a son, Augustin Guillaume de Macarty, who married Jeanne Chauvin de Lery. Their son was Mayor de Macarty. Bartheleme Daniel de Macarty's children included: Jean Baptiste de Macarty, husband of Heloise Fazende and father of Bartheleme, Edmond, and Marie Celeste; Louis Bartheleme de Macarty, husband of Marie Lecomte and father of Madame LaLaurie; Marie Celeste Eleonore de Macarty, wife of Governor Miro; and Jeanne Francoise de Macarty, wife of Jean Baptiste Cesaire Le Breton. Mayor Macarty inherited from an unmarried brother, aunts, and uncle. Bartheleme Macarty of the Crevasse died unmarried as well, but bought out brother Edmond's interest prior to the Crevasse. Edmond married to Marie Eleonore d'Estrehan des Tours, and Marie Celeste married Paul Lanusse. Persons familiar with Louisiana social history recognize these families as the peaks of Creole society. Arthur, 330-33.

20"An act to grant relief to Mrs. Lucy B. Holland, Widow of Francis Holland," Acts Passed at the Second Session of the Fourth Legislature of the State of Louisiana (New Orleans: J. C. De St. Romes, 1820), 110. Keelboat merchant J. G. Flugel observed the ruins of the Suffolk on 11 Feb. 1817. En route to New Orleans, Flugel wrote: "Passed most delightful farms and saw about six miles above New Orleans the ship which was sunk last year by the distressing flood." He apparently thought the flood sank the ship, but this was a casual visitor who knew none of the circumstances. On reaching the city, Flugel and companions "went along the levee where we ate some oysters" and admired "the order in which the ships are tied." Flugel, 427.


22When Jean Baptiste de Macarty died in 1808, the property split among his children Bartheleme, Edmond, and Marie Celeste, wife of Paul Lanusse. Bartheleme and Paul bought Edmond's part in 1809. Bartheleme bought Marie and Paul's interest after the crevasse. Bartheleme sold an undivided half to the wife of nephew Charles Bartheleme Lanusse in 1826. He sold the other half to Samuel Kohn and Bernard Marigny in 1831. Marigny sold to Laurent Millaudon and John Slidell in 1831. Lanusse's portion went to the New Orleans Canal and Banking Company in 1831. These transfers led to a division into lots in 1833. The Canal and Banking Company, Millaudon, Slidell, and Kohn hired a surveyor and civil engineer, Charles Zimpel, to subdivide
the plantation. It became Carrollton, and the first urban
dwelling was built in 1835. The original Macarty planta-
tion house stood at the place called Race Ground, in the
vicinity of what is now Clinton Street. It was lost either
to crevasse or caving banks. Important enlargements or
repairs were made to the levee here in 1833-34. After
Carrollton's creation as an incorporated town in 1845, its
government adopted the upkeep of the corporate levee. The
act of incorporation said the power of the Jefferson Parish
police jury would cease in the town, and mayor and council
assumed its powers. They received full control over levees
and batture in the corporate limits, with "power to repair,
alter, or enlarge the said Levee, or if necessary for the
safety of the inhabitants, to make a new Levee in front of
any part of said town, in accordance with the laws of the
State on the subject." To supplement city taxes, mayor and
council could levy levee or wharf fees on any craft or raft
tied to the city levee for more than one day. Property
owners were not entirely exempt from public works in town.
They were liable for the cost of banquets, sidewalks,
bridges, ditches, and streets at their lots. If they
failed to pay the cost or the city taxes, mayor and council
sued for recovery at 6 percent interest.

Carrollton spent enough on levees to get by.
Continued threats showed a need for enlargements and
rebuildings in 1853, but the city said its resources were
much too small to build the levee needed. It asked the
State for money in 1851, but none was forthcoming. In 1853
the city government of New Orleans--mostly to secure its
own protection--loaned Carrollton $12,000 to hire levee
contractors. The loan, never repaid, was tacitly cancelled
when Carrollton merged with New Orleans. See Ledet, 227-
29, 247-49; "An act to incorporate the town of Carrollton,"
Acts Passed at the First Session of the Seventeenth
Legislature of the State of Louisiana (New Orleans: Magne &
Weisse, 1845), 47; Carrollton Star, 28 Sept. and 19 Nov.
1853; New Orleans Daily Picayune, 23 Nov. 1853; Carrollton
Centennial Exhibit Collection, Louisiana and Lower
Mississippi Valley Collection, LSU.

23"An act providing for the expences incurred at the
Crevasse at Macarty's Point in the year 1816," Acts Passed
at the Second Session of the Third Legislature of the State
of Louisiana (1818), 2-3; "An act for the relief of the
widow and heirs of the late Governor Claiborne," Acts
Passed at the First Session of the Fourth Legislature of
the State of Louisiana (New Orleans: J. C. De St. Romes,
1819), 4.

24"An act to grant relief to Mrs. Lucy B. Holland,
Widow of Francis Holland," Acts Passed at the Second
Session of the Fourth Legislature of the State of Louisiana
(1820), 110; "An act for the relief of the widow and heirs
of William C. C. Claiborne, deceased, late Governor of the State of Louisiana," Acts Passed at the First Session of the Fifth Legislature of the State of Louisiana (New Orleans: J. C. De St. Romes, 1821), 116. Appropriately, the settlement with Mrs. Claiborne occurred under Thomas B. Robertson, the self-styled "American" governor. American prejudices against Creoles lingered throughout the 1820s. For example, around 1830 an "intelligent planter" on board the Union told Captain Alexander of the 42nd Royal Highlanders that:

Some of the old planters are prejudiced, particularly the French and Spaniards, and will not adopt anything new, either in their agriculture or manufacture of sugar, yet we Yankees try experiments, and adopt new systems, if we find them profitable. The plough and steam-engine are far better than hoes and cattle-mill, and in the course of a few years we might do without slaves at all.

J. E. Alexander, Transatlantic Sketches, Comprising Visits to the Most Interesting Scenes in North and South America, and the West Indies (London: Richard Bentley, 1833), II, 54.


26 "An act relative to roads, levees, and the police of cattle," Acts Passed at the Second Session of the First Legislature of the Territory of Orleans (1807). 132-36. Officials subscribing their names to this law were: William C. C. Claiborne, Governor of Orleans Territory; John Watkins, House Speaker; and Julien Poydras, President of the Legislative Council. Poydras was viewed as a republican Creole, rather than a royalist, and hence was an appealing "native" partner for the new American government; but Creoles disliked the fact that Poydras dabbled so much in philosophy that his slaves imbibed revolutionary ideas.

27 "An act concerning the levees and roads," (1816). As seen in a previous chapter, Concordia Parish needed diverse, non-linear levee structures, in addition to levees on the riverfront, to protect planters on oxbow lakes. Lafourche Parish contained bayou settlements, rather than on the Mississippi. Bayou settlers built smaller levees appropriate to narrower strips of improved, elevated land.

28 Sect. 1, 10, "An act concerning the levees and roads," (1816).
29 Sect. 2, "An act concerning the levees and roads," (1816).

30 Henri-Marie Brackenridge, Views of Louisiana (Pittsburgh: Cramer, Spear and Eichbaum, 1814), 176-77; Brown, 136-38; Sect. 2, "An act concerning the levees and roads," (1816).

31 Sect. 3-5, "An act concerning the levees and roads," (1816).

32 Sect. 6-12, "An act concerning the levees and roads," (1816). A set of letters from Plaquemines Parish describes the crawfish menace in detail. Dr. David Fox lived at Jesuits' Bend on retainer to various planters. He named his house "Hygiene" to allude to his profession and to emulate the practice of estate naming that prevailed on the river. Mrs. Fox, a former governess from Massachusetts, often wrote her mother about life on the Mississippi. On 9 July 1858, from "Hygiene Island," she wrote about a crevasse in which crawfish "completely undermined" the levee. Calling them "miniature lobsters," Mrs. Fox complained that they were "almost innumerable." Because of crawfish, the Stackhouse family lost their cane, which meant they could not pay Dr. Fox. She expected the shortfall from his various clients to reach $900 for the year, forcing a loan of $200 to meet flood-related expenses such as "provisions, horse & cow feed." The Foxes' garden, yard, stables, and corn house flooded, and the small Creole farmers in the area who sold fruit and vegetables to New Orleans had nothing to sell or to eat themselves. In short, Mrs. Fox apologized for being unable to send her mother any money. T. B. [Tryphena] Fox, ["Hygiene," Plaquemines Parish, La.], to "Dear Mother," 16 May 1858 and 9 July 1858, Fox (Tryphena Holder) Papers, Special Collections, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, Miss.

33 Sect. 14, 21, 23, "An act concerning the levees and roads," (1816). When levee inspectors' jobs grew more time-consuming, parishes began to pay them. For example, after the flood of 1828, the police jury of West Baton Rouge named two inspectors to do routine inspections, but also to supervise repairs and rebuildings. Each received $400 for the year. Paid appointments were probably arranged for coping with emergencies in 1828. Later, however, some parishes paid as a matter of course. For instance, in 1854 (not a flood year) the Parish of St. John the Baptist paid two "syndics" (the colonial term) $300 per year to superintend levees, roads, and stray animals. They were, more-or-less, supervisory officials in a professional public works department. Baton Rouge Gazette, 21 June 1828; Lucy, La., Le Meschacebe, 11 June 1854.
34 Sect. 15, 17, 19, "An act concerning the levees and roads," (1816).


36 Requisitioned slaves had to be provided with "hoses, spades, axes, and hand barrowes" to enable them to build or repair levees. The inspector had to see that they had this equipment. Sect. 18-20, 25, "An act concerning the levees and roads," (1816).

37 Section 45 specified a fine of $25 to $100 and a jail term for 15 days to 2 months for forcible or violent opposition to an inspector-ordered levee setback. Sect. 37, 41, 44, 45, "An act concerning the levees and roads," (1816).

38 Sect. 22, 45, "An act concerning the levees and roads," (1816).

39 Sect. 17-20, 22, 47, "An act concerning the levees and roads," (1816).

40 Sect. 24, 26-31. The possibility of non-enforcement could not be discounted. Governments did not automatically compel payments of damages to private persons; proprietors had to sue on their own. Whether from fear of reprisals, from kindness, social taboos, or a belief that suits would be fruitless, the injured seldom sued, and it was uncertain that suits would prevail. Consider the problems between two planters of Ascension Parish—William J. Minor of "Waterloo" and Henry Doyal of "Hard Times" and "Mount Houmas." Minor's place lay between Doyal's plantations. If levees broke on either Doyal property, Minor suffered. He despised the way Doyal managed slaves and levees, and Minor sent a bill for flood damages in 1852.

The trouble grew gradually after a break in 1849 was repaired. Minor's slaves helped close another at Doyal's in May of 1850. Another at Doyal's in June of 1850 forced Minor to replant corn and peas on which slaves and livestock relied. Doyal rebuilt behind the levee line and cut part of the old levee to build a new one. When high water arrived in 1851, the new levee crumbled because it had not been seasoned with rain. The crevasse broke Minor's crop levee between their places, two secondary levees, and the corner of Minor's "main Levee." Minor described the latter as 6 feet high with a base of 20 feet. Four feet of height had been stacked with carts, the rest with handbarrows.

Crevasses occurred on three days that week, and Minor ridiculed methods Doyal used to fix them. Minor sent slaves to help, but retained some to build an emergency
levee around his own house and to raise the sugar in his sugar house. In 1852, Minor sent Doyal a bill for $31,260 for the loss of 250 acres of planted cane, 240 acres of first year rattoons, 400 acres of corn, and two oxen, as well as damages to Minor's house, quarters, bridges, and livestock from "confinement and want of green food." Whatever Doyal did, Minor could at least control the size of his own levee. In September of 1851, he added 20 inches of height and 10 feet of base, spreading the crown to 6 feet wide. The suit stalled, however. In 1857, Minor was still trying to get it to court, and he sacked the lawyers. W. J. Minor, Diary for 1849, 8 Mar. 1849; W. J. Minor, Diary for 1850, 9 June 1850, 18 June 1850, 21 July 1850; W. J. Minor, Diary for 1851-1855, 21-30 Mar. 1851, 10 Sept. 1851; W. J. Minor, Letter Book, 1848-1855, [1852]; W. J. Minor, Letter Book for 1855-1858, 11 Mar. 1857, 26 Mar. 1857, 9 May 1857, in Minor (William J., and Family) Papers, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, LSU.

41 Sect. 26-31, "An act concerning the levees and roads," (1816).

42 Sect. 24, 39, 40, "An act concerning the levees and roads," (1816).


44 Sect. 10, "An act concerning the levees and roads," (1816).

45 Darby, 128; "An act to repeal the act entitled: 'An act concerning the levees and roads on the banks of the Mississippi, and for other purposes,'" Acts Passed at the First Session of the Third Legislature of the State of Louisiana (New Orleans: J. C. De St. Romes, 1817), 78-80. A sample of "American" misgivings about Villere can be seen in an editorial by "Publicola" in the Louisiana Gazette and New Orleans Mercantile Advertiser, 19 June 1816. The writer admitted Villere was "a virtuous good man," but he judged him to be the wrong man to be governor. "Publicola" thought a governor, as chief magistrate of an American state, ought to know American laws and the languages used in his state, but Villere was said to know "not one sentence of the English language, nor was he acquainted with the laws or government of the United States."

"Publicola" concluded that Villere, in spite of his good character, must certainly become a tool of the disaffected French faction if elected.

46 See, for example, a discussion of levees in St. John the Baptist Parish during the late 1810s in Chapter 4. For Villere, see Sidney L. Villere, Jacques Philippe Villere, First Native-Born Governor of Louisiana, 1816-1820 (New Orleans: J. C. De St. Romes, 1817), 78-80.
47 Fourth Census of the United States, 1820, Louisiana; Lewis W. Newton, "Creoles and Anglo-Americans in Old Louisiana: A Study in Cultural Conflicts," in Carleton, Howard, and Parker, eds., 71-87. Resolutions passed by the American faction at Tremoulet's Hotel, in June of 1816, registered considerable indignation that feelings of "American" identity were less than universal in Louisiana. Martin Gordon chaired this meeting which endorsed Joshua Lewis for governor (against Villere) and Thomas Bolling Robertson for U. S. Congress. These heirs of the American Revolution, now in Louisiana, complained that:

we [italics mine] view our [Louisiana's] union with the American confederacy as the only true foundation for our political happiness: as having raised us [i.e., you ungrateful Creoles] from colonial vassalage--from subservience to foreign tyranny, avarice, and caprice, into the dignity and happiness of a sovereign state. Resolved, That penetrated with this statement, we view with deep regret any measures tending to draw a line between American citizens natives of Louisiana, and American citizens natives of some other state of the Union, as measures springing from a spirit hostile to the stability, prosperity, and tranquility of the state.

"Publicola" also deplored division, ridiculing the idea that an American state could have political parties that were "French" and "American." Louisiana Gazette and New Orleans Mercantile Advertiser, 19 June 1816, 26 June 1816. Ten years later, The Duke of Saxe-Weimar Eisenach traveled to New Orleans. He still noticed a lingering resentment of Americans. For example, the Washington's Birthday Ball was barely attended by French residents, even though ticket prices had been reduced. From conversations with Creoles, Bernhard concluded that they would rather be French colonials than American citizens and "do not regard the Americans as their countrymen." Bernard, Duke of Saxe-Weimar Eisenach, Travels through North America, during the Years 1825 and 1826, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea & Carey, 1828), II, 72.

48 Fourth Census of the United States, 1820, Louisiana: Parish of Plaquemines. For a cultural study of Plaquemines and St. Bernard, see Harnett T. Kane, Deep Delta Country (New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1944). It deals with folkways of poor Deltans and the effects of climate, soil,
and human resources on the riverfront's economic and agricultural development. According to Kane,

Nowhere have I felt the beat of rains like those of the Delta's wet season. The water pours . . . with the rage of an animate thing. The country is humid beyond the belief of most outsiders. Housewives complain that their bread molds in the night; walls sweat; chickens scratch dispiritedly in the moist ground. (xiv)

The poor Creoles were hunting farmers who sold produce in New Orleans and scavenged the Mississippi for usable flotsam. Pastimes were card playing, hunting, and making homemade orange wine. They did not aspire to wealth and disliked technological improvements. Sugar planters were the source of mechanization and progressive agriculture. "One finds that the French accent marks and spellings grow fewer with each mile or so to the Gulf," Kane said. In the lower Delta, especially in Plaquemines, "Anglo-Saxons filtered in, looked about, and if they did not conquer, at least they climbed up to sit beside the French rulers." Kane, xvii-xix, 13, 42, 44. The toleration which eventually marked the Delta society took some time to take root. For instance, Tryphena Fox did not like poor Creoles at all when she first arrived. She wrote her mother that "we do not associate at all with the Creoles." They were "mere nothings, neither white or black, illegitimate and shut out from all grades of society." T. B. Fox, "Hygiene," Plaquemines Parish, La., to "Dear Mother," 7 July 1856, 14 July 1856, and 9 July 1858, Fox (Tryphena Holder) Papers, Special Collections, Mississippi Department of Archives and History. Other manuscript collections that shed light on plantation life in Plaquemines Parish include: Beauregard Miscellany, Lanaux (George, and Family) Papers, McCutchon (Samuel) Papers, Reed (A. R.) Diary, and Robertson (Frederick D.) Account Books, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, LSU; Durnford-McDonogh (Andrew and John) Papers, Manuscripts Department, Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University, New Orleans, La.; Durnford-McDonogh (Andrew and John) Papers, Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans, La. See also Duke of Wurttemburg, 27-30.

Fourth Census of the United States, 1820, Louisiana: Parish of St. Bernard. Gen. P. G. T. Beauregard was a product the native Creole planter culture: husband of (1) Marie Laure Villere and (2) Caroline Deslende; a relative of the De Reggio, De Vezin, and Ducros families. Raised at "Contreras" plantation in St. Bernard, he went to West Point, served in the Mexican War, and built defensive works at the Delta Forts Jackson and St. Philip. Kane, 66-67. For Beauregard's disagreements with Louisiana State Engineer and Governor Paul Octave Hebert, see Hebert (Paul
Octave) Scrapbook, Manuscripts Collection 818, Manuscripts Department, Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University. In the postbellum era, he was involved in flood control and railroad development. Good insights into the planter lifestyle of St. Bernard in 1826 can be gleaned from the Duke of Saxe-Weimar Eisenach’s comments on the plantations of Jacques Villere and Michael Andry. Bernhard, II, 65-83. See also Duke of Wurttemburg, 31.

Manuscript sources pertaining to the St. Bernard Parish plantations include: Lanaux (George, and Family) Papers, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, LSU.

50 Fourth Census of the United States, 1820, Louisiana: Parish of Orleans. Many small households were also double counted. For relative value of military installations, see Darby, 185-90. The disposition of batture lands occupied a controversial niche in the city's politics. See James A. Padgett, ed., "Some Documents Relating to the Batture Controversy in New Orleans," Louisiana Historical Quarterly 23 (July 1940): 679-732. For floods in the city in later years, see manuscript collections such as: Campbell (Zoe J.) Diaries, Peters (Samuel J., Jr.) Diary, Poole (James M.) Diary, and Tower (L. F.) Diaries, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, LSU.


52 Fourth Census of the United States, 1820, Louisiana: Parish of Orleans; Darby, 182-85.

53 Fourth Census of the United States, 1820, Louisiana: Parish of St. Charles; Darby, 188. Manuscript collections which pertain to St. Charles Parish include: Andry (Michel Thomassin, and Family) Papers, Girod (Joseph) Papers, Kenner (Family) Papers [Charles Oxley diary], and McCutchon (Samuel) Papers, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, LSU. See also Duke of Wurttemburg, 87-88.

54 Fourth Census of the United States, 1820, Louisiana: Parish of St. John the Baptist; Darby, 190. Manuscript sources on planting activities in St. John the Baptist include: Andry (Michel Thomassin, and Family) Papers, and Evans (Simeon A.) Letters, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, LSU.

55 Fourth Census of the United States, 1820, Louisiana: Parish of St. James; Darby, 190-91. The diary of Jean Baptiste Ferchaud of "Maison Magnolia" plantation, tells about day-to-day flood control activities in this parish in 1858, seven miles from Donaldsonville, on a place that produced sugar, rice, lumber, and Perique tobacco. People cared for levees on their own properties, even in 1858, but
a high degree of cooperation prevailed. In January and February, Ferchaud prepared for high water by employing hands in ditch maintenance. In April, he noted the rising river, and in May he assigned slaves to work his levee. They also worked on the levee of C. P. Melancon & Co. On 19 June, a levee broke at LaBranche's plantation. Ferchaud kept a running measurement of how near the water approached, and he sent slaves to John Ory's to throw up a cross levee to prevent the lateral spread. On 29 June, Ferchaud noted the drowning of little Edmond Trepagnier, who fell between two levees in front of his father's house. By 2 July, Ferchaud's negroes were called home when it became clear that the cross levee would be useless; water now rose from the Poirier side. Heavy rains on 8 July added to crevasse water and flooded fields, but it began draining by evening. Four days later, livestock from the Amant brothers' was brought to Ferchaud's to graze. On 29 July, the river began falling but the crevasse water rose. By mid August, the river was swiftly falling, the crevasse water gradually. Water was so low by October that Ferchaud was able to cut his levee to make a road for hauling lumber and cane to the river, where it was loaded on a barge to take to the mills. Grinding was over by Christmas Eve. This sums up a routine year of high water for a typical member of the levee building community in the mature phase of the ante-bellum levees. Ferchaud (Jean Baptiste) Diary, 1858, Vol. 3, Manuscripts Collection 769, Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University. Other manuscript sources that deal with planting in St. James include: Boucry (Family) Papers, Bourgeois (Lillian C.) Collection, Bruce, Seddon, and Wilkins Plantation Records, Lambremont (John D., and Family) Papers, Mather (George) Account Books, Mather (Joseph) Diary, Theriot (Joseph, and Family) Papers, and Welham (William P.) Plantation Record Books, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, LSU.

Fourth Census of the United States, 1820, Louisiana: Parish of Ascension; Darby, 191-96. Darby's comments on the west bank of Ascension show that he judged its interior capable of agricultural development. Darby distinguished degrees of overflow based on ground cover. He noted huge canebrakes which were "above overflow" but had not been cleared for farming, as well as large tracts of palmetto that overflowed on an occasional basis. Palmetto land usually overflowed less than two feet. It was lower than cane land and harder to reclaim, but fertile, and could be guarded for planting with front, back, and side levees. Manuscript sources about planting in Ascension include: Acy (William, Jr.) Papers, Bringier (Louis A., and Family) Papers, Minor (William J., and Family) Papers, and Tureaud (Benjamin) Papers, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, LSU; Johnson (William) Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History; Gaudet (James A.) Papers, Hampton (Wade) Papers, McCollam (Andrew) Papers,
Trist (Nicholas) Papers, and Wood (Trist) Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. See also Duke of Wurttemburg, 88-96.

57 Fourth Census of the United States, 1820, Louisiana: Parish of Iberville; Darby, 200-1. Darby thought the banks of Bayou Plaquemines worthy of reclamation, but also low and flood prone from the Atchafalaya. Manuscript sources about planting and planter flood control in Iberville include: Gay (Andrew Hynes, and Family) Papers, Gay (Edward J., and Family) Papers, Hutchinson (Holmes, and Family) Papers, Murrell (John D.) Papers, and Randolph (John H.) Papers, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, LSU.; Hebert (Louis) Autobiography, Hudson (Franklin) Diary, Murrell (George M.) Papers, and Slack Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Brown (James M.) Papers, Dutton (John) Papers, and Sugg (Peregrine P.) Papers, Natchez Trace Collection, Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.

58 Manuscript sources of life on the back bayous of Iberville include: Erwin (Isaac) Diary, Gay (Andrew Hynes, and Family) Papers, Kleinpeter (Joseph, and Family) Papers, and LeBlanc (Family) Papers, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, LSU.

59 Fourth Census of the United States, 1820, Louisiana: Parish of East Baton Rouge; Darby, 220. Inter-ethnic cooperation among the East Baton Rouge elite may be glimpsed in "An act to incorporate an agricultural society in the town of Baton Rouge." The group provided a forum to share knowledge about agricultural improvements and better breeds of livestock. Sugar processing required a high degree of technological sophistication, and there were many changes in industrial processes with which to stay current. Drainage machines and levees were another common concern. Organizers included a mix of Anglo-American and Creole planters: Armand Duplantier, Antoine Blanc, Barthelemy Beauregard, Lucien Charvet, Jean De Bellievre, Fergus Duplantier, Philip Hickey, Sebastien Hiriart, Isidore Larquier, Thomas Bolling Robertson, Fulwar Skipwith, Achille Sherburne, Samuel Steer, Charles Tessier, and William Wyckoff, Sr. These leading citizens envisioned a common goal—the production of wealth. Acts Passed at the First Session of the Eighth Legislature of the State of Louisiana (New Orleans: John Gibson, 1827), 44. Manuscript sources on planting and overflows in East Baton Rouge include: Bannon (Lois E.) Papers, Buhler (Family) Papers, Dougherty (John A.) Papers, Hall (George Otis, and Family) Papers, Hickey (Philip, and Family) Papers, and Lopez (Manuel) Papers, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, LSU. See also Duke of Wurttemburg, 96-97.
Fourth Census of the United States, 1820, Louisiana: Parish of West Baton Rouge; Darby, 218. Manuscript sources on planting and flooding in West Baton Rouge include: Chase (George W.) Correspondence, Stirling (Lewis, and Family) Papers; and Town (Clarissa E. Leavitt) Diary, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, LSU.

Fourth Census of the United States, 1820, Louisiana: Parish of Pointe Coupee; Darby, 218-19. Manuscripts that pertain to Pointe Coupee's plantations include: Barrow (Bartholemew, and Family) Papers, Batchelor (Albert A.) Papers, Bowman (James P., and Family) Papers, Butler (Thomas, and Family) Papers, Leonard (Theodule) Papers, Turnbull-Bowman (Family) Papers, and Wynne (Michael D.) Collection, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, LSU; Trask-Ventress Family Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History; Boyd (John) Diary, Carmouche (Annie) Papers, Devereux (John G.) Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. The Duke of Wurttemburg recorded extensive remarks about life in Pointe Coupee, particularly among the poorer Creoles, during his stay with planter John Nicholls in 1823. See Duke of Wurttemburg, 98-123.

Brackenridge, II, 175. As an example of bayou flood problems that crossed parish lines--in May of 1828, the Donaldsonville Creole sent news that planters on Bayou Lafourche were safe from a crevasse in St. James Parish, on the west bank of the Mississippi, but correspondents from St. Martinsville said the Bayou Teche farmers were suffering very high water. Teche floods originated from the Red and Atchafalaya Rivers; Lafourche floods primarily from the Mississippi (hence, more affected by crevasses). New Orleans Bee, 7 May 1828, 10 May 1828; Baton Rouge Gazette 17 May 1828, 14 June 1828. The riverfront at Raccourci Bend was partly vacant and hard to levee. During the 1830s, Louisiana began to aid Pointe Coupee Parish here. In 1838, Louisiana's Board of Public Works was told to build a public levee across Raccourci Point. The state would spend up to $8,000, once Pointe Coupee raised $6,000 for it. In 1835, the legislature asked the U. S. Government to make levees on federal land at Raccourci and the mouth of the Atchafalaya to complete the levee line. The Board of Public Works was assigned to make repairs in the Raccourci Point levee in 1840 not to exceed $1,518. In 1844, the state gave up on levees at Raccourci Point and asked the State Engineer to make a cutoff. Acts and resolutions passed in 1847 sent the State Engineer to finish Raccourci Cutoff with up to $6,000 from the state Internal Improvement Land fund and 50 state-owned slaves. He was also to work the Grand Levee of Pointe Coupee when water conditions prevented work on the cutoff. The cutoff created controversy among the various levee-building

63 The Attakapas Gazette communicated with the New Orleans Bee about a law which passed the U. S. House of Representatives to give Iberville, St. Mary, St. Martin, St. Landry, and Lafayette Parishes 10,000 acres each to fund navigation improvements between the bayous and the Mississippi. The Attakapas Gazette believed that Rapides and Avoyelles Parishes should be included, because Bayou Boeuf "affords sufficient water for steamboats, several months of the year and ought to be opened." New Orleans Bee, 16 May 1828. This is just one example of the interest in navigation improvements expressed in newspapers and legislation, as well as in private correspondence, for Louisiana's water transport network. Agricultural resources of interior alluvial parishes were being tapped, and many planters wanted better access to the Mississippi. Manuscript collections that describe the planting experience in the secondary sugar region—the bayou parishes—are myriad, including: Bisland (John, and Family) Papers, Butler (Thomas, and Family) Papers, Close (John) Papers, Duncan (Stephen, and Stephen, Jr.) Papers, Evans (Nathaniel, and Family) Papers, Gibson (Randall Lee) Papers, Hardin (Miss Sidney) Diaries, Landry (Family) Papers, Landry (Severin, and Family) Papers, Martin (Robert C., Jr.) Account Books, Minor (William J., and Family) Papers, Nicholls (Thomas C.) Record Book, Palfrey (Family) Papers, Pugh (Alexander Franklin) Papers, Stirling (Lewis, and Family) Papers, Tabor (Hudson, and Family) Papers,
Taylor (Miles, and Family) Papers, and Weeks (David, and Family) Papers, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, LSU; Bisland-Shields Family Papers, Hamilton (Charles D., and Family) Papers, Watts (Amelia) Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History; Avery Family Papers, Brashear and Lawrence Family Papers, Guion Family Papers, McCollam (Andrew) Papers, Quitman Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; and Pugh Family Papers, Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.


every species of Hydraulic Apparatus, Fire Engines . . . for cities, villages, factories, and plantations; Suction Hose, Coupling Screws, lift and force pumps, to lift and force water any diameter from 10 to 500 gallons a minute; Wind Mills, Horse Powers, Water wheels, &c., for working pumps, ship and steamboat Pumps, for filling boilers, &c. The Pumps of this manufacture are double action, of great strength, and very simple in their construction, being particularly well calculated for the Southern and West India markets.

Concordia Intelligencer, 30 April 1844. Alluvial planters often invested large sums in technologically advanced manufactured goods, and their purchases greatly stimulated the industrial development of the North.

65 New Orleans Louisiana Gazette, 7 May 1823. Later, a theater-goer could attend "the admired comedy Lovers' Vows, to which will [be] added the laughable farce of No Song, No Supper." New Orleans Louisiana Gazette, 28 May 1823.

66 Minutes of the City Council session of 17 May 1823, New Orleans Louisiana Gazette, 19 May 1823.

67 Ibid.

68 Ibid.

Fourth Census of the United States, 1820, Louisiana: Parish of St. Bernard; New Orleans Louisiana Gazette, 9 May 1823. In this issue, the Gazette warned that fears had been voiced about the stability of levees near English Turn, and it pointed out that the river had not been so high since 1811. "God grant that New Orleans may not experience such another autumn also as that of 1811."

News from Baton Rouge: "Distressing Times--The state of the Mississippi . . . becomes really alarming; it rises from an inch to an inch and a half every twenty-four hours, and by the latest accounts, which are far from being satisfactory, we are informed that the Missouri freshet is daily expected . . . This is an uncommonly distressing season under every point of view--mercantile business is at a stand--the price of Cotton is low and without demand; cash scarcer than ever before noticed in this part of the world; incessant rains; . . . and the unusual swelling of the river threatens to blast all hopes." New Orleans Louisiana Gazette, 13 May 1823; Fourth Census of the United States, 1820, Louisiana: Parish of West Baton Rouge.

"An act to determine the limits of the Parish of Point Coupee, and to grant certain powers to the Police Jury of said Parish, and likewise to that of the Parish of West Baton Rouge," and "An act . . . to grant certain powers to the Police Jury of said Parish [Point Coupee]," Acts Passed at the First Session of the Seventh Legislature of the State of Louisiana (1824 and 1825), 82-86; "An act relative to the grand levee of Point Coupee," Acts Passed at the Second Session of the Eleventh Legislature of the State of Louisiana (New Orleans: Jerome Bayon, 1834), 75-76; "Resolution relative to obtaining an appropriation of money from the General Government for making levees on the United States' lands," Acts Passed at the First Session of the Twelfth Legislature (1835), 155; "An act supplementary to an Act entitled 'An act to determine the limits of the parish of Pointe Coupee, and for other purposes,'" Acts Passed at the First Session of the Thirteenth Legislature of the State of Louisiana (New Orleans: Jerome Bayon, 1837), 24.

Isaac Erwin's plantation diary for 1849 testifies to the continuing importance of the Grand Levee for Bayou Grosse Tete in western Iberville. For example, on 22 Feb. he wrote, "plowing and making levy gear. fear of overflow. the Levy of Mr. Landry we hear has broke and I fear the Grand Levy will soon brake. if it does brake we are gone." Erwin worked hands on his plantation levee from that day until 1 Mar., making it almost six feet high. He expressed surprise that neighbor Sherburn "has quit working on his Levy," because "Mr. Hotar I am told is nearly Crazy--we constantly hear of Crevasses" which would flood the bayou properties. Much depended on dry weather: "I hope if the
Grand Levy stands we will be able to stand this water, but it looks squally now." "The Grand Levy is week [sic] and if it Brakes we are overflown." "If the Grand Levy stands we are safe." At the end of June he wrote, "Bayou has now fallen full 7 feet. Thank God for his mercys." Probably from newspapers, Erwin knew about crevasses in West Baton Rouge, at Morganza in Pointe Coupee, and at Sauve's plantation above New Orleans. He kept daily records of the rise and fall of his bayou in increments as small as a quarter of an inch. "Shady Grove" plantation diary, 22 Feb., 28 Feb., 1 Mar., 3 Mar., 8 Mar., 10 Mar., 29 June 1849, Erwin (Isaac) Diary, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, LSU.

73"An act to create a board of internal improvements, and for other purposes," Acts Passed at the Second Session of the Seventh Legislature of the State of Louisiana (New Orleans: James M. Bradford, 1826), 104-6; "An act providing for the appointment of a Civil Engineer, and for other purposes," Acts Passed at the Third Session of the Tenth Legislature of the State of Louisiana (New Orleans: Stroud & Pew, 1832), 154. The late 1820s was a time of great public interest in internal improvements in Louisiana. The boom of the 1830s, prior to the Panic of '37 and the cotton slump of '39, is better known, but interests and initiatives in the 1820s laid the groundwork for much that was accomplished or projected in the 1830s. Governor Henry Johnson (1824-28) showed a keen interest in public works and social reforms. For example, his address to the legislature on 7 Jan. 1828, asked for support for internal improvements, effective use of the penitentiary, aid to canals, the use of convicts to improve the streets of New Orleans, and a plea for aid to the Boys' Orphanage. Baton Rouge Gazette, 19 Jan. 1828.

74"An act relative to the bayou Manchac," Acts Passed at the Second Session of the Seventh Legislature of the State of Louisiana (1826), 144; "An act to authorize certain inhabitants of the parish of Iberville to procure, by means of a lottery, the sum therein mentioned," Acts Passed at the First Session of the Eighth Legislature of the State of Louisiana (1827), 62; "An act to amend `An act to authorize certain inhabitants of the parish of Iberville to procure, by means of a lottery, the sum therein mentioned,'" Acts Passed at the Second Session of the Eighth Legislature of the State of Louisiana (New Orleans: J. Gibson, 1828), 96.

75Darby, 134-37; Monette, 473; "An act concerning the Levee of the Bonnet-Quarre," Acts Passed at the First Session of the Second Legislature of the State of Louisiana (New Orleans: Peter K. Wagner, 1815), 3-4; "An act supplementary to the act entitled, `An act concerning the levee of Bonnet-Quarre,'" Acts Passed at the Second Session

By the mid-1800s, St. John the Baptist resorted to double levees for protection. In 1854, two men of the parish, Francois Mathurin and J. Maitreme, were severely censured for cutting the old Bonnet Carre Point levee to let water against the new one. The parish paper declared "l'idee bizarre" to be "l'ignorous completement." Water seeping through the new levee turned the adjacent road into a "vast lake" and plunged the floors of houses on the Point below two feet of water. The road "already passed for the worst in the parish." The editor declared that the men were "dressed in a strong unpleasant circumstance, for our laws strictly forbid any citizen from destroying the levees. They are subject to one very strong penalty." Lucy, La., Le Meschacebe, 10 April 1854.


77Natchez, Miss., The Ariel, 23 Feb. 1828, 1 Mar. 1828; Baton Rouge Gazette, 23 Feb. 1828.

78New Orleans Bee, 4 Mar. 1828, 17 Mar. 1828. Regarding the large sugar output, the Bee exclaimed that "Paddy would say, on hearing this, Och! What a swate country." 17 Mar. 1828. Of the spread of information via steamboat and newspaper, Harnet Kane claimed it was a Delta tradition for a steamboat captain to give planters a free copy of a New Orleans newspaper when he picked up freight. Kane's informers had no knowledge of the origin of this courtesy: "it was 'just the way.'" Kane, 47. Of course, steamboats advertised heavily in newspapers, and editors
frequently printed their thanks to captains who brought papers whose news they could reprint. In other words, steamboat captains were the wire service of the antebellum Associated Press. Steamboat captains also provided flood news by allowing ships' logs to be printed, including notes on the water level at various locations. This allowed the leved region to know when to look for high water. See, for example, the General Clark's log on a journey from Louisville to New Orleans during the flood of 1823. New Orleans Louisiana Gazette, 9 May 1823.


80Police Jury of West Baton Rouge Parish, Minutes of Extra Session, 15 Mar. 1828, Baton Rouge Gazette, 5 April 1828. Emergency preparations were followed by revised West Baton Rouge Parish levee laws published in the Gazette. The WBR parish law of 1828 was not identical to the state levee laws of 1816 or 1829. It shows what an indigenous Creole police jury thought was needed after a big flood. WBR levees were to be two feet ("french measure") taller than high water, with a base of five to six feet for each foot that water rose against the levee. Setbacks were to be half an acre from the bank in areas that caved, otherwise, only thirty feet away (measured to the edge of the base). Borrow pits had to be at least twenty feet from the base. Levee builders were forbidden to put stumps or vegetation other than cypress in the levee. In making new levees they were to dig a ditch two feet wide and three feet deep on the levee line, then put pickets or planks of cypress upright in the ditch. This was supposed to impede the lateral sliding of levees which had not yet melded to the ground. In high water, non-residents were to keep a guard on site, otherwise a levee inspector would appoint one and charge the owner $2 a day to have him on duty. Inspectors drew lines for new or rebuilt levees, and disputes about the line would be settled by the parish judge. In 1828, WBR's police jury elected two levee inspectors (one per riverbank) to annual terms with a salary of $400. It chose Thomas Aillet and James Devall. They were to superintend levee work as well as serve notices and make inspections. Baton Rouge Gazette, 21 June 1828.

81The adjacent levee of Erwin's daughter, Mrs. Wilson, also broke. A passenger on the Coosa said the crevasse was quite wide and ten to fifteen feet deep. "It is not expected that it can be stopped." New Orleans Bee, 14 May 1828. Donaldsonville news, 10 May 1828, Baton Rouge Gazette, 17 May 1828. Breaks were especially unwelcome because the water in Bayou Lafourche and Iberville's back-
swamps had been falling. Formerly, on April 19th, the "retrograde movement on the backlands, both on the river and bayou," encouraged hopes that those "who had no prospect of a crop may make their provisions for the ensuing year, and perhaps something more." Donaldsonville Creole, 19 April 1828, qtd. in Baton Rouge Gazette, 26 April 1828.


Joseph Orillion to Joseph Erwin, Conveyance Book E, Entry 563, Iberville Par., La.; Auguste Landry to Joseph Erwin, Conveyance Book E, Entry 434, Iberville Par., La.; Joseph Erwin to Jean Baptiste Dupuy, Conveyance Book E, Entry 503, Iberville Par., La.; Jacques De Villier to Joseph Erwin and Abraham Wright, Conveyance Book E, Entry 606, Iberville Par., La.; Urbain Gagnie to Joseph Erwin and

John Pemberton was Iberville's second largest slaveholder in 1820, with 43 hands farming. He bought this place of 2,796 arpents and 54 slaves from John McDonogh in 1818 when cotton prices and land were very high. When the value fell in 1819, Pemberton had a large debt and little income. McDonogh held the mortgage, and Erwin assumed it on 23 April 1821. Erwin had 130 slaves farming in the parish in 1820. His means permitted him to benefit from Pemberton's distress, and the deed transferred everything to Erwin but Pemberton's "wearing apparel and that of his wife and children"! John T. Pemberton to Joseph Erwin, Conveyance Book G, Entry 448, Iberville Par., La.; Joseph Erwin to Ann Waters, Conveyance Book G, Entries 448, 521, Iberville Par., La. Debts to Pemberton and McDonogh were paid in 1830 and 1834--Succession of Joseph Erwin, 798-805, Probates, Iberville Par., La.; White, 366-67; Fourth Census of the United States, 1820, Louisiana: Parish of Iberville.


judge of the New Orleans City Court to plant sugar with Erwin on Bayou Lafourche, but soon quit for politics. Groomed by attorney Alexander Porter and Gov. Henry S. Johnson, White captured Edward Livingston's seat in the U. S. House in 1828. Like Erwin, White was amiable and charming, but also somewhat erratic and brutal, given to extreme bluntness, even violence. For example, in his 1828 campaign, White tried to stab a critic with a dirk. Such honor-code magnates were only slightly removed from the habits of the frontier. Joseph G. Tregle, "Edward Douglass White," in Dawson, 113-18.


89 In 1820, Christopher Adams had the fifth largest agricultural workforce in Iberville Parish. Adams had 41 slaves engaged in agriculture that year, and Joseph Erwin had 130 engaged in agriculture. Erwin's son-in-law Nicholas Wilson was sixth with 31 in agriculture. The other American planters in Iberville in 1820 were John Pemberton, Philip Thomas, Isham Fox, Philip Winfree, and John Dutton, several of whom were business associates of Erwin. Fourth Census of the United States, 1820, Louisiana: Parish of Iberville; Christopher Adams, to Col. Joseph Erwin, Plaquemines, [La.], 10 Aug. 1828, Gay (Edward J. and Family) Papers, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, LSU.

90 Joseph Erwin, Iberville Farm, [Iberville Par., La.], to Jane [Erwin] Dickinson, Nashville, Tenn., 18 June 1808; John Erwin, Mouth of Cumberland, [Tenn.], to Joseph Erwin, Iberville [Par.], La., 23 June [?]; John B. Craighead, [Nashville, Tn.], to Jane [Erwin] Craighead, Iberville [Par.], La., 17 Dec. 1820; Joseph Erwin, Iberville [Par.], La., to Andrew Hynes, Nashville, [Tenn.], 19 Sept. 1821; Joseph Erwin, Iberville Farm, [Iberville Par., La.], to
Col. Andrew Hynes, Nashville, Tenn., 9 July 1823; Bill for Joseph Erwin [Jr.], Lunatic Asylum, Lexington, Ky., 29 Dec. 1826; Eliza Wilson, Washington, to Col. Andrew Hynes, Nashville, Tenn., 8 July 1826; Joseph Erwin, Iberville [Par.], La., to Col. Andrew Hynes, Nashville, Tenn., 3 May 1827; Joseph Erwin, Iberville Farm, [Iberville Par., La.], to Lavinia Erwin, Nashville, Tenn., 14 May 1827, in Gay (Edward J. and Family) Papers, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, LSU; Riffel, 223-24.

91William B[lount] Robertson, Plaquemines, [Iberville Par., La.], to Gen. A[ndrew] Hynes, [Nashville, Tenn.], 14 April 1829; Clement, 40; White, 377; Riffel, 79. Joseph Erwin deeded some Bayou Grosse Tete land to grandson Charles H. Dickinson. When the young man came to Iberville in 1828 from Nashville, he found "his land completely under water" and "climbed a tall tree to survey his property." Riffel, 74. Ironically, "Home" plantation and "Irion" returned to Mrs. Erwin. Irion bought Clark's interest but was unable to pay the debt to the Erwins. Mrs. Erwin recovered "Irion" for $45,000. Hall could not make payments to the Bank of Louisiana for "Home Place," and Mrs. Erwin obtained it as well. She and son-in-law John Craighead valiantly labored, paid Joseph's debts, and returned the family to wealth. Joseph sold most of the Bayou Grosse Tete property to Isaac Erwin. White, 376, 398-99; Joseph Erwin to Isaac Erwin, Conveyance Book L, Entry 521, Iberville Par., La.


93Ibid., passim.

94Sect. 9, 52, 53, 56, Ibid.

95"An act concerning Levees and for other purposes," Acts Passed at the Second Session of the Ninth Legislature of the State of Louisiana (Donaldsonville: C. W. Duhy, 1830), 114-16.


97"An act supplementary to the several acts relative to Roads and Levees," Acts Passed at the First Session of the Eleventh Legislature of the State of Louisiana (1833), 91-92.
CHAPTER SIX

LAND WITHOUT LEVEES ON THE MIDDLE MISSISSIPPI:
HUNTERS VERSUS DEVELOPERS IN THE ARKANSAS
DELTA, BEFORE THE WAR OF 1812

Nowhere on the Mississippi was it more obvious that "without the levees there would be no land," than in Arkansas. Deltaic floodplain composes about one third of the state, and the Mississippi River lines its eastern border for 250 linear miles, or about 465 river miles. As usual in the Mississippi Valley, the river overflowed its banks, dropped sediment, and created ridges which could be cultivated if guarded with levees. Thus, Arkansas's Delta contained fertile alluvial land and enjoyed access to rivers for transportation. Unfortunately, it also suffered from complex flood problems that could not be solved by a simple line of embankments. Within this Delta, the White, Arkansas, and St. Francis Rivers flow into the "Father of Waters," each with a large floodplain of its own. At high water the four washed together, courtesy of smaller streams that interconnected across a third of the state. Minor waterways like the Tyronza, L'Anguille, and Boeuf Rivers, as well as bayous such as Macon, De View, and Bartholemew, expanded and overflowed each spring. Then, crisscrossed by water and unable to drain, the Arkansas Delta would sink to the extent of about ten million acres in what are now
twenty seven eastern counties. Flooding hindered Arkansas's development and contributed to a reputation for backwardness which has dogged the region from its first settlement until the present. Sensitive Arkansans often blame this image problem on the popularity of a satiric comedy song, "The Arkansas Traveler," but the stereotype of non-improvement actually dates to colonial times, when unregulated flooding prevented the founding of plantations. Rather than planters and commercial farmers, colonial Arkansas collected a population of swamp-dwelling hunters who not only tolerated floods, but were indifferent to land development. While they composed the majority of Arkansas's population, little would be done to prevent overflows or to convert its swamps to leveed fields. Thus, the history of early settlement in Arkansas is one of non-levee-building communities whose aspirations and achievements contrasted sharply with those of the leveed parishes downriver.¹

To begin with, the lack of leveed agricultural development in Arkansas caused a measurable drag on its population growth. For example, in 1810, after ninety years of flood control at New Orleans (and none in Arkansas), more than 52,000 people lived in leveed river parishes of Orleans Territory, but only 1,062 resided in the Delta of Arkansas. Although Arkansas Post and its surroundings had been spasmodically maintained as a white settlement for 124 years without levees, they contained

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fewer than 900 people in 1810. By contrast, New Orleans and the Parish of Orleans boasted a population of about 25,000, which included nearly 11,000 slaves and sixty highly improved, leved farms which operated with more than twenty slaves each. Leved estates on the Lower Mississippi in 1810 included those of prominent and powerful planters such as Jean Noel Destrehan (100 slaves), Daniel Clark (100), Denis Delaronde (115), Julien Poydras (122), Daniel Macarty (136), and Joseph Descuir (174 slaves). Arkansas, on the other hand, had no planter class in 1810 and no political significance as a territory. Its wealthiest slaveowners probably owned fewer than ten slaves, and none protected the land from overflows. Arkansas could not attract improvement-minded settlers in these circumstances. Persons with slaves or capital to invest would put it where floods could be controlled.²

Because levee building in Louisiana allowed farmers to grow cash crops, the high commodity prices of the latter 1810s stimulated its plantation development. Therefore, by 1820, the river parishes housed almost 94,000 inhabitants, whereas Arkansas's Delta still contained no leved farms and fewer than 2,500 persons. Flooding propelled most of its new settlers out of the Delta into upland subsistence farms which were inaccessible to markets. Commercial agriculture languished as a result, and throughout its whole extent Arkansas contained only about 14,000 people in 1820, of whom just a thousand or so were slaves. That same
year, in Louisiana's river parishes alone, slaves numbered almost 48,000, providing an ample workforce for levee upkeep and crops. The contrast between population growth rates for these leveed and unleveed regions extend to urban growth as well. For example, settlement at flood-prone Arkansas Post and in Arkansas County increased by fewer than 400 persons from 1810 to 1820. Meanwhile, the populace of New Orleans and the Parish of Orleans grew by nearly 17,000. Levees marked the path to improvement in Louisiana, but their absence in Arkansas led to regional obscurity.  

The cumulative effects of habitual non-improvement in flood control can be judged from an incident in Arkansas's religious history soon after the War of 1812. Minister Cephas Washburn of Vermont received a call from the American Board of Missions to preach to Cherokees in Arkansas. They, like several other Native American tribes, had been removed from homes that whites wanted to occupy in the Eastern states. At Walnut Hills, Mississippi, (now Vicksburg), Washburn inquired for directions on how to reach Arkansas, and people seemed astonished at his destination. To them, according to Washburn, "Arkansas was a perfect terra incognita. The way to get there was unknown; and what it was, or was like . . . an unrevealed mystery."  

The lack of levee-builders drove prospective settlers away from the Arkansas Delta for years thereafter.
Consider the assessment found in Traugott Bromme's handbook for German emigrants, *Hand-und Reisebuch fuer Auswandere nach den Vereinigten Staaten von Nord-Amerika* (1849). Bromme said that swamps and prairies in Arkansas's Delta had rich soil, but were unhealthy. Though traversed by many rivers, the land was ill-watered. It flooded in spring, yet scorched by late summer. "Pestilential mists" rose from the ground, and swamp maladies attacked settlers. Texas, on the other hand, received a commendation for its lack of swamps. Through fifty-two pages Bromme lauded Texas, dismissing Arkansas in three. Assistant Surgeon Junius Bragg remarked that no one but a mosquito could live at Arkansas Post and even "the snakes have chills."

The roots of negative perceptions lay embedded in actual living conditions in the Delta, but also in disappointments experienced by those who tried to use it without building levees. Some frontiersmen actually enjoyed the mobile lifestyles which suited an active floodplain. Other western pioneers, like the levee-builders, condemned such activities as unprogressive. They believed the country's destiny lay in being improved for agriculture.

An essay by Gregory Nobles called "Breaking into the Backcountry: New Approaches to the Early American Frontier" reveals that conflicting environmental expectations were common throughout North America, not just on the Mississippi. His survey of modern frontier studies shows
authors frequently exploring "patterns of cultural assumptions and economic expectations" among various types of settlers. Typical writings about land use and cultural landscapes include: William Cronon's *Changes in the Land*; Timothy Silver's *A New Face on the Countryside*; Daniel Usner's *Indians, Settlers, & Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy*; Andrew Cayton's *Frontier Republic*; Thomas Slaughter's *The Whiskey Rebellion: Frontier Epilogue to the American Revolution*; Richard Beeman's *The Evolution of the Southern Backcountry*; Christopher Morris's *Becoming Southern: The Evolution of a Way of Life*; and Peter Onuf's *Statehood and Union: A History of the Northwest Ordinance*.  
New social historians of the frontier often believe that negative perceptions of hunter and Native American land usages came from the mindset of observers with conflicting values, rather than being a literal description of character flaws among non-developers. For them, the issue is not one of improvement versus non-improvement, or laziness versus industry, but of cultural expectations. As Cronon and Silver have shown, even those who seemed to use the land "as is" effected environmental changes that derived from their social ideals and economic pursuits. However, because land developers installed more visible, permanent improvements or belonged to higher social strata, historians sometimes label the developer mentality as "elite." They also suspect developers of using political land policies, such as the Northwest Ordinance, to achieve
social control. For example, new frontier historians might invoke Federalists like Washington and Hamilton as representative opponents of the subsistence culture. Some historians even think that developers wanted a frontier population which would defer to them. The most deferential supposedly consisted of commercial farmers "who would improve the land (and land values) and produce a marketable commodity." To the dismay of elites, however, many frontiersmen neglected the cultivation of cash crops and lived like "white Indians." Rather than develop land, they used it with minimal changes, meanwhile eluding organized society and its demands as much as possible.

Yet, it is important to keep in mind that there was consensus as well as conflict about how the frontier should be developed. Farmers at all economic levels had similar basic ideas about land use and disapproved of transients who made no improvements. Many seemed to live like nomadic hunters in the first years of settlement, but actually aimed at a more settled existence to be realized through farming, improvements, and the eventual purchase of land. Once sure of a subsistence, they might even branch into commercial agriculture if transportation was available. Few of these developers were "elite" by standards of the day. Unlike the gentry, they did physical labor to improve property. Genteel speculators might clash with them sometimes over squatters' rights or land titles, but both groups of farmers agreed that land (especially fertile
land) was meant to be developed. Thus, it seems inaccurate to suggest that the self-interested actions of poor developers are evidence of their "deference" to elites. Ideas truly elitist in nature never dominated the upland frontiers of the United States. For example, Federalist policies which restricted access to land were soon modified by Jeffersonians, and settlers who disliked the Northwest Ordinance could move South instead to the Gulf Plains. American frontiersmen had choices, both in politics and habitat, and deference was not their typical posture. Indeed, most westerners had more pressing concerns than to enact or evade rituals of deference. Dependent on land for survival, they constantly had to assess the fitness of their holdings for the needs of their families. As Jack P. Greene points out, most frontiersmen emigrated to secure a modest independence. Though not averse to a greater degree of prosperity, the typical goal of westward movement was to escape social and economic declension. Unless some left for the west, expanding families and the declining productivity on Eastern soils would press young farmers out of the real estate market. Many had to find cheap lands to improve for themselves, or lose their status as independent farmers.

What effects did these trends have on the general population? Whereas gentry families might limit the number of heirs in order to consolidate wealth, non- or small-slaveholding farmers relied on children as laborers and
considered large families to be an asset. On reaching adulthood, the younger farm generation provided for itself, with little direct aid from parents. Thus, it often happened that older children went west, while the younger stayed home, cared for the elderly, and obtained the family farm. Or, parents might emigrate with their children to places where cheap land gave opportunities to all and families could stay together. In either case, the number of young farmers to be equipped with real estate multiplied enormously in the colonial and Early National eras. Their immediate and gripping need for land was the central experience that led to frontier development. Yet, only a few were fitted to be land developers of the swamps.\(^9\)

Consider the not-atypical family of Robert Coleman, Sr., a colonist of the small slaveowning class, some of whose descendants settled in Arkansas. The history of the Coleman family clearly shows non-elite farmers developing successive frontiers to escape overcrowding. At first, they emigrated to Virginia from Wales, where tenantry had been commonplace. Since Wales is small (an area only 14 percent the size of North Carolina's) and much of it mountainous, poor men acquired farms there with difficulty. Virginia offered more opportunity, but as families and improvements multiplied, its real estate prices also rose beyond reach. Accordingly, around 1756, Robert Coleman moved to the edge of North Carolina's tidewater, where he acquired 357 acres and married Frances Mathis, the child of
a farmer with a mill and ten slaves. Her father's goods provided comforts for one family, but certainly not for eight adult children, spouses, and households. After all, Robert and Frances alone had thirteen children, and financial independence depended on their own initiative. Therefore, in 1775, Robert and Frances sold their improvements and moved to the piedmont of South Carolina. Here they joined a settlement which had headquartered in a private fort, whose inhabitants had fought Indians and been harassed by eviction threats from the elite, land-speculating Wade Hampton family. To secure a title, Robert Coleman, Sr., bought land from an earlier grantee. His probate in 1795 revealed farming on a modest scale: four horses, ten cows, about thirty hogs, much bacon, a plow, wheat scythe, fifty bushels of corn, and a hundred pounds of cotton, with a spinning wheel and loom. A slave, Moses, was given to one heir before Robert's death. The widow and youngest son received a hundred acres, but the other twelve children had to supply farms for themselves.¹⁰

In the community, Colemans were known as people of "strong character, and industrious, thrifty habits," who abhorred "show of any kind." A small production of cotton provided textiles for household use, and descendants preserved Robert, Sr.'s homespun coat as an heirloom. Some of his thirteen children remained in South Carolina; others moved to Georgia, Kentucky, and Arkansas. Robert Coleman, Jr., who stayed behind, married Elizabeth Rowe, whose
father farmed with fourteen children and eight slaves. Elizabeth and Robert, Jr., also had fourteen children. At his death in 1809, Robert Coleman, Jr., left land to two unmarried heirs; older sons got cattle. The youngest obtained a slave and a promise of instruction in hat-making. Colemans made hats for money, but also raised food crops and cows, with some cotton. Since this took a good bit of land, several heirs sought fortunes in the West. Five stayed in South Carolina; five emigrated to Alabama's Black Belt; two struck further off; and two died young. The eight whose children are known produced sixty-eight children--nearly all farmers or farmers' wives--at an average of 7.25 children per household. If one calculates the probable descendants of Robert, Sr., by the same proportion, it yields an estimated 94 grandchildren, 683 great-grandchildren, and 4,952 great-great-grandchildren; mostly coming to adulthood in the early national or antebellum era, mostly farmers, mostly small slaveowners, and moving southwest from South Carolina to Texas. Each had to work to replicate or exceed his birth status. While the wealth of many Colemans did increase on an individual basis, estate divisions almost always prevented them from becoming "elite" as a group. Possessions accumulated in old age, but each generation received just a fragment. John Roe Coleman, for example, son of Robert, Jr., acquired an Alabama cotton farm and sixteen slaves by 1835, but sold the land and died, leaving less than $1,700 for each of ten
children. By 1850, his heirs, great-grandchildren of Robert, Sr., owned a total of 62 slaves, but none with more than 16 slaves each and some with as few as two. The pursuit of modest independence even carried them in different directions. By 1850, the siblings occupied land in seven counties and five states. Slaveholding allowed them a competence, but no guarantee of wealth or ease. Dorcas Coleman McElroy, for example, inhabited a farming household which in 1850 contained nine daughters, two sons under the age of ten, and eleven slaves: three slave women and eight slave children. Few in this 24-person household could help Mr. McElroy with heavy farm labor, and he died fairly young in 1853, doubtless of exhaustion.\(^{11}\)

Overall, Colemans typified much of the populace that marched westward in search of a "modest independence." Though land developers, they were neither elite, nor pioneers in the strictest sense. Colemans preferred semi-established neighborhoods which offered the prospect, within a few years at least, of health, safety, and social amenities, such as churches and schools. They were not typical swamp settlers. Interestingly, none of the Colemans are known to have moved to swamps on the Mississippi. Such a residence would have overtaxed their resources, and they knew better than to risk limited capital on terrain they could not afford to develop. To build levees or work a large plantation was beyond their
capacity. To live in a swamp, without flood control, held no attractions. Other lands better met their needs.

One member of the family, William "Buck" Coleman, wrote a travel journal in which he expressed a marked dis-like of swampland. In the 1840s and 50s, Buck Coleman, grandson of Robert, Jr., was farming a non-alluvial cotton plantation in northeast Mississippi with about thirty slaves. He contemplated a move to newer lands where his ten children could settle. To gather data on various neighborhoods, Buck toured more than 1,500 miles by horseback in the Southwest in 1851. He found that northeast Louisiana, just south of Arkansas's Delta, produced fortunes for those who leveed and drained it. Arkansas had similar resources and was much cheaper, but Coleman did not care to investigate. Observations in Louisiana convinced him that the leveed areas were sickly, while the unleveed swamps were simply intolerable for a man who was used to traveling by land rather than by boat. For example, it took Buck and his party seven days to trudge on horseback from the Ouachita River and Bayou Bartholemew to the Mississippi. He wrote, "The swamp is so exceedingly bad we are much disheartened. No settlers and we do not know whether we are on the right road or not." Some nights they camped where they heard nothing "but owls and wolves and the bellowing of alligators." A typical Coleman, Buck always noted churches, schools, town life, and health as factors that made places attractive, but the swamps offered
none of these advantages. True, leveed land near the river was "thickly settled and finely improved," with wealthy proprietors making one to three bales an acre, but the desirable land was expensive and frequently had been engrossed by non-residents. Vacant lands, "rich, sickly, and wet," were available where flooding could not be prevented, but these tracts featured "many overflows; many deaths." Coleman spurned the environment. Instead, he bought land on a Texas prairie where he found fertile soil, social comforts, and no swamps.\textsuperscript{12}

Unlike the frontiers that most Americans experienced, the frontier of the levee-builders did enforce deference--probably to as extreme a degree as anywhere in North America. As we have seen in leveed Louisiana, the swamp environment demanded regimentation. Social and political forces compelled land developers to build levees, and economic forces dictated that riparian settlers be well-capitalized in order to produce profitable crops. Yet, those "decrees" only affected settlers who tried to acquire and improve swamps as leveed agricultural real estate. On floodplains of the \textit{Middle} Mississippi, a non-levee-building community took shape whose expectations in life differed widely from that of the levee builders, as well as from the ideals of small Coleman-type planters of the uplands. North of the levee line, there lived a community \textit{without levees and without progress}, as developers measured it. To
trace that divergent community's origins, one looks at
colonial Arkansas, where levees were utterly absent.

In the colonial era, Arkansas was part of Louisiana,
and Louisiana's laws required grantees to build levees.
The governors of Louisiana sent military officials to
Arkansas as commandants to enforce laws. However, the
assignment of military officers to Arkansas often caused
discord there because its population resisted the
commandants' ideals of improvement. Interestingly, the
frustrations that plagued commandants in Arkansas strongly
resembled ways in which Native Americans thwarted other
administrators on the Great Plains. Whether in swamps or
on plains, an open landscape allowed inhabitants to escape
control. As free-ranging, non-landowners in a titleless
wilderness, they already enjoyed access to the thing (land)
of which the government wanted to make them conditional
possessors. Environmental historian Walter P. Webb, noting
Spain's failure on the Plains, attributed its disarray to
those wide open landscapes that allowed hunters to be
comfortable, within their own expectations, without resort
to permanent improvements. Mobile Plains Indians refused
to defer to Spanish elites for the sake of farmland. Thus,
Webb aptly called them "a people who could not be
conquered, would not stay converted, had no property to
confiscate, and steadfastly refused to produce any."
Similar descriptions could be written of Arkansas's swamp
hunters, whose rootlessness guarded them from government's
most effective form of control: the access to real estate as property which was critical to development. Where people desired to own land and could make someone improve it, Spanish colonialism succeeded. Consider, for example, the missions of the Southwest which lasted because church-organized Native Americans worked to support them. Settlements on the Lower Mississippi also survived, because docile grantees and slaves maintained the necessary levees. But in the swamps of Arkansas, residents lived a water-bound version of life on the plains. Freedoms, not of strength or wealth, but of movement, characterized the unleveed society of colonial Arkansas. Like plainsmen, no one could force swamp hunters to labor for land, and, as Webb said, their ability to evade coercion on that basis caused Spanish plans for colonial improvements to "crumple up in failure." The freedom to obstruct progress did not, however, equate to progress itself. On the Lower Mississippi, disciplined improvement brought levees into being, as well as a chastened but prosperous society. Pursuits on the middle river generated, meanwhile, a civilization with minimal public duties and little regard for propertied improvements. In the Delta of colonial Arkansas, despite superior soil and river transport facilities, there were few slaves, no levees, and no notable towns. It had little accessible land that anyone expected to stay dry and gave scant evidence of political significance. Most hunters
wanted society to leave them alone. In Arkansas, their obscurity and poverty generally brought that to pass.  

Any discussion of land without levees in early Arkansas must include the Quapaw Indians who farmed its Delta in the colonial era. They hunted in the swamps, but also obtained much of their sustenance from agriculture performed on unleveed alluvial ridges. When we speak of Arkansas's hunters as a rootless, non-agrarian group, we do not refer primarily to Quapaws as a society, but to males of the Delta who hunted for a living. The Quapaw men, as well as French and Anglo bachelors who lived intimately with the tribe, worked as professional hunters. As such, they had little interest in real estate development. The squaws farmed and would perhaps have envied the Creole ladies downriver whose gardens were safeguarded from overflows, but Indian women had little ability to combine forces with commandants to bring levees into being. In colonial Arkansas, those who might have desired levees--commandants and squaws--were powerless to effect them. A workable consensus to bring levees about did not yet exist.  

Sometimes one thinks of Native American cultures as static, or timeless, and of their geographic locations as being fixed for many centuries at the time of European contact. Yet, they were creatures of history just as other peoples. When French explorers first encountered the Quapaw in 1673, the tribe had only recently arrived in the Arkansas Delta. They migrated in the third quarter of the
seventeenth century, after Algonquians and Iroquois from further east pushed them out of the Ohio Valley. Though well-versed in woodland skills, these neophyte swamp-dwellers had to learn to deal with overflows just as Creole planters did. However, because of differing social structures and economic pursuits, their level of expectations and manner of land use was quite different from that of the levee builders. For example, Quapaws never tried to prevent floods with artificial embankments, but cleared and planted a tract while it served their needs and moved elsewhere when its utility ceased. If water covered it, they paddled to higher ground. Most importantly, they did not conceive of land as personal property. Thus, even if subtle changes occurred in the environment from their planting, hunting, or gathering activities, they did refrain from drastic alterations, such as levee building, which white farmers routinely engaged in to secure property rights from their own government.14

To white developers, the Indians' improvements seemed somewhat invisible. Yet, it would be wrong to think that the Quapaw used swampland unintelligently. If one chose to live in swamps without levees, their example shows how it could be done. Actually, the Quapaw culture engaged the landscape both for subsistence and exchange, and farming on the alluvial ridges met many of their needs. For example, Native Americans husbanded as many as 150 domestic plants which, maturing at various seasons, furnished a varied diet.
of carbohydrates and proteins. Principal Quapaw staples included corn, beans, and squash, as well as pumpkins, lima beans, melons, and sunflowers. From these, they cooked dishes such as hoe cakes and hominy, succotash and tamales, washed down with muscadine grapes crushed in water. They did not grow indigo or tobacco for export, nor employ gangs of slaves in leveed, monocultural fields. Their farming generated little money. Hence, the French took little interest in it, except as a convenient food source for its isolated huntsmen and garrisons.15

To make places where food could grow, Quapaw men girdled trees and burned cane on alluvial ridges. This enriched the soil with ashes and left irregular spaces which were cultivated in small mounds with hoes, rather than as row crops. Lacking draft animals, such as oxen, Quapaws could not plow. However, they knew of compatible plants which grew well in limited spaces, thereby reducing the amount of clearing that was necessary. For instance, cornstalks served as beanpoles and, if planted correctly, would spring from the same hole. The Native Americans either abandoned land after about a decade of use, allowing it to return to forest and regain its fertility, or they took advantage of alluvial sediment deposits from overflows which renewed the fields. Men did some heavy farm work, such as clearing land, but focused on the hunting of deer, bears, and small game which provided meat and hides. Boys often fished. Women and children tended house plots and
village fields. Quapaws also gathered wild swamp foods, such as pecans, persimmons, chinkapins, hickory nuts, pawpaws, mayhaws, and berries. Gourds furnished serving or storage vessels. Medicinal and ceremonial plants included tobacco, beebalm, sassafras, and ginseng. Trees, of course, provided fuel, as well as utensils, implements, and canoes. Thus, "unimproved" Quapaw land produced goods valuable to themselves, without being worthy of long-distance trade. Hunting, on the other hand, yielded them a means of exchange and an income. With the appearance of a European market for hides, Quapaw males secured a means of earning money and goods through commercial hunting, not through commercial farming, as in the culture of the levee-builders. So, actually, the men of both communities were seeking wealth through the accumulation of trade goods--one through commercial farming and flood control, the other through commercial hunting in unleved swamps.16

In short, the Native Americans of Arkansas were not uncivilized. At the time of French contact, the Quapaw even lived in recognizable towns: Tourima, on the Arkansas River's north bank, near its mouth; Osotouy, 16 miles west of the Mississippi on the Arkansas; Tongigua, on the Mississippi's east bank, 11 miles above the Arkansas; and Kappa, on the west bank, 10 miles north of Tongigua. All these young villages of the late seventeenth century lay directly on rivers subject to overflow, yet were unprotected by levees. The dwellings stood on poles, encased in
mats of cane. Quapaws also built summer sleeping platforms, fifteen to twenty feet high, to escape mosquitoes, heat, and high water. In spite of precautions, lowland diseases decimated the Quapaw after their arrival in the swamps, and by 1700, the survivors from four villages had merged into two. A French observer from 1687 described their main corn field on the Mississippi as measuring a league and a half long, or 8.5 square miles. The tribe soon learned of flood dangers, however, for the traveler Andre Penicaut reported food shortages in 1700. "The Missicipy had overflown its banks," he said, and "beasts had withdrawn to more than sixty leagues from the river bank." Deprived of crops, dependent on game, and unwilling to build levees, the Quapaw moved to higher ground up the Arkansas River.17

The French of that era had more than a dash of rootlessness themselves. Rather than establish heavily populated agricultural colonies, they really preferred to found mercantile outposts, world-wide, to secure trade partners and native political allies. Hence, they founded Arkansas Post in 1686 near Quapaw towns on the Mississippi floodplain, but closed the post when an epidemic killed about two-thirds of the tribe in 1698. With that event, there were not enough customers to keep it open. Furthermore, the flood of 1699-1700 pushed the remaining tribesmen away from French trade routes. In 1721, the government revived the Post near the Quapaws' upriver
villages, and a Father Poisson reported about 1,200 Quapaw on the Arkansas River in 1727. One town, Sotouris, consisted of 41 cabins and 330 Indian inhabitants who lived slightly above spring flood levels. The squaws who farmed might have liked to be even further upriver, but aggressive Plains tribes such as the Osage dominated the land west of the flood zone, and British-aligned Chickasaw controlled the high bluffs east of the Mississippi. Since Quapaws appreciated French goods, and the French needed to stay near the Mississippi to aid convoys and to transport hides, their combined military and commercial interests dictated a downriver site for Arkansas Post. Unfortunately, this location flooded when the Mississippi and Arkansas Rivers rose, so white farmers avoided the place. The Post came to consist principally of merchants and a small garrison, with Creole hunters drifting in and out to do business. Urban development was minimal, and the European and African-American inhabitants ranged from as few as twelve to no more than four hundred persons in the colonial era.18

A census of 1749 counted 7 civilian French families and 14 slaves, totaling 45 people in residence at Arkansas Post. They owned some livestock--29 oxen, 29 pigs, 60 cattle, and 3 horses--but were not commercial farmers. Sixteen creole hunters at the Post were at that time preparing to return to the swamp. By 1766, the resident population had risen to 40 whites and 10 slaves. Lieut. Philip Pittman, a British reconnaissance officer who

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visited in 1765, told his superior, General Gage, that its buildings stood on stilts or piers six feet off the ground. Like the Quapaw, Arkansas's Frenchmen were adapting to natural swamp conditions, rather than trying to alter them with levees. Even in the 1790s, houses at the Post rose above ground as much as six feet. The Creoles there built a cottage style of house very similar to what was used on the lower river, with an elevated first floor, hipped roof, timber and bousillage walls, and tall chimneys. However, the placing of individual houses above overflow, rather than the cooperative building of levees by a farm community, was very different from the downriver settlements. It suited the capacities of a trading post. The tactic would not, however, have satisfied an agricultural community which needed extensive tracts of crop land. To allow flooding and simply "rise above it" on a per-household basis indicated resignation and fatalism. Such an acceptance of destructive natural forces was alien to the spirit of improvement found in planter communities. Conversely, Pittman noted that overflows at the Post prevented its people from raising necessary provisions. Buildings were in shambles, and only about eight families tried to farm, by working a sort of communal clearing between the river and the fort. Yet, in spite of its shabbiness, this minute, unleveed settlement was the European metropolis of Arkansas's Delta.19
Morris Arnold, in his studies of colonial Arkansas, concluded that "there were never more than eight or ten real farmers at any one time" at Arkansas Post. The absence of white farmers definitively explains the absence of levees, because the Quapaws lived above overflow and the non-levee-building white merchants adopted Indian-type housing expedients. Since neither group needed to own land, and none expected to become wealthy from crops grown in leveed fields, they cared little about improvements for farming. Whites often failed even to grow their own food, but purchased it from Quapaws or from creole villagers of the Illinois Country. There, on the Upper Mississippi, hunters sometimes turned to farming when the furs ran out, and a vocational progression resulted which resembled the frontier process described by Frederick Jackson Turner. But Arkansas's pioneers were insulated from the maturing of frontier society. Their swamps harbored game animals for a long time, and, unlike Turner's Midwest, the terrain and transport facilities of Arkansas's Delta confined settlement precisely to places that would flood. Hence, it was difficult to advance beyond the hunting phase of society.20

Since hunters relied on merchants for supplies, account books from the colonial era offer occasional glimpses of life in the Arkansas floodplain. For example, in a winter expedition of 1725-26 from New Orleans to northeast Arkansas, one Guillaume Allain hired himself as a hunter to Monsieur Lefevre, a French Canadian. The
contract provided wages of cash and commodities: 200 francs, 40 pounds of tallow, 50 pounds of meat, 4 pots of bear's oil, and half the pecans Allain could gather. Bear's oil, used in cooking, was often carried in bladders or deer heads plugged with fat and ashes. Records from 1746 show Nicholas Judice, a Louisiana creole, sponsoring Pierre and Michel Clermont for an Arkansas hunt. They pledged 2,250 pounds of tallow against goods advanced—tallow being a rendered fat used in soap and candle-making. Since animals with fine furs were scarce in Arkansas, deerskins became its most common commodity. From 1720 to 1780, about 50,000 deer hides crossed from New Orleans to La Rochelle each year for redistribution to tanneries at Niort, whose craftsmen sewed them into gloves and book bindings. A lawsuit from 1770 showed a typical cargo from Arkansas to a New Orleans merchant, consisting of 200 pelts of deer, bear, beaver, and otter; 40 salted carcasses; 1,400 pounds of tallow; and 4 pots of bear's oil. In a routine transaction, another merchant, John Fitzpatrick of Manchac, sent 200 pounds of gunpowder and 244 pounds of shot to two Anglo hunters in Arkansas in 1776. Quapaw hunters also received such goods, generally from the Post commandant or resident merchants.²¹

Needless to say, hunters and merchants in Arkansas did not occupy serried ranks of riverbank farms. Instead, hunters spent most of their lives in camps on alluvial ridges, with lay-overs at the Post or in squaws' villages.
Commandants in Lower Louisiana would have ejected them in favor of grantees who would do public works, but the landless were tolerated in Arkansas because they maintained a European presence and supplied France with valued commodities. Therefore, commandants of Arkansas Post had to wink at levee laws and allow landless hunters to stay. Denizens of the Post itself might not own land. For example, in 1743 a Widow Lepine held considerable property by local standards, including four slaves, nearly a ton of tobacco, promissory notes, a house, and three outbuildings; but no real estate. Although levee edicts were dead letters in colonial Arkansas, they still formed a requirement for obtaining titles. Yet, since vacant ground was abundant and had no monetary worth, why build levees to legally secure it? Few Arkansans even wanted titles until the colonial era ended. Then, they realized the United States would charge money for land, that newer settlers might buy improvements from under them, and that they could sell improvements (as preemption rights) to clearings they had never bothered to levee or acquire.22

The land claims made by Arkansas's squatters after the Louisiana Purchase would not have been honored by their colonial government. The claimants had not performed public works for confirmations. And, because of Arkansas's scanty population, few even filed claims for property. For instance, the Board of American Land Commissioners retroactively confirmed just five Spanish concessions and
twenty-three Spanish-era settlement claims for all of Arkansas in its 1812 deliberations. Frederick Bates, on appeal, recognized another forty concessions and seventy-seven settlement claims in 1816. But the kings had not accepted squatting or preemption as a basis for grants, and Morris Arnold found "not a single regular Spanish land title . . . in the entire state of Arkansas." Its royal governments believed they were generous merely to tolerate squatters, much less to give land away without receiving levees, roads, and militia service in return. Such claims as were confirmed mostly stood on the Arkansas River around the Post, with a few on the Mississippi at Hopefield, or on the White, St. Francis, and Cache Rivers, where settlement had been casual indeed. None of these lands were developed during the colonial era with levees, and none remotely attained the degree of improvement that prevailed on the Indigo, German, or Acadian Coasts. Why then were the grants confirmed? The Americans who approved them came from a less controlled frontier, and their standards of legitimacy in land claims differed widely from that of the levee-building royalists downriver.  

On the Lower Mississippi, deference had been indispensable. Settlers who built levees in French and Spanish Louisiana accepted the authority of King and Church. Colonists received land with loyalty oaths and became part of dense communities. Commandants, as royal agents, looked into the settlers' character, showed them
where to settle, inspected their public works, and expelled non-conformists. As a result, prosperity and order resulted from regimented land distribution. By contrast, creole hunters neither wanted grants, nor received them. Once a year, they were supposed to register at the Post for a hunting license, but some refused even to do that.

Critics of the hunters, such as Major Amos Stoddard, who received Upper Louisiana for the United States at the time of the Purchase, judged that Arkansas's creoles "had lost all industry, and nearly all their knowledge of agriculture" during their swamp sojourn. In his opinion, their "unconquerable predilection for the Indian trade" would keep them impoverished, for it had always proved "precarious and unprofitable." As farmers, though, their prospects were hardly brighter, because they seemed mired in "habitual indolence." Only levees and commercial farms would bring true wealth to the swamps, Stoddard maintained. Yet, he was equally convinced that Arkansas's colonial inhabitants were unfit to farm it.24

Most colonial Arkansans came from Canadian voyageur backgrounds via the Illinois Country. According to Captain Pittman, male Illinoisians spent about two months a year in farming: one month to sow corn and one month to harvest it. Wives of Canadian or Indian ancestry tended the crops, whereas for men to show undue concern for the fields probably appeared effeminate. Though strong, "well made," and able to speak Native American dialects as well as
French, Pittman considered *voyageurs* to be "superstitious and ignorant." They pursued hunting and trade, absorbed Indians' wilderness skills, and "much affect[ed] their manners." The latter comment was not meant as a compliment, and the easy assimilation of Arkansas's creole hunters to the culture of Native American men drew harsh criticism from other districts. For example, Athenase de Mezieres, an official at Natchitoches, declared that Arkansas's creole hunters were lawless and irreligious, deserters and fugitives. In his view, its unleveed swamps sheltered "the most wicked persons, without doubt, in all the Indies."25

A measure of the lax discipline of Arkansas's French hunters may be taken from the census of 1749, which showed forty hunters on the Arkansas River and nine on the White and St. Francis Rivers—all with expired passports. Though known to be in the district, they would not risk an appearance. How likely is it that they would have submitted to a commandant's inspection of levee- and road-building?26

If Arkansas's creole frontiersmen resembled Native American hunters, rather than levee-builders, their manner of life also evokes comparisons with backwoodsmen of British origins. Differences did exist, however, between Arkansas hunters and Anglo-Saxon frontiersmen in attitudes about land. British squatters generally wanted land at some point, and they did not associate real estate with
onerous public duties. Those originally from Atlantic colonies had not lived in places like the banks of the Mississippi where development depended on continuous levees and community discipline. In Carolina, for example, no British officer scoured the backwoods to view crawfish holes or to evict negligent levee makers. Compared to what France and Spain demanded from grantees on the Mississippi, British colonists accepted land with little effort. For example, from 1763 to 1773, a head of household in British West Florida received 100 acres for himself and 50 acres for each household member, up to 1,000 acres. He merely had to build a crude dwelling and clear three acres of every fifty over the course of three years, or place three neat cattle on any fifty acres left unimproved. There was no requirement for him to settle next to another grantee, nor connect a levee to a neighbor's. The natural terrain of swamps and ridges, and the political terrain of King and commandant, did not dictate his homesite. Yet, the British upland grantee in West Florida owned his land as surely as the leveed Creole. Even Arkansas's hunters might not have been averse to landowning under the conditions of Britain, but in their own colony they seemed like vagrants.27

Ironically, the frontier tradition in British America often rewarded settlers for tumbling through the wilderness in advance of public works or even public safety. Although George III's Proclamation Line of 1763 tried to exclude them from lands beyond the crest of the Alleghanies--
supplying Florida as an alternative—his colonists chafed under the restriction. They ignored the Line in practice and attacked it politically during the Revolution as a sign of tyranny. For example, in 1777 the Virginia Assembly adopted the "ancient cultivation law," wherein land claims of squatters were guaranteed on a preemption basis because of prior occupation of the soil. A second Virginia land law in 1779 gave additional grounds for claiming vacant property. Both were widely invoked in Kentucky. Similar legislation in North Carolina accelerated immigration to Tennessee, and the liberality of the policies established precedents of expectations throughout the West. As a result, squatters occupied land on the authority of revolutionary governments and brushed aside hunters who claimed the land was theirs.28

Much of what Natives "owned" were hunting grounds which seemed to be in a state of nature and therefore appeared open for settlement. To an Anglo's way of thinking, the absence of improvements showed the absence of prior claims. Among his own kind, he respected the clearing of land, building of cabins, and planting of crops as symbols of preemption, just as he accepted the giving and receiving of rings as evidence of marriage. To claim land without such symbols carried no more legitimacy to him than to claim that fornication constituted a marriage. Yet, the symbols which satisfied possession rituals in the Anglo West were inadequate to secure true possession in a
Mississippi River swamp. What good would it do, after all, for a frontiersman to claim land in Arkansas which might be under water six months of the year? Land laws that required practically no public works sufficed for Kentucky and Tennessee, but a freedom from levee duties in eastern Arkansas simply allowed its settlers to remain poor and vulnerable. Those who cleared land, planted crops, and built cabins would also watch them wash away, or at least sit idle in the growing season, unless they teamed up to build levees. However, when rugged individualists aspired to be swamp farmers they viewed enforced cooperation with horror. Furthermore, hunters found contentment in the unimproved swamps, much to the dismay of those who believed swamp land promised a higher destiny.29

The chief critics of unrestricted flooding in Arkansas prior to 1804 (the end of its colonial era) were the commandants at Arkansas Post. Like other European military officers, they frequently came from branches of noble families whose status derived from manorial farms. In Lower Louisiana, officers typically engaged in planting, and when assigned to military duty on the frontier, they expressed contempt for hunters and squatters. At Arkansas Post, it particularly peeved them that farm resources could not be developed because of the floods which hunters did nothing to prevent. Commandants with aristocratic names and plantation connections, such as Delino De Chalmette, De La Houssaye, De Clouet, and Dubreuil Saint-Cyr, often asked
their superiors to have the Post moved beyond the reach of overflows, so farmers would move there and develop a stable community. Hunters, on the other hand, viewed the whole landscape as being at their disposal. When surrounded by abundance, why confine one's attentions to a single spot and incur the obligations of land-owning? Hunters could not expect to benefit from the closure of a wilderness that lay outside of legal boundaries. As one descendant of Arkansas's pioneers remembered her forebears: "The cries of wild animals was music to their ears. They did not take in consideration perfect deeds nor titles to lands," but "a hut in the dense forest . . . appealed to them." Thus, in Arkansas two sets of ambitions--hunters versus developers--clashed in the swamp.30

Responses to flooding were a basic means by which divergent attitudes were revealed, and the Arkansas hunter response was avoidance. For example, in 1748 the Quapaw simply moved beyond the flood zone to higher ground at Ecores Rouges, about 45 miles from the Arkansas's mouth. Their flight endangered the creoles, and a Chickasaw raid destroyed the Post. France reluctantly allowed the Post to rejoin the Quapaw upriver in 1749, because the new, drier location promised better opportunities for development. However, the Post's simultaneous immersion into the hunter culture annoyed its genteel commandants and also caused a dangerous over-reliance on Native Americans for security. Since Arkansas Post was now too far from the Mississippi to
defend convoys, the government cut its defense budget by using the Post primarily for trade. Within two years, nothing remained of the garrison but an ensign, a corporal, and six soldiers. So slight a force could hardly command respect. By 1751 the young ensign, Louis-Xavier Delino de Chalmette, had fled downriver to where his family planted commercial crops on leved land between New Orleans and English Turn. Soldiers sacked the commissary in his absence and deserted to Texas. The turmoil suggests a deep alienation between the commandant and those he supervised. Essentially, Chalmette lacked coercive strength to impose his own values, and the hunter community was uninterested in a developer's agenda. Unimprovement prevailed. 31

Levee builders helped to enforce all kinds of social discipline on the Lower Mississippi, but since the hunter community could not be viewed as a partner in progress, Governor Vaudreuil met the Arkansas crisis by strengthening the military. To Arkansas Post, he sent a higher-ranking commandant and a company of fifty men. Nor did the Governor expect disinterested public service. Rather, he gave Lieutenant de La Houssaye a five-year trade monopoly with the Quapaw in exchange for building fortifications at the upriver site. Here, forty-five miles from the Mississippi, security from overflow and invasion brought new confidence. The enlarged garrison commanded respect, and the Post's population grew in the early 1750s because development could occur without flooding. Unfortunately,
the Seven Years' War brought royal convoys back to the Mississippi in 1756, and the Post removed to within ten miles of the Mississippi to defend them. Flood problems instantly returned. For example, in 1758 a merchant complained that high water was confining his family, five slaves, dogs, cats, and hens to a house measuring 25' x 16' which was perched above high water. Post defenses suffered heavy damages, and residents feared the Chickasaws would attack while drunken workmen dallied over repairs.

Commandant de Villiers, who pronounced the site "the most disagreeable hole in the universe," told his superiors it flooded almost every year. From 1763 to 1767, agriculture ceased at the Post. Settlers did not even fence fields to guard the crops from animals, and the spark of enterprise which had flared at Ecores Rouges quickly waned.32

A hunter's disinterest in permanent improvements partly resulted from flooding, but to fully understand one must also recall his manner of life. His property had to be portable, functional, and light; not something stacked in barns, fenced in pastures, or held for display. Note, for example, a typical hunter's accoutrements just north of the Arkansas Delta, as observed by traveler Edouard de Montule. The tourist watched a Native American hunter sitting at a shelter beside the Mississippi with his squaw, children, and camp equipment. The hunter wore homemade moccasins, buckskin clothing of European appearance, a nose ring, earrings, hair beads, and a scarf. His tools
included a rifle, an axe, a pack of hounds, turkey fans for shoo-ing mosquitoes, and other items in bundles. The wife wore a belted dress, patterned scarf, beaded hair band, and moccasins. Their son donned a hunting shirt, and baby was a bound papoose. The hunter's merchandise consisted of deerskins in packs to be traded for supplies and consumer goods: powder, lead shot, cloth, and probably whiskey. De Montule saw no horse in the entourage and commented that "to judge from the quantity of his baggage, he must find traveling most onerous." Naturally, the hunter's idea of valuables differed from that of a farmer who prized durable improvements. Anything he owned would have to be dragged from place to place through the swamp. However, portable possessions were the only ones which could be saved from water damage. In short, a hunters's goods survived the natural swamp environment where a farmer's could not.33

Nevertheless, commandants clashed with hunters in the Spanish period, just as under the French. One of them, Captain de Clouet, who governed Arkansas Post in 1768 and 1769, could not enforce levee codes like his counterparts in Louisiana, but he at least planted a garden and made colonists agree to build a fence. (Morris Arnold found no evidence, however, that the fence was built). De Clouet worried about floods at the Post because fears of high water discouraged planting. It bothered De Clouet that creole villagers bought food from the Quapaw, because Quapaw men, seeing the whites' dependence, demanded to be
able to trade corn for liquor, which Spaniards did not want them to have. Since Indians could trade for alcohol at an English post near the mouth of the Arkansas, the Quapaw discontent about "prohibition" became a threat to the Post's security. For example, Quapaws told Commandant De Leyba, De Clouet's successor, they would sell corn to the British or massacre the Post garrison if the Spanish would not obey their thirst. How much better if, as De Clouet suggested, the Post simply moved beyond the flood zone. The downriver site was unfit for agriculture, in his opinion, whereas on drier ground Europeans could feed themselves and even grow tobacco and cotton. Yet, military necessity intervened, and Arkansas Post stayed in the deepest floodzone. As a result, high water in 1769, 1771, and 1774 caused alarms and damages. The Quapaw held aloof, and the Osage plundered the hunters. This led to financial distress, the cancellation of fur expeditions, and an inability to pay merchants for goods advanced. In these situations, flooding disrupted even the hunter economy.

In 1777, Commandant de Villiers reiterated the need to move the Post above overflow, by which tactic he hoped to provision troops more effectively, regain respect from Native Americans, and attract better settlers. Otherwise, he thought Arkansas's colonists must remain few in number, without livestock or field produce, deficient both in moral fiber and social improvement. Poverty prevented the introduction of slaves which might be used for planting and
levee building. And De Villiers, true to his class and developer ideals, referred to hunters as brigands or libertines whose rough manners, mixed-breed families, and Indian habits must repel useful immigrants. In short, hunters made cultivated people nervous; and De Villiers hoped to flood Arkansas with farmers instead, to submerge the hunters' bad influence. Meanwhile, hunters and merchants opposed his scheme to move the Post upriver. The lure of the plow did not excite them, and prospects for land development paled beside present dangers from the Osage and Chickasaw.35

With apologies to Frederick Jackson Turner, who thought the frontier experience spawned positive democratic ideals, one could describe the hunter response to the commandants' ideals as conservative and illiberal, rather than progressive. They chose to cling to what was known and familiar, even if in doing so opportunity was denied to a much larger group (farmers) who might otherwise inhabit the land. Frontier self-interest sometimes generated progressive achievements, as Turner believed, but not always. In many cases, the infrastructures that promoted progress (such as levees) came from government directives which aimed at the displacement of one populace (hunters, floodwaters, or snakes, etc.) and its replacement by a more desirable one (farmers, livestock, and cash crops). Left to themselves, many frontiersmen did not even desire progress, or they defined it in different ways. Much
depended on what their interests were, or what their
trophies consisted of--whether pelts, pigs, or indigo.
Elite observers, like Lieut. Gov. Zenon Trudeau of Upper
Louisiana (whose relatives planted in Lower Louisiana),
described Arkansas's hunters as "wanderers" and "the scum
of the posts." However, it was natural for Trudeau to
downgrade Arkansas; the Plains Indians who raided there
brought its plunder to sell at cut-rate prices in St.
Louis, his own headquarters. Trudeau's self-interest is
apparent, but he did know his audience. Class-biased
commandants were already disposed to assess hunters at this
negative valuation.36

Comments from Ouachita Post (Monroe, Louisiana),
Arkansas Post's nearest neighbor, give clear evidence of
the contempt that officers felt for those who neglected
improvements. For instance, Commandant Juan Filhiol called
hunters unreliable because they abandoned settlements
casually and could not be reached for public service.
"Their rifle and their powder horn comprise their entire
property," he said, "and every country is good to them" as
long as the animals held out. "If they hunt a little, it
is only to satisfy the first needs of nature," rather than
to edify a settled community. Indeed, he thought they
scarcely knew "whether they are Christians." Carlos de
Gran Pre made similar remarks concerning their "ruinous
passion" for wilderness life. To him, the lure of the
chase explained why "lands so ancienly settled are still
standing in timber." Sixty five hunters from Gran Pre's settlement often left during the fur season, not returning until March or April the following year. In the meantime, no significant work would be done at their clearings. Another officer, Captain Harry Gordon, stated that the "Bandetti" of Arkansas did not even deserve to be called a settlement.37

For gentlemen, hunting was a leisure activity. If whites or Indians pursued it as a vocation, gentlemen thought they were playing at life and leaving to women the manly task of raising provisions. Even in Europe, the French bourgeois of the latter eighteenth century found fault with "lazy" peasant men who "made" women labor in the fields. Gentry officials also deplored the work and gender ethics of the hunter culture in the New World. Squatters were slightly more palatable as "hunting farmers," but the gentry culture could not condone a division of labor which asked women to do "male" labor, nor could they trust in the patriotism of men who held no real estate. Without an interest in landed property to fix his energies on a single landscape, neighborhood, and country, how were loyalties to be secured? Louisiana's Governor Carondelet, harassed by specters of revolt and invasion, darkly pondered the question. Of hunters and squatters he wrote, "they are a hardy people who live only on maize," and (ominously) a "people who have nothing to lose." No taxes, priests, militias, or levees reminded the unleveed frontiersmen of
social obligations. Even the incentive to bequeath land did not move them to improvements because natural swamps contained no real estate. Swamps also lacked facilities for formal education and religious training. Consequently, hunters and swamp squatters seemed useless, alarming, even savage, to those like Carondelet who viewed leveed plantation districts as the goal of rational development.38

However little interest the hunters and traders of Arkansas had in boarding the Car of Progress, as defined by commandants or planter elites, the flood of 1779 finally compelled even them to move upriver. In that year, water from the Mississippi, Arkansas, and White rose so high at Arkansas Post that the most elevated houses washed to ruins. Nearly all the livestock drowned, the walls of the fort split open, and the well collapsed. Conditions in other parts of the Delta were even worse. Refugees from a British post called Concordia, at the Arkansas's mouth, and hunters' families from the St. Francis basin fled to Arkansas Post which doubled its population. Water even covered the gardens of the Quapaw. Many victims vowed to leave Arkansas, but Commandant De Villiers begged them to go to Ecores Rouges instead. Thus, in 1779 Arkansas Post made its final move. Osage raids would not permit it to leave the floodplain, but the new site furnished some topographical relief and the effects of this were quite striking. The Post's population rose from 50 whites and 11 slaves in 1777 to 337 whites and 56 slaves in 1798.
However, settlers still did not build levees, but continued their individualistic solution of living in the air. Upriver houses at the Post, mostly constructed in the 1790s, were described by the secretary of a territorial governor as being four to six feet off the ground. Floods remained something the Arkansas creoles would accommodate to, rather than prevent. Therefore, the relocation of the Post did not erase Arkansas's overall negative image. Remoteness, the sickly environment, its vulnerability to Indian raids, and the availability of vacant land nearer to improved settlements, retarded Arkansas's development. At the same time, the abundant swamp resources sustained a community here that developers held in contempt. 39

So, overflows continued, and at the dawn of the nineteenth century, the Arkansas Post district was still far from well-developed as a farm community. Spanish records of 1791 show only fifteen family harvests. By 1798, wheat production had tripled, but half was grown by widows' households. Men had other things to do, and farm labor was scarce. For example, Maria Menard, a merchant's widow and the largest slaveowner at the Post in 1791, owned but nine slaves. No inhabitant held them in the quantity needed for plantation work, and Post households contained just sixty slaves altogether in 1805, mostly house servants and farm hands. Courtesy of sediment from overflows, the patches of corn, hemp, wheat, and cotton grew well, even where land had been planted for a decade. This was

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fortunate because Arkansas farmers did little to conserve its fertility. Investigator John Treat said in 1805 that Post farmers never manured fields or rotated crops. Some grew cotton for home use, but gins did not arrive until ten years after the device was introduced in Louisiana. Indeed, the first wagon came to Arkansas Post in 1811, carried by boat because no usable roads existed. Cattle flourished on cane and grass, but settlers never bothered with domestic fodder. They accepted what nature provided and used it with hardly an alteration. Incredibly, Arkansas Post was the most developed spot in Arkansas, but its residents clearly had neither the resources nor mindset to convert their Delta to a region of improved and leveed plantations. Thus, when Arkansas entered into American possession in 1803, it did so without any infrastructure of flood control, trailing both leveed and upland districts on the Mississippi in population and improvement.

If the inland settlement at Arkansas Post was primitive and ill-improved, even less development could be found on the Arkansas Delta's banks of the Mississippi. Though blessed with soil as rich as that of the leveed plantation districts, Arkansas's frontlands produced almost nothing of value at the turn of the nineteenth century and were practically devoid of settlement.

Lieut. Richard Butler described Arkansas's Mississippi River frontage on a trip from Pittsburg to Natchez in 1798. Butler said the river was "the colour and thickness of lime
and water when mixed for white washing," because caving banks continually fell into it and turned to mud. Trees collapsed with the banks and formed innumerable snags that made shipping hazardous. For hundreds of miles, Butler observed no place that did not overflow, except for three or four spots where small bluffs approached the river. "You will go for miles," he said, without seeing "as much dry ground as you can encamp on." Adjacent floodplains were "good for nothing" and lay submerged to the extent of "twenty to fifty miles more or less, tho' seldom less, and in many places more." At the northern edge of Arkansas, two Missouri settlements caught Butler's attention. He noted New Madrid as a place "very little above high water mark," whose shoddy fort consisted of flat-boat timbers nailed together. About thirty miles below, a natural prairie claimed four creole families as residents: "clever lazy people, with a number of rascally Delaware Indians," all living much alike. From there until one reached what is now West Memphis, the riverside appeared uninhabited. Then, across from Fourth Chickasaw Bluff, a handful of Spaniards watched the river. Further south, Spain had once maintained a blockhouse at the Arkansas's mouth, but floods destroyed it. Disgusted with the environment, Butler exclaimed, "This spot was the highest ground the Spaniards could find between the [Chickasaw] bluffs and Walnut hills, yet it overflows." One day, Butler shot a buck--"no bad thing, as we had no fresh meat." The lack of food
supplies, desolate landscape, and toils of upstream travel exhausted his oarsmen. "Between sweat & rain they are always as wet as though they lay in the river." Butler could have his pick of this land in exchange for improvements and a loyalty oath, but he avoided Arkansas, married an heiress from Pointe Coupee, and chose to cultivate plantations in the Natchez District and the German Coast. Persons of means had no reason to live in Arkansas.41

Apart from the district around Arkansas Post, Arkansas had no distinct identity. "Upper Louisiana" centered on Missouri but extended south to Campo de Esperanza (Hopefield) which the Spanish founded when evacuating the site of Memphis in 1797. The "Camp of Hope" garrison consisted of eight men who gazed at Americans across the river. The most prominent Hopefield resident, Benjamin Fooy, entertained travelers and traded in hunters' supplies from a big red house on the riverbank. Indians tolerated Fooy's presence because he made no claim to their land and provided consumer goods. Sylvanus Phillips of North Carolina also settled on the Mississippi in 1797, below the mouth of the St. Francis, where Crowley's Ridge approaches the Mississippi. Fearful in so remote a spot, Phillips moved to Arkansas Post for a time, but returned in 1802, eventually naming the settlement "Helena" for his daughter. A merchant named William Patterson built a warehouse in 1800 to store pelts at the mouth of St. Francis. When Patterson died, his widow married Phillips. In 1800, three
Kentuckians also settled a little below the St. Francis at Big Prairie. Such as they were, these scattered clearings, plus Arkansas Post, were the chief settlements of Arkansas's Delta at the time of the Louisiana Purchase. None of them relied on levees for protection.\textsuperscript{42}

Jedidiah Morse's \textit{American Gazetteer} of 1804 revealed some knowledge of Arkansas. The book said Arkansas comprised one of Louisiana's 37 districts, and that Arkansas Post, its seat, contained less than 400 people. Quapaw villages stood at 18, 27, and 36 miles beyond. By that time, Indians from east of the Mississippi (Cherokee, Chickasaw, and Choctaw), whose hunting grounds had been depleted, came there and intermarried. About 500 Indian families also lived around the St. Francis or near New Madrid and Cape Girardeau. These displaced Natives--Chickasaw, Cherokee, and others--were seen by Morse as vagabonds, being hunters without a permanent abode and "attached to liquor." He warned whites not to speak too freely around them about travel plans or cargoes. "Many of them speak English, all understand it, and there are some who even read and write it." Just as colonial commandants worried that hunters would frighten farmers away, western promoters deplored the presence of hunters who might frighten "respectable citizens." Persons with the means to build leveed plantations did not relish their society.\textsuperscript{43}

Major Stoddard added further details about Arkansas in his \textit{Sketches, Historical and Descriptive, of Louisiana}
Like most officers, Stoddard thought farm exports were "the foundation of foreign commerce" and believed that riverbanks could have no better use than as leveed plantations. On the other hand, he could not see how a commerce between two sets of poor men (hunters and Post merchants) who made no improvements could be anything but "precarious and unprofitable." What Arkansas needed was not trade, Stoddard thought, but land development.

Ambitious, land-clearing, American settlers could wrest lumber, cattle, pigs, and flour from the Delta. Even cotton, indigo, and rice might be possible, where the climate permitted and floods could be controlled.

Unfortunately, as Stoddard admitted, overflows limited Arkansas's potential. By any standard, settlements outside the floodplain in Upper Louisiana were "of much the most consequence in whatever light we consider them." New settlers flocked to higher ground, especially in Missouri. From 1800 to 1804, Missouri's population grew very rapidly, while the lowland populace from the mouth of the Arkansas to New Madrid increased by only six persons. Too, the kind of settlers who went to Missouri were like Colemans--sociable, small producers. They had no interest in swamps. Cape Girardeau District, for example, contained some alluvium, but pioneers avoided that area and settled the rolling hills instead, several miles off the river.

According to Stoddard, few immigrants to the Cape Girardeau District "planted themselves on the Mississippi." Thus,
while Lower Louisiana churned out plantation crops using levees and slaves, Cape Girardeau featured family farms making hemp, grains, tobacco, and a little cotton on its non-alluvial hills. Uplanders at the Cape also harvested maple sugar; shipped beef, pork, and lard; and gathered a few remaining pelts. They shunned swamps, but in pursuing flood-free improvements they were in company with most of their fellows. For example, the 1810 American Gazetteer showed that Louisiana Territory—the Louisiana Purchase lands outside of the present state of Louisiana—contained 20,845 people, only 1,062 of whom (5 percent) lived in flood-bedeviled Arkansas. Its overflows just lasted part of the year, but, as Stoddard pointed out, unimproved swamp lands would be useless to farmers except as cattle ranges, unless agricultural communities drained them "at great expense" and built levees "to keep the water from them." Stoddard knew that levees were transforming Louisiana into a plantation powerhouse. Arkansas's resources could be developed the same way, but only if levee builders would move there.45

The unequal pace of development between flooded and floodless regions was also visible in river traffic on the Mississippi. Cargoes revealed that upland frontiers were attracting many developers at the beginning of the 1800s, whereas Arkansas's swamps continued as a hunter stronghold. For instance, the German traveler Christian Schultz, who passed beside Arkansas in the spring of 1808, noticed
sixteen flatboats near the mouth of the Ohio. With crews from Kentucky bound for New Orleans, their goods represented products from highland western farms and industries. Two boats contained Kentucky tobacco; four, whiskey and flour from Cincinnati; two, horses from the Limestone; two, Virginia lime; two, cotton and tobacco from the Cumberland; and four, families destined for hill settlements on the Amite River, north of Lake Pontchartrain. Schultz also glimpsed immigrants bound for Arkansas—a flotilla of Native Americans heading for White River, where they meant to join a war party to seize the lands of the Osage.46

Schultz learned that voyagers viewed the six hundred miles between New Madrid and Natchez as "a wild and pathless wilderness." Even New Madrid failed to impress. It stood on caving banks, two feet above overflow, and Front Street had already caved into the Mississippi. Swamps began two miles behind it which stretched westward for fifty miles, and even its farmers seemed discouraged and careless. However, this was partly the climate's fault. Schultz said cotton from around New Madrid sold very cheaply because frosts impaired its quality. Modern hardiness maps from the U. S. Department of Agriculture confirm his misgivings. New Madrid lies in Zone 6, where winter temperatures range from -10 to 0 degrees Fahrenheit, the same zone as eastern Massachusetts, Connecticut, and north-central New Jersey. Near the middle of Missouri's
Bootheel, the climate warms to Zone 7, where cold ranges from 0 to 10 degrees. This prevails to the mouth of the Arkansas, encompassing central and northeast Arkansas. Climatic equivalents of Zone 7 appear on the Atlantic coast in New Jersey, Delaware, and the Chesapeake, as well as the piedmonts of Virginia and North Carolina. Early or hard frosts damaged cotton in Zone 7, but it sometimes matured. Had it not been for floods, farmers might have found this area attractive. Yet, Schultz noted only infant communities at Hopefield, Helena, and Big Prairie.47

From New Madrid to Hopefield, the 140 miles of Delta frontage appeared uninhabited. Schultz thought eight or ten farmers at Hopefield grew cotton superior to New Madrid's, but it still suffered from the cold. From there to the St. Francis, Schultz said, "you descend . . . without meeting any thing worthy of notice." Solitude was relieved at Helena and Big Prairie where squatters occupied a few acres, but swamps began less than a mile away. The remoteness of these settlers may be gauged by Schultz's encounter with a nearby barge which had been ascending from New Orleans for 48 days! Squatters grew cotton at Helena and Big Prairie for household use, and Schultz saw women spinning it, but he judged its quality to be inferior to Hopefield's. From Helena, Schultz floated downriver two days and saw nothing. Between the mouths of the White and Arkansas Rivers, a canoeful of Indians boarded for whiskey, but nothing on the banks drew his attention. The riverside
at the mouth of the Arkansas exhibited no visible improvements, but he did notice the climate was warming. Vegetation such as cypress trees and Spanish moss appeared, which meant a longer growing season. Alligators also made a debut. These features pleased planters, because they signaled the onset of Hardiness Zone 8, where low temperatures run 10 to 20 degrees above zero. Nationwide, Zone 8 contained premier cotton regions such as the Gulf Plains of Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi. Arkansas's Delta counties of Chicot and southern Desha occupy the same zone. Yet, overflows discouraged settlement here, as elsewhere in Arkansas, and Schultz indicated that the riverfront was empty of human life from Big Prairie all the way to the Yazoo.48

Just weeks after Schultz's visit, a British traveler named Fortescue Cuming passed beside Arkansas's Delta. His account is valuable because he depicts the activities of some of the earliest American pioneers on the Middle Mississippi making their first, tentative improvements. For example, Cuming saw squatter camps near the mouth of the Ohio and fifteen miles below. These squatters hunted for food, but were not professional hunters. One family, the Pettits, had paused on the Ohio's banks to build a cabin and raise a crop or two in a small clearing. Pettit told Cuming he would go down the Mississippi eventually, but for now contented himself with small subsistence crops and sales of poultry, eggs, and milk to travelers. The
other family whom Cuming interviewed had already headed
downstream, but was stopped for a while by the shore.
People with little money for provisions often made the trip
in stages, growing food and camping for a time to rebuild
resources. Even Indians traveled in this manner. Cuming
said the second family had made "a fine new settlement," by
which he meant a clearing by the riverside. Yet, the boat
that carried them was tied to the shore for the next leg of
the journey. They had not made a legal commitment to the
spot, but simply used it as a temporary convenience. If
overflows had covered its banks, they would not have
stopped, and if a rise inundated the camp, they would load
the boat to move on. After all, they did not own the land
and certainly would not make permanent improvements, such
as levees, to protect it. That performance would have to
wait until someone with a stronger interest came along.49

Native American hunters on the Mississippi also drew
within Cuming’s view. At the upper edge of Arkansas’s
Delta, he watched three canoes of Delawares, whom he
described as "whooping it up on whiskey, having just sold
their furs." The surrounding riverside was desolate and
unimproved; profits from its peltries were swallowed rather
than invested in land development. About forty miles
further, a canoe full of Shawnees overtook Cuming’s boat.
The whites treated them with whiskey, then camped out of
sight in company with boatsmen from South Carolina and
Pittsburg. White and red frontiersmen might inhabit the
same environment, but common frontier experiences did not assimilate them into one society. From Cuming, hunter habits of consumption and their disinterest in improvement elicited disapproval, even as their wilderness prowess earned a sort of respect. Cuming's account of Chickasaw warriors, for example, conveys admiration coupled with condescension. One warrior he saw was attending a present-giving ceremony at Fort Pickering (now Memphis) "drest very fantastically" in a bright calico shirt with red, white, and blue body paint, beaded moccasins, leggings, and a heron plume. The man's companions also made a brave show in paint, feathers, crescent breast-plates, and tin earrings. Unfortunately, their presence at the Fort indicated political and military weakness rather than strength, and the extravagance of the costumes did not allay Cuming's basic lack of sympathy for their cultural values.  

That Fortescue Cuming came from a refined background is suggested by his name and writings, as well as by circumstances he saw fit to record. For example, Cuming told of a boat approaching his vessel which blew a horn as a signal. Cuming's party answered with "airs on the clarionet and the octave flute." Whether the cultural one-upmanship was appreciated or not, the incident implies a degree of gentility socialized to an elite standard. Witness, then, Cuming's reaction to a hunting camp on the Mississippi. He noted that Natives made temporary huts with forked stakes six to twelve feet apart. A ridge-pole
being trussed across the forks, tree bark was then stripped and laid as a roof. Having mangled several trees to raise the shed, men lounged in it when not engaged in the chase, lying full-length on blankets or sitting cross-legged by the fire. Meanwhile, squaws performed the drudgery and wove baskets. Cuming passed several such camps on the Mississippi, all of which seemed "newly abandoned" and strewn with debris. 51

Race and ethnicity probably factored into Cuming's disapproval, but the poverty and conservatism of the hunters, amidst abundant opportunity, were often criticized by those who envisioned the land's potential in more developed forms. Consider, for instance, Schultz's reaction to hedonistic creoles at New Madrid: "The men mostly follow boating, and the women, during their absence, make out to raise a little corn to keep themselves alive." When husbands return, "they eat, drink and dance as long as their money lasts." Furthermore, the people of New Madrid hardly seemed to know one another, grew shoddy cotton, and planted so little food that they sometimes tried to buy provisions from travelers! Of New Madrid settlers, Cuming said they had little to sell, but always demanded high markups. Their derelict church was bereft of clergy. Even the militia officers neglected European mores by wearing "dirty ragged hunting shirt[s] and trousers," with nothing but a cockade to distinguish them from commoners. Though New Madrid's people were said to own much cattle, this
species of property lent them no distinction, and they seemed indifferent to wealth. In fact, an influx of improvement-minded Americans around 1800 left the older settlers quite depressed, because they were being eclipsed in importance by new arrivals.52

The shortcomings attributed to the hunter culture by these writers are, of course, similar to critiques of many groups who have been viewed as the undeserving poor. One could point to complaints against Irish peasants, Russian serfs, Southern freedmen, or even My Fair Lady's Mr. Doolittle. All were believed by critics to be partly responsible for their poverty because of vices or character flaws which impaired their potential. Another consideration is that Christians in the American West believed prudence, industry, and stewardship were obligatory for those who followed Biblical teachings. They learned verses such as Proverbs 6: 6-8, "Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise," or, Ecclesiastes 10:18, "By much slothfulness the building decayeth; through idleness of the hands the house droppeth through." Among Bible students, Esau furnished a sterling example of improvidence among hunters. This son of Isaac and grandson of Abraham was supposed to receive a double portion as the first-born. "A cunning hunter, a man of the field," he lived for the thrill of the chase and charmed his father with feats of courage and gifts of venison. Jacob, the younger brother, lived a domestic life, helping Mother and
being useful at home. One day, returning from a hunt, Esau thought he might die of hunger, in which case the birthright would be valueless, so he swapped it to Jacob for a bowl of beans. "Thus Esau despised his birthright," forfeited property, and lost his place among the chosen of God. Jacob's heirs, on the other hand, inherited the Promised Land. Church-going farmers on the frontier knew the story well; creole and Indian hunters in Arkansas's swamps probably did not.53

As primary windfalls dissipated, hunters did not renew the Delta's resources, nor were they equipped for more complex phases of development as commercial farmers. Hence, improvement-minded people disrespected the hunter culture. To the degree that squatters resembled hunters, by neglecting improvements, they also inherited the hunter stigma and incurred the displeasure of developers. One could say that before land-developers arrived, Arkansas's Delta had reached a level of improvement similar to that of a hunters' camp. Real property, what there was of it, was unsecured against overflow. Yet, according to Cuming's journal, improved settlements were underway by the summer of 1808 at several places along the Mississippi. Little Prairie, the last settlement in Missouri's orbit, consisted of a store and twenty cabins strewn on a natural grassland at the riverside. Sites like this prairie attracted early settlers because no trees had to be felled and forage was abundant. The pattern of land use at Little Prairie was
that of French creoles from Illinois and Canada. They lived in villages with a common field and separate gardens. By American standards, the land apportioned to each family was quite small, with intensive, rather than extensive, agricultural development being practiced. Cuming saw that later-arriving Anglo-Americans at Little Prairie opened larger, separated farms within a ten-mile radius of the village. Besides farming, the settlement also participated in river commerce. Cuming noticed five lumber boats from Pittsburgh which were undergoing repairs after being snagged. However, beyond Little Prairie the river regularly overflowed and there were 132 miles of nothingness before one reached Hopefield. In spite of its fertility, Cuming called it a "dreary and solitary part of the river, the sameness of which began to be irksome."

Evidence of human improvements was most welcome, and Cuming rejoiced over a small clearing near Hopefield beautified with cows, oxen, and horses. He saw the Fooys' house, slave quarters, and store, and was delighted when Mrs. Fooy gave him some butter. It was, he claimed, the first act of disinterested kindness he experienced on the Mississippi. The Fooys had fine furnishings and also owned a trading barge, which frequently went to New Orleans. It took forty days to return. The Spanish fort at Hopefield built in 1797 had already caved into the river by 1808, but in spite of the bank's instability, five families were settled nearby. Then, emptiness for another 65 miles (in
what are now Crittenden and Lee Counties) until, after avoiding "snags, sawyers, and improper sucks" in the Mississippi, Cumming came to the mouth of St. Francis, where a "handsome two story cabin with a piazza" owned by Sylvanus Phillips "seemed to promise plenty and comfort." Unfortunately, the family had made cheese that morning and had no milk to sell. The thirsty travelers proceeded four miles further, where William Basset had a herd of cows, but no milk. Five miles beyond, Cuming's party finally secured "milk, sallad, and eggs" for their provisions.

The riparian squatter community from Bassett's to Anthony's was called Big Prairie, and the site held considerable attractions. Its natural savannah of sixty acres was covered in grass and could be cultivated without clearing trees. Less than half a mile from the river, a seasonal lake nine miles in circumference fed into the Mississippi through a bayou. The lake held water in spring and summer, but was dry the rest of the year and sprouted nutritious grass. As a reservoir, the lake provided fish; as a pasture, it nourished cattle; all without human effort. Natural features so hospitable were sure to draw attention. By 1808, according to Cumming, about a dozen families had located on twelve miles of riverfront adjoining the lake and Big Prairie. These were not creole hunters, but American squatters. Ten of the households hailed from Kentucky, one from Georgia, and another from Natchez. Cuming said that at Big Prairie they had good
soil, healthy homesites, and many neat cattle, but raised "neither grain nor cotton, except for their own consumption." Settlers told him that cotton grew as well there as in any part of the United States and that they would like to farm it on a large scale, but lacked the means. "None of them are sufficiently wealthy to procure and erect a cotton gin." In that case, neither had they the capital, individually, to own a plantation-sized slave force or, collectively, to maintain the continuous levees which were needed to secure fields from overflow.56

At Big Prairie then, in a nutshell, was Arkansas's typical, early, unleveed pattern of settlement on the Mississippi. Settlers picked a choice site that needed no major improvements and consigned many miles of intervening riverfront to economic oblivion. They had no concern for regional development, but simply wanted a residence that supplied basic needs with a minimum investment of work and money. Yet, how many naturally occurring Big Prairies were available? Not enough to endow Arkansas with the resources needed for large-scale population growth. Too, the natural resources of Big Prairie only aided pioneers while they dealt primarily in cattle. Seasonal overflows nourished a pasture, but if the settlers had really bought that cotton gin, they would learn that water on the fields in spring and summer was the last thing they needed, especially combined with Zone 7's pattern of early frosts. By the time water receded from the fields, the year would be too
far spent to plant cotton. Therefore, while Big Prairie might seem satisfactory, even idyllic, by the standards of herder-frontiersmen, regional development and a more elaborate farm economy could not be accommodated to so limited a space. Nor did these settlers know as yet whether their homes would withstand a major flood. They came from places where levees were unknown and had not been on the banks of the river long enough to know its habits.

Seventeen miles below Big Prairie, the banks seemed very low, but Cuming was probably meeting a rise in the river as it moved to the Gulf. From this point, he saw the Mississippi overflowing its banks for about forty miles downstream. Travelers could not go ashore to camp, because there was no shore, only a sunken forest. Mosquitoes devoured them, and men swatted themselves past the mouths of the White and Arkansas Rivers, where they learned that Arkansas Post stood about fifty miles to the west. Rumor said it was a poor place settled by hunters and traders, who expected nothing from life but whiskey and mere survival. Meanwhile, Cuming grew very weary of the river's emptiness, "the perpetual sameness of low banks, willow islands, and sand bars." Finally, on June 2, 1808, after 136 uninhabited miles since Big Prairie, Cuming encountered a settlement at the so-called Isle des Chicots.

This lonely place occupied a section of bank that was unusually elevated. Cuming said its soil was "very fine" and stood six feet above the surface of the water, in spite...
of a general inundation. A Monsieur Malbrock from Arkansas Post had settled there two months earlier, bringing with him a large family and several slaves. According to Cuming, Malbrock and his retinue were clearing land "with spirit, having already opened twelve or fourteen acres."

Until their own crops matured, they ate corn from Arkansas Post, pounded into meal with a pestle on a spring sweep. The task was tedious, but at least Malbrock's household was large enough to assign it to someone. Bread was scarce in the swamp, and many who lived there hardly ate anything but game. Malbrock, on the other hand, had access to an alluvial prairie, three miles inland, where he could graze domestic cattle. Cuming said that "the neighboring lands are all parcellled out and granted to settlers, who are to commence directly." The community probably expected to use the prairie as a commons for stock raising, as in creole villages on the Upper Mississippi. Malbrock seems to have been French in ethnicity, and it is likely that the other families were too if they came from Arkansas Post. Outside leveed areas, these semi-communal creole settlements often sprang up where high ground, river transport, and natural pasture conjoined. Yet, what Cuming saw at Malbrock's farm was the genesis of Chicot County, Arkansas, where landowners and cotton planters built the first levees in Arkansas thirty two years later. In the meantime, residents risked their labor on land that seemed to be
above overflow. Experience had not yet encouraged them to become levee builders.58

Below Malbrock's, the Arkansas Delta reverted to the desolate sameness that usually prevailed, and Cuming floated 82 miles before seeing another settlement. Then it was modest enough, just three clearings together on the riverside, barely three feet above water. Within ten miles of the Yazoo, scattered new settlements began. Dense settlement finally began at Natchez.59

Taking Cuming's entire record into account, it appears that there were approximately twenty families in residence on Arkansas's entire eastern border in 1808. Its banks on the Mississippi, endowed with stupendous fertility, sprouted little more than trees for more than 450 miles. Yet, in Louisiana, below the mouth of Red River, the leveed banks resembled continuous streets of farms, many quite opulent. The levee-building proprietors exported valuable crops and greatly enhanced the United States' balance of trade. By contrast, the unleveed Delta of Arkansas could barely muster a salad and a glass of milk.

A simple comparison shows how crucial it was for Arkansas to attract settlers who would develop Delta land with levees. The 1810 census, taken two years after Cuming's tour, reveals the population of the United States at more than 7,230,000. Its people inhabited 16 states, 2 districts, and 6 territories. The most populous, Virginia, had approximately 975,000 residents, and New York almost
Kentucky's population exceeded 400,000 persons and Tennessee contained about 260,000. Orleans Territory—the state of Louisiana, without the Florida Parishes—held just over 76,000; Mississippi Territory had more than 40,000 residents; and Missouri (the populous part of Louisiana Territory) contained about 20,000. On the other hand, Arkansas, the unleveed floodplain, housed a straggling 1,062 persons. They composed just 5 percent of the population of the territory they inhabited, and their share of the Union as a whole amounted to a hundredth of one percent (.01468). If this desolate region was ever to catch up with its companions in the Union, swamps would have to yield to levees, and hunters yield to developers, who would modify the land for agriculture.60

ENDNOTES


For population figures, see U. S. Census Office, Aggregate Amount of each Description of Persons within the United States of America and the Territories in the Year 1810 (Washington, D.C.; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1976); Bolton, 21. Parish and household slave statistics were assembled from manuscript census schedules of riparian parishes in Orleans Territory for the year 1810.


Choctaw Indians (New York: Harper & Row, 1972); Robert Paul
Markham, "The Arkansas Cherokees, 1817-1828," (Ph.D. diss.,
University of Oklahoma, 1972); Mary W. Clarke, Chief Bowles
and the Texas Cherokee (Norman: University of Oklahoma
Press, 1971). Literature on Arkansas as part of the wild
West includes such works as: James William Miller, ed. and
trans., In the Arkansas Backwoods, Tales and Sketches by
Friedrich Gerstacher (Columbia: University of Missouri
Press, 1991); Friedrich Gerstacher, Wild Sports in the Far
West (Boston: Crosby, Nichols, & Co., 1859; Durham, N. C.:
Duke University Press, 1968); George W. Featherstonhaugh,
Excursion through the Slave States (London: John Murray,
1844), vol. 2; Leonard Williams, ed., Cavorting on the
Devil's Fork, The Pete Whetstone Letters of C. F. M. Noland
(Memphis: Memphis State University Press, 1979); and Henry
Stanley (Boston: Houghton Miflin Co., 1909; New York:
Greenwood Press, 1969). Citations to antebellum South­
western and Arkansas humor sketches, such as Thomas Bangs
Thorpe's "The Big Bear of Arkansas" and "The Devil's Summer
Retreat in Arkansas," are found in Masterson, 396-425.

5Traugott Bromme, Hand- und Reisebuch fuer Auswanderer
(1849), 225-27, quoted in Marilyn Orts Brister, trans. and
ed., "The Image of Arkansas in the Early German Emigrant
Guidebook: Notes on Immigration," Arkansas Historical
Quarterly 34 (Winter 1977): 342-44; Junius Bragg, Letters
of a Confederate Surgeon, 1861-1865, ed. T. J. Gaughan

6Gregory H. Nobles, "Breaking into the Back Country:
New Approaches to the Early American Frontier, 1750-1800,"
William and Mary Quarterly 46 (October 1989): 643, 645,
654. Social histories of American frontier cultures
include: William Cronon, Changes in the Land: Indians,
and Wang, 1983); Andrew R. L. Cayton, "The Northwest
Ordinance from the Prespective of the Frontier," in Robert
M. Taylor, Jr., ed. The Northwest Ordinance, 1787: A
Bicentennial Handbook (Indianapolis, 1987); Andrew R. L.
Cayton, The Frontier Republic: Ideology and Politics in the
Ohio Country (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press,
1986); Thomas P. Slaughter, The Whiskey Rebellion: Frontier
Epilogue to the American Revolution (New York, 1986);
Richard R. Beeman, The Evolution of the Southern
Backcountry: A Case Study of Lunenburg County, Virginia,
1746-1832 (Philadelphia, 1984); Christopher Morris,
Becoming Southern: The Evolution of a Way of Life: Warren
County and Vicksburg, Mississippi, 1770-1860 (New York:
Oxford University Press, 1995); and Peter S. Onuf,
Statehood and Union: A History of the Northwest Ordinance
(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987). The phrase
"white Indians" is noted by Rachel N. Klein, "Frontier


17 Baird, 10-11, 27, 29-30; Usner, 154; Richelbourg Gaillard McWilliams, ed. and trans., Fleur de Lys and Calumet: Being the Penicaut Narrative of French Adventure in Louisiana (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1953), 34-35. Henri Joutel's observations from 1687 are cited in Baird, 10.


population having generally departed for higher ground. In 1863, the Union Army burned its remaining creole houses during actions against Fort Hindman.

Arnold, Colonial Arkansas, 61. Small farmer settlements of the colonial Illinois Country sent flour to New Orleans, but the Middle Mississippi tended to intercept it. For instance, in 1737, Illinois farmers harvested 40,000 livres of flour. Of this amount, 6,000 livres were dropped off at Arkansas Post and 27,000 livres at Natchez, which left only 7,000 livres for New Orleans. In 1750, when Illinois's wheat harvest was poor, Arkansas received food from New Orleans! In 1754, Canadian officials forbade the shipping of flour from the Upper Mississippi to Arkansas Post, Natchez, or Pointe Coupee, but New Orleans bureaucrats protested because they knew the posts would look to them for food, in spite of the hardship of hauling it upriver. Carl J. Ekberg, "The Flour Trade in French Colonial Louisiana," Louisiana History 37 (Summer 1996), 265, 269, 277-78. The stages-of-pioneering model, from hunters to farmers, is a notable contribution of Frederick Jackson Turner's "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" (1893) to analyses of western migration. Turner's model derived from personal knowledge of the Wisconsin frontier and from Peck's New Guide to the West (Cincinnati, 1848). For a bibliographical survey of the frontier thesis and its critics, see Ray Allen Billington, Westward Expansion: A History of the American Frontier, 4th ed. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1974), 666-71.


acre were not uncommon, but within three years after the Purchase, U. S. land policy had made it hard to find good land for under two dollars an acre. Stoddard, 266.

23In the Louisiana Purchase agreement, the United States agreed to respect property rights based on Spanish titles. Congress honored this agreement in 1805, when it confirmed: 1. bona fide grants made and settled before Oct. 1, 1800, the date of the Treaty of San Ildefonso; and, 2. de facto settlements existing before December 20, 1803, when the American flag was raised over Louisiana. The Board of Land Commissioners for Louisiana Territory reviewed Spanish claims for Missouri and Arkansas in 1812, and confirmed 1,340 claims, i. e., about one-third of them. Bates heard appeals and confirmed 1,756 more Spanish claims for the two regions in 1816. Arkansas's confirmations totaled 145. Missouri was more improved in the colonial era because of its lands above overflow. Bolton, 59.


25Pittman (1906), 83, 102; Herbert Eugene Bolton, Athanase de Mezieres and the Louisiana-Texas Frontier, 1768-1780, 2 vols. (Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1914; reprint, New York: Kraus Reprint Co., 1970), I, 166-69. As an example of the Illinois-Arkansas-Upper Mississippi connection, Charles Bougy, a native of Kaskaskia, is said to have gone to Arkansas Post with U. S. troops in 1804. Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Eastern Arkansas (Chicago: Goodspeed Publishing Co., 1890), 635. Charles's relative, Joseph Bougy, had been there since the 1790s, and botanist Thomas Nuttall called Joseph "a gentleman, though disguised . . . in the garb of a Canadian boatman." Thomas Nuttall, A Journal of Travels into the Arkansa Territory (Philadelphia: Thomas M. Palmer, 1821; reprint, Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1966), 72. Creole boatmen lived on the riverside, engaged in seasonal hunting, and represented an amalgam of French and Indian habits, just as hunters did. In the spring and summer of 1798, Lieutenant Butler commented on such boatmen on the Mississippi. He found it "pleasing to hear those fellows sing & row" as they propelled pirogues full of hides. "You may hear those fellows singing & rowing two miles off . . . naked as when born, except a britch clout." Butler also encountered four large canoes full of Cherokees whom the Spanish had encouraged to settle as farmers on prairies up the St. Francis. Diary entries 27 April, 30 April, 8 June 1798, Journal of Lt. Richard Butler, Butler (Richard) Papers, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Hill Library, Louisiana State University.

27 Numerous families settled on the banks of the Mississippi under the West Florida grant system, but they generally occupied land above overflow on loess bluffs of the Natchez District. British grantees in the vicinity of Manchac, south of Baton Rouge, did need levee protection, but they were few in number and primarily acted as merchants. Full-scale plantation development in West Florida's floodplain occurred under the Spanish, whose levee requirements stimulated improvement. Agricultural settlement of swamps north of the Yazoo would not be attempted until much later. Cecil Johnson, British West Florida: 1763-1783 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1943), 115-31; Robin F. A. Fabel, The Economy of British West Florida, 1763-1783 (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1988), 6-8; Dalrymple, 18-20, 32-33, 127, 170-71, 329, 341, 421-22; and William Bartram, Travels Through North & South Carolina, Georgia, East & West Florida, the Cherokee Country, the Extensive Territories of the Muscoogulis, or Creek Confederacy, and the Country of the Chactaws (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958), 270-71.

28 Steven Channing, Kentucky: A Bicentennial History (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., for, Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1977), 40-43. Virginia's Ancient Cultivation law of 1777 allotted free land to settlers who were in place before June 1, 1776, with an understanding that quick-acting later settlers would be allowed the same provisions. Virginia's subsequent land law of October 1779 laid down a price of 40 pounds per hundred acres, but accepted paper money, so the actual price often fell to about 10 shillings per hundred acres. Those who lived in the West before 1778 obtained the first 400 acres free. In 1777, the North Carolina Assembly approved the sale of land in Tennessee, in amounts up to 640 acres, for 50 shillings per hundred acres. Payment could be made in depreciated paper money, and the population of these regions grew very swiftly. Ray Allen Billington, Westward Expansion: A History of the American Frontier, 4th ed. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1974), 184-85. If religious rather than republican justification was desired, devout westerners could present Genesis 1:28 against the Proclamation Line of 1763. This ordered them to "Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it." In Numbers 14:30, when Israelites wavered on the verge of the Promised Land, the faithful spy, Caleb, admonished God's people: "Let us go up at once, and possess it, for we are well able to overcome it." Caleb entered the Promised Land, but those
who shrank back died wandering in the wilderness. How often must this text have been preached, as congregations stood on the brink of migration to the American West!


For a list of Arkansas Post commandants, several of whom bore elite Louisiana names, see Arnold, 177-78. Arnold calls Arkansas Post commandants "an itinerant gentry," who seldom received an assignment there longer than four years. Their standing vis-à-vis the Post community is described in "The Sorts and Conditions of Men and Women," Arnold, 53-72. The quote on hunters is from a pioneer settler of Chicot County, Arkansas, who reminisced about early inhabitants. Leona Sumner Brasher, "Chicot County, Arkansas: Pioneer and Present Times," Special Collections Division, University of Arkansas Library, Fayetteville, Ark.


Arnold, *Colonial Arkansas*, 39, 107, 131; Ray H. Mattison, "Arkansas Post: Its Human Aspects," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 16 (Summer 1957): 126. A detailed contemporary description of Arkansas Post buildings constructed above overflow in 1751 is found in the Fort Papers of the Missouri Historical Society in St. Louis, as "Survey of the works of the fort and the buildings or lodgings that have been newly constructed at fifteen leagues from the Mississippi River on the River of the Arkansas by Mr. de La Houssaye, according to the specifications of 17 October and the contract of the twenty-first day of the same month, 1751." For descriptions and reconstructions at the park of Fort St. Jean Baptiste, Natchitoches, see Arnold, 32-36. Captain Balthazar de
Villiers, Arkansas Post, to Governor Bernardo de Galvez, 11 June 1778, Archivo General de Indias, Seville, Papeles Procedentes de Cuba, legajo 191; Captain Alexandre de Clouet, Arkansas Post, to the Governor of Louisiana [Antonio de Ulloa], 6 Oct. 1768, Archivo General de Indias, Seville, Papeles Procedentes de Cuba, legajo 107.


34Captain de Clouet, Arkansas Post, to Governor of Louisiana [Antonio de Ulloa], 6 October 1768, Archivo General de Indias, Seville, Papeles Procedentes de Cuba, legajo 107; De Clouet, to General Alejandro O'Reilly, 21 March 1768, AGI, PC, leg. 107; De Clouet, to General O'Reilly, 26 July 1768, AGI, PC, leg. 107; De Clouet, to Governor de Ulloa, 15 August 1769, AGI, PC, leg. 107; Captain Fernando de Leyba, Arkansas Post, to Governor Luis de Unzaga, 24 June 1772, AGI, PC, leg. 107; Arnold, 59, 154-56; Mattison, 131. See also Ekberg, 280-81, which shows that the Illinois Country could no longer be relied on as a source of wheat for Arkansas Post. At the time of Illinois's transfer to Britain, via the Treaty of Paris (1763), its French inhabitants mostly crossed to Spanish Missouri, which took some time to become productive.

35Captain Balthazar de Villiers, Arkansas Post, to Governor Bernardo de Galvez, 25 January 1779, Archivo General de Indias, Papeles Procedentes de Cuba, legajo 190; De Villiers, to Galvez, 2 March, AGI, PC, leg. 190; De Villiers, to Galvez, 3 August 1779, AGI, PC, leg. 190; Arnold, 160-61.


37Juan Filhiol, "Description of the Ouachita in 1786," Louisiana Historical Quarterly 20 (1937): 483-84; Letter of Carlos de Grand Pre, 16 December 1796, Special Collections, Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley; Captain Harry Gordon, 1766, qtd. in The New Regime, 1765-

Captain Balthazar de Villiers, to Governor Bernardo de Galvez, 2 March 1779, Archivo General de Indias, Papeles Procedentes de Cuba, legajo 192; De Villiers, "Denombrement du Poste des Arkansas de l'Anee 1791," AGI, PC, leg. 190; "Padron del Puesto de Arkancas," AGI, PC, leg. 2365; Arnold, 39-50, 161, 181; Pope, 67.


Journal of Lt. Richard Butler, April-July 1798, Butler (Richard) Papers, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, LSU. Business and personal papers in
the Richard Butler Papers document his marriage to Margaret Farrar of Pointe Coupee, ward of Julien Poydras, prior to 1801. After the marriage, the Butlers moved to the Natchez District. By 1804-8, they owned "Woodstock" plantation (cotton) near Fort Adams, Mississippi, and "Ormond" plantation (sugar) in St. Charles Parish, Louisiana. For Butler history, see also Stanley C. Arthur, Old Families of Louisiana (reprint, Baton Rouge: Claitor's Publishing Division, 1971), 352-6.


44"The Indian trade, at present very inconsiderable, occupies the attention of the inhabitants, who are altogether of French extraction, and in a great measure unacquainted with agricultural pursuits." Stoddard, 205-6, 265, 295-96.

45Stoddard, 202, 208, 211-15; Fortescue Cuming, Sketches of a Tour to the Western Country (Pittsburgh: Cramer, Spear, & Eichbaum, 1810), 135. This slow pace occurred in spite of Spain's desire to attract settlers through generous land offers. See Gilbert Din, "Spain's Immigration Policy in Louisiana and the American Penetration, 1792-1803," Southwestern Historical Quarterly 75 (1973). Ever eager to praise his countrymen's enterprise, Stoddard attributed Spain's desire for American settlers to its recognition of their superiority to the creole French in matters of business. Stoddard, 295. For population statistics, see entry for "Louisiana" in Jedidiah Morse,
The American Gazetteer, 3rd rev. ed. (Boston: Thomas & Andrews, 1810). Morse said the Territory of Louisiana's population was divided as follows: Settlements on the Arkansas, 874; Settlements of Hopefield and St. Francis, 188; Dist. of New Madrid, 2,193; Dist. of Cape Girardeau, 3,888; Dist. of Ste. Genevieve, 4,620; Dist. of St. Louis, 5,667; and Dist. of St. Charles, 3,505—totaling 20,845 persons, of whom 3,011 were slaves. For further contrasts between development in Missouri and Arkansas, see M. Lopez-Briones, "Spain in the Mississippi Valley: Spanish Arkansas, 1762-1804" (Ph. D. diss., Purdue University, 1983); and Louis Houck, A History of Missouri from the Earliest Explorations and Settlements until the Admission of the State into the Union, 3 vols. (Chicago: R. R. Donnelley & Sons, 1908).


47 Schultz, II, 102-5.

48 At Hopefield, Schultz saw water marks which indicated rises of the Mississippi with a forty foot differential between high and low water levels. Schultz, II, 111-12, 117-20, 122-25.

49 Cuming, Sketches of a Tour to the Western Country (Pittsburgh: Cramer, Spear, & Eichbaum, 1810), 254-55. Schultz also saw squatters, five miles below the mouth of the St. Francis. They were Americans who had come to Arkansas since the Louisiana Purchase, confident that the government of the United States would aid them in securing land. Schultz looked on their quest with favor, because "these poor objects" had made "hard and well-earned improvements" in a "dangerous and exposed situation," which "surely has entitled them to receive; either a free gift or a pre-emption right" to land they had cleared and settled. Schultz believed the generous Republic would not withhold from a squatter the fruits of his labor in clearing new farms. Hunters, on the other hand, were wanderers without legitimate claims. Schultz, 117. Stoddard concurred in Schultz's sympathy for development-minded squatters. He said the United States should strongly consider free grants to actual settlers in the Louisiana and Mississippi Territories. Here, exposed national borders were open to invasion, and a sturdy, loyal population would enhance national security. "We cannot populate Louisiana too soon," Stoddard said, and "this population should consist of men habituated to agriculture, and educated in the principles of our laws and constitution." Stoddard, 267.

50 Cuming, 258-60, 267-68.

The Bible-based culture of the American West also valued enterprising, busy women who gave themselves to material and social improvements. Proverbs 31: 10-31 often brought frontier families to tears at funerals by praising a mother's selfless industry: "Who can find a virtuous woman? Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates. She considereth a field, and buyeth it: with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard. She . . . eateth not the bread of idleness." The entire text lauds physical improvements as a means for honorable gain.

Cuming's remark on the dreariness of the Delta referred to his impressions of what are now the riverfront of New Madrid and Pemiscot Counties, Missouri, and Mississippi and Crittenden Counties, Arkansas. Cuming, 266. For creole villages on the Upper Mississippi, see Carl Ekberg, *Colonial Ste. Genevieve: An Adventure on the Mississippi Frontier* (Gerald, Mo., 1985); N. Belting, *Kaskaskia under the French Regime* (1900); Clarence W. Alvord, *The Centennial History of Illinois*, vol. I: *The Illinois Country, 1673-1818*, (Springfield, 1922); Pittman, 83. Pittman indicated that Post of Arkansas was the only village between Natchez and Kaskaskia. St. Genevieve washed away in 1785, but inhabitants moved to a bluff nearby. For further data on creole habits of the Upper Mississippi, see William E. Foley, *The Genesis of Missouri: From Wilderness Outpost to Statehood* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1989); and Schultz, II, 36-88. Schultz noted that creole hunters and traders of Illinois and Missouri farmed after the peltry gave out. Stoddard made the same comment about New Madrid, saying its people began to farm around 1794 when the game animals were almost gone.
Arkansas Post settlers continued to hunt because they still had access to animals in the swamps. Stoddard, 212.

55 Cuming, 266-67. Edouard De Montule also recorded an encounter with Mr. Fooy, expressing surprise at his "vast and handsome residence," furnished with "mahogany . . . of the best taste." Fooy's store sold powder, ammunition, and weapons to Native American hunters. Fooy said he grew corn and cotton for his own use and considered himself "more or less camping on his farm," for Indians frequently told him the region still belonged to them. Fooy had to remain on good terms with the Native Americans for financial reasons, and, indeed, Natives had peacefully tolerated his presence there for twenty years, because he did not insist on land claims. De Montule, 105-7.

56 Cuming, 270-72.

57 The area where Cuming got tired on the sameness of the banks is now Phillips County (the southeastern part) and Desha County, Arkansas. Ibid., 272-73.

58 Ibid., 273-74. Chicot County's levees, built in 1841, will be the subject of a later chapter. Levee legislation in Arkansas debuted as "An act to authorize and enforce the construction of levees along the bank of the Mississippi river in the county of Chicot, and for other purposes," Acts Passed at the Third Session of the General Assembly of the State of Arkansas (Little Rock: George H. Burnett, 1840), 25-28.

59 This leg of Cuming's journey took him out of Arkansas into what are now the Louisiana parishes of East Carroll and Madison. Ibid., 276-77.

CHAPTER SEVEN

PRECONDITIONS FOR LEVEE EXPANSION: THE MIGRATION OF PLANTERS TO CHICOT COUNTY, ARKANSAS, AND THE FLOOD OF 1840

As late as 1841, Arkansas had no record of levee construction or legal tradition of compulsory public works. Its settlers refrained from levee building in the colonial and territorial periods, nor did Arkansas issue a general levee law after the achievement of statehood in 1836. Although the eastern third of the state consisted of overflowed lands, a working consensus for levee building did not exist. Yet, after the flood of 1840, levee building did occur in the county of Chicot (pronounced Sheeko) in the state's southeast corner. This chapter shows why the decision to build levees took place and portrays the society which would build them.

Physical geography greatly affected the course of Chicot's development; therefore, one must describe the natural setting. From the beginning, life here revolved around rivers. As formed in 1823, Chicot County stretched northward along the Mississippi from Louisiana's state line to the Arkansas River, occupying the Mississippi's floodplain as far west as the Saline and Ouachita Rivers. This area included all of modern-day Chicot County and parts of what are now the counties of Drew, Desha, and Ashley.
FIGURE 7.1

STATE TAXES COLLECTED IN 1840 FROM ARKANSAS COUNTIES, ON THE BASIS OF PROPERTY ASSESSED IN 1839; AS EXPENSIVE, EFFICIENT PLOW ANIMALS, MULES ARE MORE NUMEROUS IN AREAS WITH WIDE FIELDS, VALUABLE CROPS, AND COMMERCIAL TRANSPORT

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Desha's formation in 1838 subtracted Chicot's northeast corner, but a very extensive frontage on the Mississippi remained. On steamboat itineraries, this part of Arkansas was called "The Bends," and visitors watched loops of land and water succeed one another with tiresome regularity. From north to south in Chicot County, bends known as Rowdy, Georgetown, Miller's, Spanish Moss, Bachelors', Shirt Tail, Kentucky, Matthews', and Louisiana swung from side to side, elongating the distance. By 1840, Chicot measured 39 linear miles north to south, but its Mississippi River frontage amounted to 75 miles, eventually requiring 110 miles of levees. The usual Delta topography prevailed, so early settlers congregated on "Big Muddy's" banks.

Stoddard's notes in *Sketches, Historical and Descriptive, of Louisiana* (1812) help to represent the county's appearance before the advent of levee builders. He said it was almost perfectly level, but much higher at the riverside than further inland. Huge trees, especially cypress and cottonwood, covered the land, and ridges featured extensive canebrakes fifteen to twenty feet high. Half a mile west of the river, land sloped into swamps which flooded twelve to twenty-five feet deep each spring. Yet, in late summer floods dissipated, and the swamps served as ranges for game and livestock. "All of these lands are . . . extremely fertile," he said, and held a potential for great economic rewards if overflows could be controlled.¹
Eventually cotton planters arrived in Chicot County, and the banks of the Mississippi rose in monetary value. At the same time, persons of little ambition or lesser means left the river and went to the western part of the county on Bayous Mason and Bartholemew, whose banks formed narrow, isolated ridges that stood slightly above overflow. The bayou settlers also enjoyed fertile soil, but participated little in the production of cotton because they lacked transport facilities. The bayous flowed southward through clogged channels in which freight movement was almost impossible. Therefore, settlers in western Chicot traveled by pirogue into northeastern Louisiana parishes, such as Ouachita and Morehouse, where they networked with other plain folk communities. Meanwhile, flooding from the Arkansas and Beouf Rivers frequently submerged the center of Chicot County and discouraged east to west overland travel. The flooding did preserve a tract of fine woodlands called "The Great Wilderness," but also prevented Chicot's poorest farmers from accessing the commercial possibilities of the Mississippi.²

Topography strongly affected the level of interest that various sections of Chicot County would exhibit in levee building. Riverfront planters naturally felt the most pressing concern for levees because the Mississippi's presence reminded them of danger. However, their holdings on the riverbank were Chicot's highest ground and could be protected to a reasonable extent by small, household
levees. On the other hand, farmers on the western bayous had fewer incentives to aid or take part in levee building. Floods came upon them gradually as water filtered through the swamps. Bayou properties stood at substantially lower elevations and required higher, more expensive levees to achieve a comparable level of flood control. Most importantly, planters had slave labor for levee building, whereas farmers must perform their own work with little help. The economic incentives differed, as well. Planters depended on monocultural cash crops grown in fields, but bayou farmers grazed livestock in the swamps and practiced a largely subsistence agriculture on unleveed ridges. Rather than levees, the farmers' public works interests focused on improvements such as roads, bridges, ferries, and the clearing of waterways to reduce their isolation.

A third area of settlement in Chicot County— that of the lakesides— acted as an intermediate zone between its planter-farmer extremes. Oxbow lakes known as Old River Lake (now Lake Chicot) and Grand Lake lay a short distance from the Mississippi and featured high banks like those of the river. Bayous connected the lakes to the main channel, so lake plantations flooded when the Mississippi filled. Due to their lack of river frontage, lakeside planters had no direct role in household levee construction, but they did receive indirect benefits from the general exclusion of overflows. In public works, lake planters supported road projects, ferries, and the closure of active bayous.
A fourth region within Chicot County, the banks of the lower Arkansas, comprised its northern boundary until 1838. Backwater made this section a chronic morass, and numerous travelers testified to the unpleasantness of its natural setting. Botanist Thomas Nuttal called the environs "a dead solemnity, one vast trackless wilderness of trees," while Timothy Flint, a missionary, noted carpets of slime, draperies of moss, and myriad cypress knees festooned with water mocassins. In winter, Flint said, "no prospect on earth can be more gloomy;" in springtime the landscape became "a region of deep and universal inundation;" a floating forest, inhabited only by "fever, mosquitos, alligators, serpents, bears, and now and then parties of hunting Indians." In 1829, attorney Franklin Wharton noted "mosquitos . . . surpassing in numbers any I had ever witnessed." In regard to sleep, he said: "It was torture. It was agony. I was unable to close my eyes." No wonder planters and farmers refused to move there; the task of land reclamation seemed too great, and the lack of population meant no improvements would be made. As late as 1835, an English visitor named George Featherstonhaugh wrote that people who got lost here would have to climb trees to escape the troops of wolves. Vegetation included thickets of smilax, supple jack (aenoplia volubilis), and saw brier (schrankia horridula) which tore clothing to shreds. "Nothing can exceed the fertility of these bottoms," the visitor said, but reclamation would occur no
time soon. "The embankments necessary to keep out the inundations would . . . be of the most formidable and expensive character." Even worse, overflows from this section of Chicot plagued the rest of the county.\(^5\)

Practically all of Chicot County's landscape made a poor impression on visitors in the early nineteenth century. However, in spite of overflows and Chicot's remoteness from other established communities, a few pioneers found ways to endure the environment at one favored spot. High ground at Point Chicot attracted the first settlers. As noted in the previous chapter, Fortescue Cuming reported the founding of a settlement here in April of 1808 by a Monsieur Malbrock from Arkansas Post. At the time of Cuming's visit, Malbrock's clearing rose six feet above overflow, and Cuming remarked that "the soil is very fine." The first settlers meant to grow corn and perhaps cotton on the riverside and to graze livestock on a natural pasture that lay three miles inland.\(^6\)

As a high and inhabited tongue of land in a desolate part of the Mississippi, Point Chicot soon became a landmark for river traffic. Because unimproved acreage behind the point often flooded, the land resembled an island. Hence, it was often called the Isle of Chicot, or "Illecheko." Since "chicot" means stump in French, the name suggests the presence of cypress stumps left by itinerant lumbermen. Zadok Cramer complained of timber poaching in Chicot's vicinity in The Navigator (1814) and
spoke of vast amounts of wood sent to Natchez and New Orleans. In Cramer's opinion, those who cut it were vandalizing the public domain. However, the clearing of timber did attract settlers. Likewise, sales of wood gave people a way to make money before they could farm. Since woodcutting required neither levees nor community organization, it was an ideal economic activity for an infant community.7

Four families lived at Point Chicot in 1814—one Indian household, one French, and two American—each with a small cabin and three or four acres of corn. Boatsmen prized the settlement as a source of fresh food, which they paid for in cash or through barter. Cramer thought high water in 1813 might drive its people away, but Chicot's pioneers proved to be more resilient. The flood receded, and they continued to sell livestock, wood, and poultry to river customers. For example, a keelboat captain from Boston recorded a stop at "Illechecko" for ham, butter, eggs, and milk in April of 1816. J. G. Flugel, a German trader, found four households in 1817 on land "as rich as I have yet seen in this country." Chicot's pioneers lacked the ability to operate on a plantation scale, but they were never "pre-capitalists." Squatters geared their activities to the market from the beginning, and the proliferation of steamboats after the War of 1812 further enhanced their prospects as provisioners and woodcutters.8
Population growth took place at Point Chicot after 1815 in the context of heightened security for white Americans on the Middle Mississippi. Jackson's victory at New Orleans guaranteed American possession, and his negotiations in 1818 for the purchase of Chickasaw settlement rights in West Tennessee removed another potential source of danger. The Osage withdrew to the Great Plains in 1808, and the disarray of Native Americans after Tecumseh's death allowed whites and blacks to infiltrate Trans-Mississippi lands with impunity. Even the Quapaws left Arkansas, giving up a large tract on the Arkansas River in 1818 and another in 1824. High cotton prices lured farmers to the Gulf Plains, which led to statehood for Mississippi (1817) and population growth in north Louisiana. Increased demands for cotton baling supplies fueled economic growth in Kentucky, where hemp plantations expanded. Meanwhile, poor Kentucky farmers often moved across the Ohio. Statehood for Indiana (1816), Illinois (1818), and Missouri (1821) logically followed, and Missouri's application for statehood in 1820 caused Arkansas to be made a separate territory, with its own governor, legislature, and delegate to Congress. Thus, by 1820, Arkansas Territory was surrounded by stable and reasonably populous neighbors, enjoying considerable military security, and endowed with a degree of sovereignty for pursuing its own interests.
Public works would be crucial for Arkansas's progress, but they rarely materialized without population growth and effective local government. Until 1818, Arkansas made up one county in Missouri's jurisdiction, and its regional development received little attention from the government. The reason for such neglect is not hard to fathom. An 1814 census of Missouri Territory revealed a total population of 11,993, of which Arkansas County claimed but 827 souls. Arkansas had one representative in the territorial legislature, while seven counties in Missouri voted with twenty one. The imbalance improved slightly in 1818 when Arkansas split into four parts. Its Delta became a new, smaller County of Arkansas, and the 1818 tax list recorded the persistence of numerous families from its "ancient" hunter and merchant class. Around Arkansas Post, names like Jardelais, Bogy, Imbeau, Vasseur, and De Rousseau predominated, whereas Point Chicot Township, more recently settled, featured mostly Anglo or Teutonic inhabitants, such as Parker, DeHart, and Merriweather, who arrived after the Battle of New Orleans.10

Arkansas's separation from Missouri led to a further subdivision of counties. For example, the northern part of Arkansas's Delta became Phillips County in 1820, while its southern portion retained the name Arkansas County. The creation of new counties did expand the Delta's visibility in public affairs, but persons represented remained too few in number to achieve significant improvements. For
instance, Arkansas County in 1820 held a population of just 1,236 among its three sparsely settled townships. Arkansas Township, now the counties of Arkansas, Lincoln, and east Jefferson, contained Arkansas Post. A breakdown shows 560 whites and 160 slaves in Arkansas Township. By occupation, there were 17 persons engaged in commerce, 16 in manufacturing, and 107 in agriculture. The swamp-ridden Township of Mississippi, now Desha County, contained just 80 whites and 2 slaves, with 30 farmers and 2 craftsmen. Point Chicot Township housed 436 whites and 16 slaves in 1820: 134 farmers, one merchant, and one craftsman.

Clearly there had been considerable population growth since 1815. The question was: without levees, how long could a larger community endure? As more settlers arrived on the riverside, some would have to farm away from the natural high ground at "Illecheco." Newer farms would lie in an active floodplain, and when floods battered the region, like those of 1823, 1828, and 1833, it became obvious that levees were needed. Yet, this handful of first settlers lacked the means to build levees. Until planters arrived to install them, what person of substance could risk his capital in such a place?11

As the resources of Arkansas's swamps became more widely appreciated, the first group to be pushed away was the Native Americans. Several ambitious men who came to Arkansas in the 1820s wanted Quapaw Delta lands, and Acting Governor Robert Crittenden recommended a buyout to "rid the
Government" of the tribe. In his opinion, they were "a poor, indolent, miserable remnant," leading an "intoxicated . . . useless and effeminate life." Crittenden's enemies said the same of him, but for the time being his Quapaw attack was popular. Essentially, Crittenden condemned the culture of the hunters and their engrossment of seemingly unimproved hunting grounds that could be put to more profitable uses. No corporate executive ever justified a plant closure or layoff with greater logic. Far from injuring the Quapaw, Crittenden claimed that government-subsidized migrations to the West would give them a better chance to shed wilderness habits and achieve a "manly and independent livelihood." The boosterite Arkansas Gazette, founded in 1819, seconded Crittenden's plan because the Quapaw held land that "our citizens, and numerous strangers, many of whom are respectable and wealthy planters," looked on with "a wishful eye."12

Attorney Franklin Wharton, fresh from the District of Columbia, encountered a few Quapaw in 1825. He heard stories about other Indians and justified their expulsion on the basis of utility. Whether or not the young lawyer's analysis was aided by a study of Jeremy Bentham, the famous utilitarian economist, the ideas of that British thinker--author of such works as the Theory of Punishments and Rewards and The Art of Packing [Juries]--could not have found a more fertile reception. In his journal, Wharton reasoned clearly that Native Americans must go because they
could not, or would not, develop the swampland. Traveling along the northern edge of Chicot County, Wharton wrote:

I confess, I do not indeed feel the strength of the arguments (charges) which have been made concerning our treatment towards these untutored beings. I see every thing that is humane in our policy towards them, and every thing done for them which a liberal spirit would dictate. After viewing these wretched and squalid beings, who have possessed the finest lands in the territory, the question forcibly arises, Did the Creator intend the production of his hands to be of show or of utility? I have always understood that nothing which was made was made in vain. And yet all the advantages of a superior soil, fine climate, navigable waters & c &c have remained in the possession of a people who knew not how to enjoy them. Surely it was not so intended. The advancement of civilization, and the steady and progressive extermination of the Aborigines, are two chains closely linked. All efforts to civilize them have been in vain. Millions of money have been spent—enthusiastic feelings have resorted to every means—the prayers of the righteous for their conversion have ascended up to the throne of mercy for ages that have gone, and yet we neither perceive the effect anticipated or the least good to arise. The necessary consequence is, that they must remain in the original ignorance and their accustomed practices. These matters are entirely at war with those of the more civilized part of the world. One cannot exist with the other. One must be exterminated. The question is, which shall it be! And to a reasonable man there is no difficulty in the answer.

Wharton considered himself a man of principle, and he left the East with a resolve to improve his character. Books he read on the journey included Henry Fielding's Amelia, Samuel Johnson's Lives of the English Poets, Thomas Campbell's The Pleasures of Hope, and Stephenson's Pleadings, a legal treatise. Yet, none induced Wharton to be charitable toward a culture that followed other ideals and obstructed his view of progress. Even Arkansas Post
failed to suit him. After eating with Frederick Notrebe, the leading citizen, Wharton admitted that his wine and claret were good, but complained about the creole food. Exiting the floodplain, Wharton arrived at Little Rock, the new "American" capitol of Arkansas, where within two days he met the editor of the Arkansas Gazette, accepted an invitation to stay with attorney Chester Ashley, went to a Fourth of July celebration, heard an oration from Colonel Oden, met Governor Izard, and attended a ball, which he pronounced to be "tolerably pleasant." The next day, Wharton went to court: "What a burlesque! Such decisions! Such low principles!" Arkansas culture fell far short of what this Eastern gentleman demanded from life, but Wharton was sampling the best it had to offer. The likely prospect of genocide, slavery, or dispossession for others in the territory phased him not at all. Focused on self-advancement, Wharton chased connections and legal fees. Meanwhile, immigrants to the Arkansas Delta without professional credentials or high social position anticipated the future on a rather different scale.  

If Arkansas's Native American and creole occupants were expendable to people like Wharton and Crittenden, the pioneers who occupied Chicot County in its "natural," unleveed state received equally little praise from American elites. For example, a writer in DeBow's Review (1857) said Arkansas had been "particularly unfortunate in its early settlers," whom he called "Ishmaels of old, without
means or love for the civilized life." A song and fiddle
tune, "The Arkansas Traveler" popularized the stereotype of
Arkansas as a home for improvident squatters. Its setting
was not the Ozarks, but the back bayous of Chicot County.
Sandford C. Faulkner, a riverfront planter, based the story
on an encounter with a squatter during the 1840 election,
when he canvassed with Ambrose Sevier, Chester Ashley,
Governor Fulton, and Governor Yell. Even though "Arkansas
Traveler" was presented as comedy, the gentleman who told
the story, and those to whom he directed the entertainment,
all deplored the squatter's indifference to material
improvement. Here are typical excerpts from the tale:

Traveler: Halloo, stranger.

Squatter: Hello, yourself.

T: Have you any spirits here?

S: Lots uv'em; Sal seen one last night by that
ar ole hollar gum, and it nearly skeered her to
death.

T: Will you tell me where this road goes to?

S: It's never gone any whar since I've lived
here; it's always thar when I git up.

T: Why don't you finish covering your house
and stop the leaks?

S: It's been raining all day.

T: Well, why don't you do it in dry weather?

S: It don't leak then.

T: My friend, can't you tell me about the
road I'm to travel tomorrow?

S: To-morrow! Stranger, you won't git out'n
these diggins for six weeks. But when it gits
so you kin start, you see that big sloo over thar? You'll cum to the damdest swamp you ever struck in all your travels; it's boggy enouf to mire a saddle-blanket. Thar's a fust rate road about six feet under thar.

T: How am I to get at it?

S: You can't git at it nary time, till the weather stiffens down. ¹⁵

The author of a historical sketch published in 1890 freely admitted he would say little about Chicot's first settlers. They "were many of them squatters," he said, who did little to advance public works, or to "identify themselves with local history or tradition." In other words, pioneers had been like hunters, a transient populace leaving few traces of occupancy. Their names meant little to the county elites of 1890. Likewise, their passing was not regretted, and the author who dismissed Chicot's squatters in six lines, lavished thirty times the space on founders of such leveed estates as "Luna," "Pastoria," "Rossmere," and "Belle Island." In this county "wonderfully fertile," where "more cotton [is] raised to the acre . . . than in any other in the United States, except East Carroll Parish," he identified planters as the group who united themselves to "the county's interests, and contributed to make its history and material prosperity." Planters who built the levees were also viewed as having built the land.¹⁶

Such an elitist tone is objectionable today; however, the basic observations were sound. Tax lists and census records do confirm the transience of Chicot's early
population. For instance, the 1823 sheriff's census of Point Chicot Township (the year it became Chicot County) showed 75 taxable inhabitants. Just 22 of them had lived in the county in 1818, and only 6 of the 75 remained by 1829. Fifty five of the taxables of 1823 did not live in the county by 1829, whereas 104 taxable people who lived there in 1829 had not been residents in 1823 (as taxables). Only twenty taxpayers appeared on both lists (1823 and 1829), and of the nine 1818 settlers still in Chicot in 1830, merely two persisted until 1834. These were Samuel Parker, a man with one slave in 1830 and three taxable slaves in 1834, and Britton Ward, who had no slaves in 1830 and two in 1834. Most early settlers seem to have departed between 1823 and 1829, probably because of floods. The nine who persisted intermittently from 1818 to 1830 included non-slaveholders Joseph Black, Thomas Davis, James DeHart, John Mills, Isaac Moore, and John Weir, who left by 1834. The turn-over rate among the swamp pioneers was very high, and they did not build levees.17

The inability to track most of those who left Chicot in the 1820s by means of the 1830 census, and the fact that families with identical surnames but different household heads do appear in said census, leads one to conclude that many early settlers died in the swamps. If obscurity shrouds the squatters' fates, that too is instructive. For to appreciate the success which planters achieved through levee building, one must also admit how easily one could
fail in the swamps if he lacked the means to make improvements. These squatters were not communal anti-capitalists in the path of a "market revolution," as described by historians like Charles Sellers, nor were they vicious wastrels. Most were just poor men seeking profits, but unequipped for a hard environment. Travel writer Karl Postl warned in 1827 that the riches amassed by levee builders on the lower Mississippi had tempted poor men to try swamp planting. Postl strongly discouraged this. "Hundreds of respectable farmers," he said, "have paid with their lives." Moved by a desire for money from swamp planting but unable to purchase slaves, they did their own work and "shortly fell victim to their mistaken notions."

The story of the DeHarts, an early Chicot and Delta family, provides a graphic example.¹⁸

At first glance, it seems strange that John DeHart, his friend Christopher Owen, and their families would be in the swamps. A New Jersey native, DeHart was a deacon's son in the Dutch Reformed Church and descended from immigrants who settled New Amsterdam in 1664. Far from irreligious, John DeHart composed a will in north Louisiana in 1811, witnessed by Methodist ministers and churchmen, which spoke of laying his body in the grave, "there to remain till the Judgement of the Great day, being assured that I shall then receive it again." The family lived as respectable Christians, and his immediate heirs were "dear children," a daughter and four "well-beloved sons." Daughter Jane
DeHart married Christopher Owen’s son Joseph, both families having come to what is now Morehouse Parish in 1797, when Governor Carondelet recruited grantees through Baron de Bastrop. A description of Christopher Owen survives from the diary of keelboat merchant J. G. Flugel, who met him beside the Mississippi in 1817 near Lake Providence. Flugel called him "a very fine old man of seventy years," a well-informed Englishman who spoke German well, having learned it while living in Pennsylvania. Flugel saw that Native American hunters had stockpiled many furs near Owen's house on the riverside. His grant lay west of the swamps on Bayou Gallion, near Prairie Mer Rouge, but he apparently made seasonal trips to the Mississippi for commercial purposes. To transact business one had to go to the river because the bayous did not lead to markets.¹⁹

Joseph Owen died young in 1814, leaving Jane with three small boys. His inventory shows a household engaged in land clearing: a yoke of oxen, two log chains, a felling axe, a "tomahawk" (hatchet), and crosscut saw. The presence of two plows, five horses, a scythe, and an iron-bound cart shows that agriculture was practiced, and there was a sizeable amount of cattle and hogs. The Joseph Owens' were fortunate in that he had obtained a title to 800 arpents of land (half of it from a deceased brother). At $1,500 this was the most valuable item in Joseph's estate, and the possession of land probably helped Jane to get a second husband in 1815. The second spouse's probate
inventory (1830) reveals steady progress on the farm, with listings of corn, cotton, and blacksmith's tools. By the 1850s, some of Jane's children had risen into the small planter class. Land near, but not in, the swamps served them well.  

The brothers of Jane DeHart lived more adventurously, moving directly into the rich swamplands around Point Chicot. None ultimately benefitted from the transfer, however, and they lost health and wealth in the process. Abraham and John DeHart, Jr., originally obtained 800 arpents near the Owens' on Bayou Gallion through a De Bastrop claim. They also acquired land on Prairie Mer Rouge, at the terminus of a swamp which stretched for fifty miles west of Lake Providence. Travel conditions were so terrible through this swamp that emigrant trains sometimes failed to move out of sight of an evening camp after a full day's travel. On reaching the prairie, migrants gave "shouts for joy and thanks to God." They also bought "corn meal, sweet potatoes, eggs, and butter" from Mer Rougians. Difficulties of overland transport prevented the prairie dwellers from shipping cotton until light draft steamers could navigate some improved bayous, but the pioneers engaged in such capitalist endeavors as were open to them. However, the younger DeHart men seem to have chafed at their inability to enter more lucrative markets. Soon, they abandoned the interior for homes on the riverfront. Some DeHart tracts in the interior went to friends and
neighbors among the Knox and Brown families. They improved the land, farmed it with slaves, and eventually became wealthy planters. Meanwhile, Abraham, and John DeHart, Jr., moved to the banks of the Mississippi, where they appeared in Point Chicot's tax records from 1818 to 1823. James DeHart, the youngest brother, married in 1816 at age nineteen, sold land in Louisiana, and joined them in Arkansas. The other son, Wynant DeHart, left for Point Chicot in 1820, though he retained his own De Bastrop grant and had acquired their father's. For Wynant, the move was a fatal choice. Jane reported Wynant's death at age 35, "sometime in November" of 1822, "at his residence on the Mississippi in the Territory of Arkansas." Several fatherless children remained, as well as his 333 arpents on Bayou Bartholemew, and almost 800 arpents of healthy but isolated land in Prairie Mer Rouge.21

From Chicot County, Abraham and John DeHart, Jr., moved over the river into Washington County, Mississippi. That county formed in 1827, and its first county court met at John DeHart's house. Washington's 1830 census showed John with a wife, son, four daughters, and no slaves. Few people owned slaves in his part of the county in 1830, but within a decade it, like Chicot, was filling with planters. John, Jr., borrowed money to buy land, but died in 1837 before he could pay for it. John, Jr.'s widow, who relinquished the claim, was living very plainly on Bayou Mason in western Chicot by 1850. Her brother-in-law,
Abraham DeHart, accumulated eight slaves by 1830 and might have been able to attain planter status, but he also died. James DeHart stayed in Chicot for a time. The tax list of 1832 shows him owning a house worth twelve dollars, a horse, and fourteen cattle, on which he paid a county tax of $1.74 and a territorial tax of six cents. This family's economic experiences illustrate how unequipped they were to develop the swamps. Their neighborhood on Bayou Mason featured Chicot's first churches and schools, but "money" flowed to the riverside while DeHarts retired to the bayou. They became plain-folks, not levee-building planters.  

A German nobleman, Paul, Duke of Wurttemburg, recorded brief eye-witness impressions of Chicot County in the year of its founding (1823) while touring the West by steamboat. According to Paul, a flood had submerged most of the unleveed riverside above Natchez, and the squatters seemed to have fled, for the banks looked almost uninhabited. Instead of humans, Paul saw wildlife: ducks, herons, and eagles; deer, bear, raccoons, and alligators. To him, "Illichico" appeared as a poor-looking spot in an "extremely wild region," about ten hours north of Walnut Hills. At Chicot's northern boundary, Paul saw the Mississippi and Arkansas Rivers "at floodstage, the banks being completely inundated." Apart from minor settlements at Helena and Hopefield, the remainder of Arkansas's Delta appeared to be empty "except for wild animals, and so
savage, unhealthful, and swampy that its possession will not be contested with them soon."\textsuperscript{23}

A second duke, Bernhard of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach, observed the Delta in 1826 from the decks of the steamer Phoenix. Passing the southern edge of Chicot County, where "the country was again very monotonous," he noted flooded forests, clearings planted in cotton and corn, and "miserable log cabins . . . built on a sort of grate, on account of the overflowing water." Nearing the mouth of the Arkansas, he groaned: "Nothing new! Woody shores, high trees," vines, cane, and Spanish moss, flooded banks, and "solitary, mean, and miserable dwellings . . . the most miserable that could be conceived." It was 590 miles to New Orleans and 560 to St. Louis--oh, the tedium. To a rich man, Chicot County seemed poor indeed.\textsuperscript{24}

Although Chicot acquired a county government in 1823, the poverty of its people and their primitive living conditions retarded the carrying out of significant public works. Public deliberations, as recorded in Book "A" of Chicot's county court minutes, commenced in 1830. Early sessions portray a county in need of the most basic improvements, such as roads to connect neighborhoods to Villelmont, the county seat on Point Chicot. Even then, citizens achieved little more than blazed trails and a bridle path. Leona Sumner, whose relatives settled Chicot in the 1810s, wrote that it was common to get lost at night and be stranded, "surrounded by wild animals, listening to
Wagons bound for the river lumbered over stumps and through quagmires. To cross the many deep or swift-flowing bayous, draymen built "Choctaw rafts" of three or more logs lashed together. Where ferries existed, patrons paid heavy tolls to cross. Depending on the state of the roads, bayou farmers within Chicot County might need four days or more to haul goods to the river! A descendant of the Parkers, a family who settled in Chicot as early as 1818, recalled that people visited and transacted business via dugout, canoe, and flatboat when the water was high. One of her first memories was of a trip made with her parents by dugout to see a new baby. "There were lots of overflows," she said, and coping with them became routine. These conditions persisted long after Chicot became a county, and they also repressed Chicot's economic development. However, so did the global cotton market.25

Extraordinary agricultural profits caused a rush of levee building on the Lower Mississippi in the late 1810s, but economic conditions changed with the Panic of 1819. The numerous floods of the 1820s, competition from established cotton planters, and slack demand for the crop discouraged investors from bringing additional swampland into production. Cotton growing occurred in Arkansas at the time, but yielded little more than a supplemental income for people who primarily grew foodstuffs. For example, Frederick Notrebe, the Arkansas Post merchant, advertised in 1820 that he would pay three and a half cents
per pound for cotton—half in money, half in merchandise. He owned a gin and warehouses, and forwarded cotton to a commission merchant in New Orleans. Middlemen's fees chipped at a planter's proceeds, so much that on Notrebe's terms, a cotton grower received just $14 per bale in cash and credits. Such proceeds were hardly apt to bring a planter cascade to Arkansas, but farmers sometimes accepted the arrangement for the sake of a cash income. Arkansas County records from the 1820s are said to contain many cropping contracts for Notrebe. He grew some cotton on his own account; advanced supplies to others; traded goods for cotton, pelts, and furs; and dealt heavily in whiskey. Notrebe and his son-in-law William Cummins even purchased unimproved land on the banks of the Mississippi near Point Chicot to open a plantation. Conditions were not yet right for another swamp reclamation boom, because by the end of the 1820s, cotton was still just selling for about nine cents a pound in New Orleans, or $36 a bale. Overflows and inadequate price incentives discouraged the planting of cotton in Arkansas. Thus, Chicot's resources waited in suspension for a rise in the price of "the article."²⁶

Karl Anton Postl, a Moravian journalist, recorded impressions of the Chicot area in 1827. The river lay sixty feet below its banks at the time of his visit, but Postl saw that it must rise to great heights in other seasons. Riverfront cabins stood about four feet in the air on huge tree stumps. Glassless windows permitted free
access to the mosquitoes, and exterior walls commonly featured a dozen deer, bear, or fox hides stretched to dry. Households near the river stacked wood for sale to steamboats. They also sold beef and poultry. All the settlers grew corn, and some had a small cotton field, but they seemed little given to agriculture in a systematic way. Postl noted that "farms, or plantations, properly so called, are seldom to be met with." He described only two towns on Arkansas's Mississippi frontage. Hopefield, seat of Crittenden County, contained two taverns, a store, a post office, and ten houses. Helena, seat of Phillips County, occupied a site on Crowley's Ridge on "dwarfish round hills, resembling sugar loaves." Its tavern, store, and six frame houses made an attractive appearance from a distance, "which, however, considerably diminishes on approaching." The store at Helena dealt, not in plantation supplies, but mainly in whiskey for trappers. Villedon, the seat of Chicot County, failed to make any sort of impression on Postl. The fact that he sailed by without a comment indicates that Chicot seemed essentially rural. Of course, flooding inhibited Villedon's development, like it did that of the whole county. Indeed, Postl learned that naive travelers thought the Spanish moss was seaweed left trapped in the trees by the overflows. Another tourist, Captain J. E. Alexander of the 42nd Royal Highlanders, characterized the typical homesite as a log hut with a
chimney, a garden with a snake fence, "and a boat moored in front of the door in case of a flood."  

By 1830, Chicot's white population amounted to 888 persons in 142 households, of which almost three-fourths were slaveless. The county contained just 270 slaves in 1830--far too few to levee its vast waterfront.

Proprietors who owned them usually had one, two, or a small family, and 31 of Chicot's 39 slaveowners of 1830 held 10 slaves or less. Of the eight with more than 10 slaves, Horace Walworth, the richest, had but 21. A New Yorker with Natchez banking connections, he obtained settlement rights on Point Chicot around 1829 and employed overseers to help develop it. Hugh White was the second-largest slaveowner in 1830 with 20 bondsmen. He had lived in Chicot since 1821, and his ferry and tavern catered to the river trade. Other "large" slaveowners of 1830 included James Estill, who settled around 1823 and owned 19 slaves; and Benjamin Miles, a resident since about 1818, who owned 15 slaves in 1830 and represented Chicot in the 1829 territorial legislature. Sheriff Abner Johnson had three slaves; County Judge Dr. William B. Duncan, none. A few settlers were buying land, but the process caused conflicts because titles were often based on irregular squatters' claims. Indeed, Ben Miles and Horace Walworth went to court over Point Chicot, both laying claim to it through purchases of improvements and preemption rights. After
much litigation they compromised. Such were Chicot's "elite" of 1830, surrounded by backwoods farmers. 28

In 1830, Chicot's most pressing needs were land titles and transportation improvements. At its first recorded county court session, in April, those who met at Jones's Tavern in Villemont were pleased that the court bonded a county surveyor and named committees to mark roads. The surveyor, William Hunt, lived across the river in Washington County, Mississippi, and traveled to Chicot when business demanded. As to roads, a path already paralleled the Mississippi, but new routes allowed citizens from the lakes and bayous to reach the county seat, as well as the steamboat landings on the Mississippi. Without roads, public and private business could not be conducted within the county because its natural routes—the ridges, rivers, and bayous—led south to Louisiana. This situation could not stand. Political necessity demanded a means of communication within the county, and developers, regardless of what part of Chicot they lived in, had to be able to access the Mississippi for shipping. Thus, in April of 1830 the court ordered the laying out of roads from Villemont to Lake Chicot, Bayou Bartholemew, and Bayou Mason. Court minutes of July, 1830, report the existence of seven road districts, the appointment of overseers of roads, and the apportionment of hands to work said roads. 29

Chicot's budget for carrying out public works was very small. To illustrate, in 1830 it built a county jail for
the impounding of stray negroes with $68 raised through a jail tax. Chicot's regular county taxes yielded just $206. The following year, the court increased Chicot's tax rate by 25 percent, and revenues rose to $472. The advancing costs of residency may have angered some pioneers, since from 1831 to 1833, taxable households dropped in number from 197 to 163. However, departing households were replaced by others who accepted higher taxes. For example, by 1833 there were 224 households paying $727 in county taxes; by 1834, 287 households provided $900 in revenue.

At the same time, the county court was not deaf to public concerns. Consumer complaints brought a ceiling on ferry rates, and a $2.50 franchise fee fell upon ferry operators. In Oden Township on the Mississippi, the court calmed public fears by founding a slave patrol in 1832 to enforce order and conserve the workforce. Also in 1832, a road was marked to a new riverfront town called Columbia which became, in 1833, the county seat.30

Leonna Sumner explained that the removal of Chicot's government to Columbia came about in an atmosphere of "much discontent and no harmony," because of clouded titles at Villemont. Early settlers were leaving Point Chicot in disgust, developers worried about their claims, and urban growth languished because town lots were hard to sell. On the other hand, Columbia's founding marked a break with Chicot's past. It signalled the growing influence of newly arriving planters and a waning importance for pioneers.31
At first glance the removal to Columbia flew in the face of logic. Villemont stood on the highest ground above overflow, whereas Columbia, three miles upriver, occupied a considerably lower elevation. A writer in 1836 called it "as uninviting a spot for a home as one could well picture," with a caving bank in front and a cypress brake at the rear. The site could not be guarded without levee construction, yet no provisions were made at its founding to supply levees. The explanation for so precipitate a move is that those who made the decision to move saw opportunity in change, rather than danger. Tax and census records show that Chicot now had important new residents, planters from Kentucky. Never having lived in the Mississippi's flood-plain, they discounted the risk of inhabiting the riverbanks and focused instead on the money they could make.  

After a period of favorable market conditions for Kentucky products, prices for hemp, wheat, and pork flattened around 1830, and ambitious Upper South proprietors became impatient at the stagnation of their capital. As Bluegrass planters read the Kentucky Gazette in the early 1830s, they realized that cotton prices had made swamp reclamation a winning proposition once again. In February of 1832, the Gazette reported Mississippi and Louisiana cotton selling at 9 1/2 to 10 1/2 cents a pound. By January of 1833, this had grown to 11 and 12 cents. In November of 1833, the price reached 15 and 17 cents. In
other words, a bale of prime riverfront cotton that sold for $36 in 1830 was worth $68 by the end of 1833. A man with enough slaves to clear and cultivate new Delta land could easily make a bale an acre. With 200 acres in cultivation, a gross yield of about $13,600 might be realized on one crop. These were important economic stimuli. International demands for cotton were strong. Banks would loan money for expansion, and the reinvestment of profits in land and slaves could produce even greater wealth. For persons with sufficient start-up capital, here were powerful incentives for opening swamp plantations. Ohio Valley planters who had seen Chicot County on trips to New Orleans remembered its natural advantages of climate and location. Kentuckians, flushed with profits from tariff-protected hemp, were particularly keen to invest. Their own crops had no real economies of scale to make reinvestment at home an advantage. Good land in Kentucky had already been bid up in price by the 1830s, and an "Era of Bad Feelings" during the previous decade soured their prospects in regard to banking. In 1833 Kentucky even prohibited the importation of slaves for resale out of state, which blocked a speculation that had furnished some planters with a profitable sideline. Hence, in the mid 1830s, members of the Kentucky gentry descended on Chicot County and its neighbor, Washington County, Mississippi. For residents of the Ohio Valley, the riverfronts of these
counties were the most desirable, inexpensive, unimproved, Climate Zone 8, Delta lands available for development.33

Silas Craig, a Kentuckian and business associate of that state's prominent Johnson clan, knew about Chicot's resources from his days as a steamboat captain in the late 1810s. A local historian wrote that "Old Si" also "traveled extensively on foot throughout Chicot and Phillips Counties, compass in hand," finding much valuable land. A nervous, restless man, "with a keen grey eye that seemed to search to the bottom of one's thoughts," Craig transmitted real estate tips to friends, and a cadre of Kentuckians began buying the more elevated tracts of the swamps which had put the "isle" in "Illechecko." Horace Walworth may have also funnelled information about Chicot into Natchez, but Natchez planters generally preferred northeast Louisiana and the Indian cession lands of northwest Mississippi. As a result, Chicot's social and political heritage came primarily from Kentucky, where, according to historian Steven Channing, "the ideal . . . of yeoman democracy was severely undermined . . . from its earliest days" by aggressive agrarian capitalists. Ambitious Kentuckians were never satisfied, he said, "with the idyllic little self-sufficient homesteads of agrarian myth." They wanted to be gentlemen-planters.34

Channing's portrait of gentrification in Kentucky practically mirrors what would take place among the levee builders of antebellum Chicot, especially in the absorption
of good land by planters, the use of government to enhance opportunities for agribusiness, and the use of debt to build improvements. The agenda brought material progress to the region, but planters' motives were primarily self-interested. As Channing remarked, the "basic values of agrarianism, fundamentalism, and, above all, the ties of kinship made up a great closed circle." Humanitarian or altruistic motivation played no significant role in their actions. Furthermore, "anything that threatened their clan, or clannishness in general, was to be resisted. All had rights . . . but all knew their place."33

In light of these self-interested principles, it is enlightening to examine the workings of Chicot's county court in 1833. One learns from the minutes of the July term that Horace Walworth and Hugh White donated land for the site of Columbia. Yet, a selection committee was paid the previous January to pick their site. In that January session, the county court convened at the office of "Hedge" Triplett, a newly-arrived attorney. It consisted of four justices of the peace: William B. Patton, Chicot's former sheriff and territorial legislator, taxed for four slaves in 1834; John Gibson, Chicot's territorial council representative, a non-slaveowner; James Russell, slaveless; and James Blaine, slaveless, taxed in 1834 for one horse. Justices elected Blaine to preside, named an auctioneer to sell townlots, spent $2 to put locks on the jail, and issued generous compensation to the commissioners who chose
the site of Columbia. Blaine received $51; James Russell, $27; Sandford C. Faulkner, $25; and $10 went to their clerk. The payoff totaled 15 percent of the county's revenue for the year. In return, Walworth got the county town removed from Point Chicot, which he wanted to plant in cotton, and Hugh White, Jr., was able to book the court meetings at his tavern in Columbia, rather than at John C. Jones's in Villemont.36

The stakes in this political interchange stood fairly low, but men of ambition were laying a groundwork for future developments. As was usual on the frontier, the population that consented to the seat's removal was swiftly changing in 1833. Only 20 of the 65 taxable slaveowners of 1834 had been taxpayers in Chicot in 1830, and just three of the fifteen largest proprietors of 1834 (those with ten slaves or more) had been residents in 1830. Horace Walworth, with 36 taxable slaves, and Ben Miles and James Estill, with 19 taxable slaves each, made up the older elite. Tax records show that other established settlers usually held capital in livestock rather than slaves because their wealth sprang from grazing and food crops. Twelve of Chicot's "big" slaveowners in 1834 were new men, such as: James B. Campbell, the county's largest slave proprietor (40 slaves); Silas Craig, the land scout (17 slaves); banker John P. Walworth, Horace's brother (26 slaves); Thomas Bernard of Natchez (19 slaves); Peak & Offutt, absentees from Kentucky (21 slaves); Joel Johnson,
brother of U. S. Senator Richard M. Johnson of Kentucky (34 slaves); and William H. Gaines of Kentucky (24 slaves). All these risk-takers were on Chicot's riverfront by 1834 and had begun to develop plantations, either in person or through overseers. During the 1830s, the number of planters continued to increase, so that by 1840, gentry immigrants comprised Chicot's dominant social group.  

Many planters who bought land in Chicot in the 1830s remained identified with their plantations throughout the antebellum period. In wealth, permanence, and visibility, they far exceeded the earlier settlers. Thus, nineteenth-century commentators rightly judged that planters had made a deeper impression in favor of local improvements. However, in view of the superior moral dimension that came to be attributed to planters on this basis, it would not be amiss to suggest some objective reasons for non-persistence among non-planter classes. Historians such as Jane Turner Censer, Joan Cashin, and James Oakes have amply documented the removal of planters to the West for the preservation of families and status. Yet, unheralded, poor men and squatters often moved in just as calculating a fashion, in pursuit of the same objectives.  

Once again, one turns to the Owen and DeHart families as useful examples. They failed to become part of Chicot's levee-building plantation community, but their comings and goings were anything but random. Within their own means, these modest settlers pursued advantage just as planters
did. A chain-of-title deposition made in 1851 concerning a single tract on Bayou Gallion illustrates the workings of their prudent non-persistence. Movement did not always mean failure; rather, it sometimes indicated that proprietors and tenants had made a rational decision to labor elsewhere. James McMahan, a De Bastrop colonist, came to the spot in 1797 with the understanding that he and his heirs would someday get 400 arpents from the king. McMahan occupied the tract from 1800 to about 1811, then moved and sold his improvements to George Hook. Soon, George died and Philip Hook purchased settlement rights from George's estate. Wynant DeHart bought the claim from Philip. Since Wynant owned more than one property, he let his brother James live there for two or three years. At Wynant's death, nephew John Owen moved to the farm and resided from about 1828 to 1834. Then, Wynant's heirs sold it to their aunt Jane DeHart Owen Cooper, who farmed it till her death in 1843. Her son, William Owen, who married his cousin Jane DeHart, his mother's namesake, then sold the land to Widow Weeks. Over time, this simple farm had been the means of sustaining several branches of the family as they needed it. True, the families were close-knit, but not "communal" in a social or economic sense, nor anti-capitalist. Rather, the prudent, conservative members of the family kept this bayou farm, and the more daring, such as Wynant, John, Jr., and Abraham DeHart, died in the swamps around Point Chicot without building plantations.
Whatever their qualities of character, the fact remains that Owens and DeHarts did not contribute much to the founding of Chicot's levee-building community, and the sole survivor among the brothers, James DeHart, retreated to the back bayous where the longsuffering Owen family had always remained. Perhaps the very qualities of helpfulness and decency which aided these plain folk through hard times also made them loathe to inflict the traumas and hardships of swamp farming upon their households. Those who endured as swamp planters could not be quite as tender-hearted.39

A New Hampshireman on the Mississippi, James Wallace, actually saw one of Chicot's new planters debark from the steamboat. Wallace, who disliked the South, marveled that in 1835 he had been placidly teaching school in Hadley, Massachusetts, but in January of 1836 was steaming up the Mississippi with "men of every stamp and condition."

"Some," he said, "are constantly watching an opportunity to get your m[oney]," while others seemed "so shy and distrustful, that it is almost impossible to speak to them." Passing the shores of Chicot, Wallace wrote:

This is a dreary country. The solitary wood cutter can here have the wild beasts of the Forest for his company. We have passed three steamboats--Samson, Splendid, & Neosho--[and] about 20 or 30 flatboats loaded with produce. During the night, Mr. McDermot and his negroes (half starved) landed.

Charles and Edward McDermott, brothers, took slaves to Chicot from Louisiana to open swamp plantations. The county's 1840 tax assessment lists them owning more than
two thousand acres, and the 1840 census shows Edward in residence with 44 slaves, of whom 32 labored in agriculture. It must have been daunting for planters and slaves alike to get off the boat and suddenly be faced with the reality of their task. Too, as Wallace observed, many were not in peak condition on arrival. Masters probably scrimped on food during the trip to save money. Exposure and stress also took a toll. For example, Franklin Wharton told of another migrant group at Arkansas Post in 1825. "In the evening," he said, "the negroes, the Irish families, & Thomas Murray" went upriver. "I am confident that some of the negroes must die, & I have my fears for Thomas Murray."40

Disease could be combated by the control of overflows, but to levee a place like Chicot required cooperation. Yet, it was a trait of the gentry to cooperate only when self-interest demanded it. Otherwise, planter capitalists competed to excel each other both as individuals and as regional interest groups. In the honor culture of the western frontier, intrigues, rivalries, and abrasive self-importance mingled with courtly manners and bravery, while politics veered strongly to personalities rather than principles. One disgruntled critic in Chicot said that several of its Kentuckian planters, such as the Craigs and Campbells, feared neither God, nor man, and cared for nothing but "money, money, money, and whiskey." Karl Postl complained that years of Indian wars, slaveowning, and
exploitive politics had bequeathed a barbarous tone to Kentucky, leaving it vulgar, violent, dishonest, and irreligious. The men were often handsome, he said, "of an athletic form, and . . . truly masculine beauty," but were also "a proud, fierce, and overbearing set of people."

Postl recommended that meek and mild emigrants go to Ohio instead, especially if their means did not permit self-sufficiency and they needed helpful neighbors. On the other hand, Postl advised those with $10,000 or more to go to swamps on the Mississippi. There, investors "whose mind does not revolt at the idea of being the owner of slaves" might find undreamed-of wealth, if they could stand alone.

Above all, Postl warned, when embarking on a planter's life one must not depend on others. Those at the apex of remote slave societies did not tolerate weakness or cowardice. Discipline extended not just to slaves, but, in a more subtle form, to planters as well. Those who failed to keep order in their own households could expect no succor from the community at large. On these terms, society became rather harsh, but facts of swamp life were brutal and it took a special breed to endure. They took pride in being called "swampers." To them, the term denoted a sort of border aristocracy, richer than most settlers and inured to hardship, but also some of the most adventurous, ruthless, and successful entrepreneurs in America.41

The Irish actor Tyrone Power, touring the U. S. in 1835, virtually fell in love with swampers he met during
his western travels. On one trip he called them a "rough but merry set of fellows," bright and well-disposed. "For their own health's sake, I could have desired to see the bar less prosperous" and less tobacco in circulation. Nonetheless, Power decreed them to be amazingly capable people and, in fact, the prime movers behind the rise of the Southwest:

We generally associate with the Southern planter ideas of indolence, inertness of disposition, and a love of luxury and idle expense: nothing, however, can be less characteristic of these frontier tamers of the swamp and of the forest: they are hardy, indefatigable, and enterprising . . . despising and contemning luxury and refinement, courting labor, and even making a pride of privation . . . fond of money without having a tittle of avarice. This is, in fact, a singular race, and they seem especially endowed by Providence to forward the great work in which they are engaged--to clear the wilderness and lay bare the wealth of this rich country with herculean force and restless perseverance, spurred by a spirit of acquisition no extent of possession can satiate.

Power said their indifference to comfort did not spring from ignorance, for many often traveled stylishly in the North and to New Orleans. In polite company, they appeared intelligent, well-read, and sociable, but as guests, hosts found them to be "much easier to please than to catch."

Why? Because swampers loved work more than leisure, and in the midst of urban pleasures, they longed to "return to their log-houses and the cane-brake to seek in labour for enjoyment." Power thought there must be "a great charm" in a swammer's life. Even the wives, some of whom were Northern-bred and used to "all the agremens of good society," assured him they were never happier than on the
plantation. Some of these individuals may have been seeking to impress a romantic foreigner with how good and comely the Slave South was, but contentment and resignation, when combined with a sense of how very rich they might become, were powerful inducements to continue planting in the swamp as long as the price of cotton held.42

In Table 7.1, one finds a comparative list of the slaveholdings of Chicot County for 1830 and 1840. By contrasting the size of slaveholdings in 1840 with those of 1830, one easily comprehends the degree of gentrification which took place there during the decade. Many new and prominent proprietors emigrated to Chicot in the 1830s, and the former elites were eclipsed in importance. Since the people listed in Table 7.1 will appear throughout Chapters 7 and 8, the list of slaveholdings is a useful reference for estimating their rank within the community, the size of their operations, and the degree of interest they had in the achievement of flood control. After all, the 1840 slaveholder cohort built the county's first levees. These are the dramatis personae whose habits of industry and love of conquest transformed Chicot's "natural" landscape.43

Of course, when assessing the personality traits of Chicot's emerging power class, allowances must be made for the disposition of the chronicler. Where Tyrone Power found much to praise, George Featherstonhaugh, a prim and censorious English geologist, found little to admire and much to condemn. In December of 1833, he found himself on
TABLE 7.1
SLAVEHOLDINGS IN CHICOT COUNTY, ARKANSAS, 1830-1840

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Slaveowners</th>
<th>No. of Slaves</th>
<th>Slaveowners</th>
<th>No. of Slaves</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hugh White</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Horace F. Walworth</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horace F. Walworth</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Richard M. &amp; G W Campbell</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benjamin L. Miles</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Thomas Bernard</td>
<td>[55]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Estill</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Joel Johnson &amp; M. Jordan</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew Latting Est.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Fed. Judge Ben Johnson</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obediah Pitts</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>William McDowell Pettit</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edward Wiley</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>U S Senator Amb. H Sevier</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John J. Bowie</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Benjamin L. Miles Estate</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moses Burnett</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Charles Calvert Stuart</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel W. Hampton</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>James B. &amp; C. W. Campbell</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betsy Latting</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Samuel D. Walker</td>
<td>40</td>
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<tr>
<td>John Mauldin</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ford &amp; Spears</td>
<td>37</td>
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<tr>
<td>James Purvis</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>John P. Walworth</td>
<td>36</td>
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<td>M. R. Rotan</td>
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<td>Elisha Worthington</td>
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<td>John Smith</td>
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<td>William H. Gaines</td>
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<td>William Patton</td>
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<td>Col. Benjamin Taylor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thomas Tunstall</td>
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<td>Keyburn &amp; Johnson</td>
<td>33</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cathrine DeVillemont</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Gen. James Clark</td>
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<td>Samuel Wallace</td>
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<td>Romulus Payne</td>
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<td>Sarah Boone</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Cooper &amp; Johnson</td>
<td>[28]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert O. Dabney</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Sand. Faulkner &amp; Shotwell</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George C. Purvis</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>William Henry Johnson</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Francis Roycroft</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Dr. Gilly M. Lewis</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betsy Bunch</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Benjamin P. Gaines</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asenath Flanikin</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>William &amp; James F. Taylor</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abner Johnson</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Smith &amp; Graves</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nancy Mauldin</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Morehead &amp; Leavy</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frederick Noble</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Vice President R. Johnson</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samuel Parker</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>John A. Craig, Esq.</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Stewart</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>John L. Fisher</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Martin Ussery</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Joel Offutt</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Squire Ward</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Anthony H. Davies, Esq.</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Silas Craig</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>William Collins</td>
<td>[19]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Craig, Peak, &amp; Taylor</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Davies &amp; Ware</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Nathan Quilling Estate</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Craig &amp; Todd</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>John M. Taylor</td>
<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Miller &amp; Clark</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Peter G. Rives</td>
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<td>John W. Maulding Estate</td>
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<td></td>
<td>William W. Rose</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hugh White, Jr.</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Shaw &amp; Price</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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TABLE 7.1 (CONT.)

SLAVEHOLDINGS IN CHICOT COUNTY, ARKANSAS, 1830-1840

Chicot Co. Tax List 1840

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Slaveowners</th>
<th>No. of Slaves</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daniel W. Hampton</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John R. Llewellyn</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Patterson</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Bartholemew Smith</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edward Wiley</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judge Dr. Albert W. Webb</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Red&quot; Reuben Smith</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samuel Wallace</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William T. Ferguson</td>
<td>[6]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samuel Townsend</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan Rotan</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franklin Stuart</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John B. Dabney</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reece Bowden</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James L. Purvis</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samuel Jones</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Blue</td>
<td>[2]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John M. Chilton</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leanner Hoskins</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abner Johnson</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Ware</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter Hanger</td>
<td>[1]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Jones</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M. R. P. Mathis</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simpson H. Dabney</td>
<td>[1]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyrus Hathaway</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Terry</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a boat descending from Arkansas to New Orleans. Passengers included the sutler for Fort Gibson, a lieutenant engaged in building a military road, and Wharton Rector, Marshall for Arkansas Territory, "the most constant blasphemer ... low and sottish in his manners." Passing Columbia, "the county-town of the county of Chicot ... said to be the most fertile part of the whole territory," Featherstonhaugh spent a "horrible night, kept awake by the tobacco and
imprecations of drunken gamblers." Ten or so "gentlemen planters," traveling on business, joined them, and the number included Mr. Vick of Vicksburg, a swamp planter of Washington County. The Englishman was scandalized that their advent failed to raise the boat's tone. The gentry joined in "gambling, drinking, smoking, and blaspheming, just as desperately as the worst of them! The cabin became so full of tobacco smoke that it was impossible for me to remain in it." Altogether, "nothing could be more reckless or brutal than their conduct and conversation." Men who had escaped from polite society now "seemed determined to exhaust all the extravagances that brutality and profanity are capable of. I shall never forget these specimens of gentlemen belonging to the State of Mississippi." 44

Lest one think his observations sprang from simple prejudice, consider the level of humor found in Odd Leaves from the Life of a Louisiana "Swamp Doctor", a book of skits composed by Henry Clay Lewis, alias "Madison Tensas, M. D." This young Whig physician settled just south of Chicot County, at the intersection of Roundaway Bayou, Tensas River, and Bayou Despair. At age twenty five, exhausted from treating slaves in a cholera epidemic, he drowned in the swamp while riding a horse that became entangled in willows. As an author, Lewis produced stories which were the 1840s equivalent of 1980s movies like Bachelor Party and Animal House. Plots turned on such incidents as: young men setting a mule on fire and
impersonating angels of death to terrorize a revival meeting; bleeding a slave woman's rump so she could not sit and would have to work harder; sewing the face from an albino negro's cadaver onto a scroll which a nosy landlady would open; and putting an alcohol poultice on a lazy Irishman to set him afire when he falsely gained entry to a charity hospital. Throughout, the tales implied that poor people—especially slaves and immigrants—were shamming when they seemed sick; that poverty and suffering were forms of weakness deserving exploitation; and that elite white men served as watch dogs to keep the disorderly in line. Yet, the savage Lewis also wrote nature adventures and a tender ode to a dead friend. His professional career showed the presence of serious qualities and of concern for others. Roughness and sadism coexisted with love and a devotion to duty and service. In short, Lewis and his "swamper" comrades were complex people with an embattled mentality; eager to stand at the head of society and direct the labors of others, but unwilling, and even unable, to lower their guard. Encompassed by so great a cloud of witnesses—whether slaves, anti-slavery critics, or "corrupt demagogues" who played on the prejudices of immigrants and poor-whites—these harsh improvers clung to honorable self-concepts and viewed themselves as paternalists, protecting the higher interests of society from the unlearned and unscrupulous. Above all, they
strove to maintain control, whether over nature or across society at large. 45

In less contemplative moods, gentry settlers simply worked to improve matters over which they had some direct control--such as the improvement of their land and habits. After all, cotton planting, levee building, godly revivals, social reforms, and schemes for enrichment all appealed to the same set of developers. Yet, in American history writing, reform is usually associated only with the ante-bellum North. This may be because the definition of reform has been too narrow and too focused on politics. At any rate, most varieties of Southern reform have gone unnoticed. Some were of a public nature, such as the building of levees and penitentiaries. These attacked public disorders like flooding or crime. Other Southern reforms occurred on a more personal level, such as a resolve to pay debts, to go to church, or even to practice better manners. For one thing, swampers deplored an uncouth appearance and strove to present a genteel front to the world. Self-esteem and a need for respect impelled them to make exertions in this regard, for they had to contrast with inferiors to better persuade, intimidate, or command them. For field work, swampers wore a practical but distinguished garb consisting of tall boots, dirt-colored pants, a blanket coat, and a wide-brimmed hat. For public meetings, excursions, or parties, the fashionables donned Byronic attire: towering collars, gloves, scarf
cravats, and stirrup pants. Dr. Shadburne, a swamp planter and partner of Henry Clay Lewis, commissioned a full-length portrait in a flowing cape. Another swamp dandy was Gillem Murrell, described as the best gambler and most open-hearted man in the West. Judge J. W. Bocage of Arkansas admired this brother of the famous swamp gang-leader, John Murrell, at a faro game on the Bunker Hill in 1836, as "one of the handsomest men we ever beheld."46

The Judge's account of this particular faro game offers an instructive peek into the human dynamics of Chicot society in the booming mid-1830s. The object of the game was to bet against the dealer as to when certain cards would appear. Swampers being more-or-less gamblers by nature, games of chance flourished on the steamboats they frequented. Here, the players included a cross-section of Chicot's settlers: Carlos de Villemont, Jr., a creole from the colonial elite whom Bocage called a "Spanish Frenchman;" John Buzzard, a poor white who rafted logs on Bayou Bartholemew; and Franklin Stuart, whose cousin Virgil had betrayed the Murrell gang. Franklin Stuart later served as Chicot's first levee commissioner, so his role in the game bears watching. As Gillem Murrell dealt the cards, the onlookers included planters "Old Si" Craig, "Red" Reuben Smith of Lake Chicot (known by his hair), and William Gaines, a riverfront Kentuckian of north Chicot, tall and muscular, with an "eagle eye and masterful physique." At dark, the Bunker Hill unexpectedly pulled-to at Villemont.
Passengers learned the boiler pumps had failed, but knew their destination, Columbia, lay three miles upriver. Unwilling to wait for repairs, one group of Chicotans walked to Columbia; another took the boat's yawl. Next day, while mists still hung on the river, the Bunker Hill reached Columbia. Bocage debarked to stroll towards Hugh White's tavern, but there on the path, "in a pool of coagulated blood," lay Gillem Murrell, "his right hand nearly severed" and body gaping with wounds from a Bowie knife. Gillem's stunning jewelry still glistened, but he was quite dead. William Hardy told Bocage to hurry on if he had no business with the corpse: "It is dangerous even to look at him." A witness said Gillem went to Pat O'Hara's saloon the night before. When someone cut his hand, he fled crying "Don't kill me!" Instead, foes chased and stabbed him until he fell. The inquest offered its "usual verdict" of death by persons unknown, but the killer was later determined to be Franklin Stuart--a "social reformer," like some other levee-builders, with rather questionable motives and perhaps dubious tactics.47

Community opinion on the event was mixed. About eight Murrellites lived near "Old Man" John Fulton's in the swamps above Gaines's Landing, habitually stealing slaves, horses, food, and valuables from travelers and families on both sides of the river. Murder, gambling, and counterfeiting figured in their activities, and "settlers were forced to be politic with this class," for to complain was
to invite reprisals. From 1830 to 1836, John Fulton and Reuben Smith served as county coroners, giving evasive opinions about who was responsible for crimes. Some elites may have done business with Murrellites in the early days, but disfavor eventually caught up with the outlaws. Just as in levee building, public reforms were only achievable on the basis of community consensus. Improvements took place in conjunction with public expressions of disgust about current conditions and a real commitment to change. For example, when citizens of Columbia convened a special meeting to combat crime and make plans to enforce order, planter Benjamin Gaines led them in a resolution of mortification at the recurring outrages which had sullied Chicot's honor. Disorder repelled them, and they vowed to bring the lawless to justice. In these and other incidents, it is clear that planters did have a strong code of ethics, however self-serving it may sometimes have been. The series of vignettes which follows will further illustrate the nature of the new elites who settled in Chicot in the 1830s and built its levees.48

As a representative man, there is no better exemplar of gentry ideals at the time of Columbia's founding than Col. Richard M. Johnson, a Kentucky politician and Chicot County absentee planter. Deeply embedded in a circle of ambitious kinsmen known as "The Family," Richard Johnson became a congressman in 1809 and U. S. Senator in 1819. He and Henry Clay led the War Hawks in the War of 1812.
Johnson also received credit for slaying Tecumseh at the Battle of the Thames, thereby foiling Native American plans to close the West to white settlement. Using Tecumseh's death as his own "bloody shirt" campaign issue, Johnson capitalized on Westerners' fond memories of trouncing Indians. Naturally, he also named his Chicot County plantation "Tecumseh" and worked hard to keep his exploits bright in the public eye. Johnson achieved such success with this strategy that he obtained the vice presidency in 1837 under Martin Van Buren, unscathed even by public knowledge of his black mistress and mulatto daughters.49

A typical example of Johnsonian promotion tactics appeared in the Kentucky Gazette in January of 1833. An author soliciting book subscriptions announced the publication of:

The Battle of the Thames and Death of Tecumseh, accompanied by a brief biographical sketch of Col. Johnson, by whose hand fell this distinguished chief . . . to which will be appended an excellent copperplate likeness of the Colonel, from a painting by Wood, at the time when President Madison presented him a sword, voted by Congress, for his gallant services on that ever memorable occasion. . . . of a suitable size for framing, and will be delivered detached from the book for that purpose.50

Editorials siding with either the Johnsons or their rivals the Taylors (another set of Chicot plantation investors) frequently appeared in the Kentucky press. Political feuds also carried forward into Arkansas, where pro-Johnson forces controlled the Democratic party through an extended "Family" composed of Johnsons, Seviers, and Conways. At the national level, they were aligned with
Andrew Jackson. In Arkansas, the Family's opponents became Whigs. Oddly enough, as the ante-bellum period wore on, the Family's Democrats outdid the Whigs of Arkansas as advocates of public works. Many Democratic leaders owned real estate in the Delta and took a natural interest in improvements, such as levees and banking, which enhanced their prospects of profits in agribusiness.51

In politics, scurrilous attacks were common among the rival factions' respective press agents. For example, Col. Benjamin Taylor and Col. Henry Payne (both with Chicot planting interests) appeared to seeming advantage in the Kentucky Gazette in 1833 for their relief of the poor during a Lexington cholera epidemic. "Col. Payne sent a number of fine lambs . . . and offered his whole flock. Col. Taylor for 8 or 10 days sent a cord of good firewood . . . besides quite a bit of flour, cornmeal & bacon."

Unfortunately, the Gazette (a Johnson paper) made sure to credit this public relations hype to its original source—the Observer (a Taylor paper)—and poured its usual stream of sarcasm on the Observer's editor: "this patron-saint of Tailors," for whom "it is the highest of all possible offenses to 'eat, drink, or sleep' with a Johnson, or to be, in any wise, 'called after their name.'" Joel Johnson, Richard's rather inept brother, made a spectacle of himself in the papers by calling one Taylor "a damned rascal" at a barbeque and almost starting a brawl. A critic said that Joel had not forgotten how to use "the same old Hobby horse
Yet, on important civic occasions and during life-threatening emergencies, such as flood, war, or slave revolt, planters presented a united front. Whatever their differences, Johnsons, Taylors, Offutts, and Paynes knew how to cooperate when to do so seemed prudent. Consider, for example, proceedings recorded at a twentieth-anniversary celebration of the Battle of the Thames, held near Lexington, Kentucky, in 1833. At the time, many participants were also opening plantations in Chicot County's swamplands. Their toasts and civic rituals brightly illuminate the values of the planter class as it assumed control of its new investment frontier, in words recorded almost at the moment of Columbia's founding.

CIVIC RITUALS AND A SERIES OF TOASTS IN HONOR OF THE TWENTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE BATTLE OF THE THAMES

(As Celebrated in Fayette County, Kentucky, 5 Oct. 1833)

Fayette County citizens address their attentions to Col. R. M. Johnson and invite friends and neighbors to rendezvous with Capt. Postlethwaite's Lexington Light Infantry at La Grange, on the railroad six miles below the city. On this day, one thousand gentlemen assemble to pay their respects, to feast, and enjoy a day of solemn celebration. Col. Benjamin Taylor, presiding, serves as head of arrangements, aided by Colonel Payne and Wm. L. Todd. Dignitaries offer twenty one toasts to the assembly, punctuated with martial music, musket firings, and artillery salutes. [Johnson, Taylor, Payne, and Todd all have interests in Chicot County plantations].

The program (in part) as follows:

Toast 2: The Heroes and Sages of the Revolution—Characters of more exalted worth never graced the page of history. ["Auld Lang Syne"]

Toast 3: The memory of George Washington. [drink standing]

Toast 4: The President of the United States. ["Yankee Doodle"]

Toast 5: The Vice President, Martin Van Buren, a Shining Light in the Republican Ranks.

Toast 6: The Army and Navy—They have had to fight their way to just renown. ["Star Spangled Banner"]

Toast 7: Governor John Breathitt—He does honor to the choice of his friends—He is in fact the Chief Magistrate of Kentucky.

Toast 8: The Heroes and Soldiers of the late War [of 1812]—Shelby, Adair, Trotter, Desha, Croghan . . . Their reward is in the hearts of grateful people.

Toast 9: General William Henry Harrison—Commander in Chief at the Battle we celebrate. He has nobly acquitted himself in his country, has she done the same by him?

Twelve more toasts. Then, a Speech by Richard M. Johnson, famed throughout the land for his oratory, and toasts in his honor by former comrades. Messages of tribute are read from persons unable to attend, including Maj. William Christy of New Orleans [a Chicot investor], and former governors General John Adair and Joseph Desha [for whom Desha Co., Arkansas, was named].

Johnson would also be pleased at a toast offered in Little Rock a month later during a dinner given to Governor Pope: "Richard M. Johnson—the faithful representative of the interests of the West."53

Leadership in this mutual-admiration society sprang partly from astute public relations, but also from a genuine rapport with people who mattered. In civic
rituals, followers responded to words, music, and imagery that recalled their shared achievements and heritage. For them, the naming of Columbia, Arkansas, was not a random act devoid of meaning. The word symbolized America's promise and recalled the first song at the Thames Battle unity feast: "Hail, Columbia!" With its founding and the displacement of squatters from the riverfront, opportunity beckoned to slaveowners who meant to redevelop the swamps for cotton planting. To them, Richard Johnson represented what a Western gentleman could achieve. Just as he slew Tecumseh and bestowed the Indian's name on an absentee-owned, professionally managed, Chicot County plantation, Johnson also smote the cypress trees and embarked on a new path to wealth in a former hunting ground. His resources included: swamp land, a slave gang, draft animals, a gin, a press, and a steamboat landing—but not levees. The necessity of such devices had not yet been proven to this newest set of swamp investors. Chicot's 1840 tax list shows that Johnson owned 1,061 acres in the county, assessed at over $11,000; 22 taxable slaves worth $11,000; 4 horses, 4 mules, and 11 cattle. Since he lived in Washington, D. C., and Kentucky, an overseer managed "Tecumseh" for Johnson. The small amount of livestock listed in 1840 suggests that clearing, rather than cultivation, was still a significant part of the routine. Capital improvement had to precede economic growth, and patriots like Johnson, whose wealth grew from intelligently delegated labor, were
judged to be worthy of their country's praise. They were developing a new frontier of opportunity.54

On this alluvial frontier, the planting enterprise appeared rational and business-like in the 1830's, much more concerned with investments and profit yields than with opulent lifestyles. Indeed, assessed values for Chicot's plantation dwellings in the 1834 tax list show that comfort and display were scarce commodities. For one thing, the county contained few gentry women, and the men emphasized capital improvement rather than housing. Hugh White, Sr.'s house was valued at $1,000, and Hugh White, Jr.'s, $600, but these were primarily business buildings. Among the planters, the sheriff assessed Benjamin Miles's dwelling at $300, Joel Johnson's at $200, and William Taylor's at $500. On numerous plantations, the "big house" ranked almost as a hovel. For example, dwellings belonging to Horace Walworth, Silas Craig, William Gaines, and the Peak and Offutt partnership were valued at $50 each in 1834. James Campbell, Thomas Bernard, and James Estill's homes had a value of $25, and Warren Offutt's was worth only $20. Between them, these seven minimalists owned almost 200 taxable slaves, but they, or their agents, occupied houses worth less than $300. George Featherstonhaugh, in late 1833, revealed that Arkansas's elites also ate bad food:

What most forcibly strikes a stranger here, is the apparent total indifference of everybody to what we call personal comforts. No one seems to think that there is anything better in the world than little square bits of pork fried in lard, bad coffee, and very indifferent bread.55
In spite of such spartan surroundings, Chicot's planters were immeasurably better-connected in social, political, and economic terms than its older group of subsistence farmers and squatters. Richard Johnson "led the pack" in notoriety, but as a group they were unusually distinguished. A look at the county's 1840 tax list in Table 7.1 reveals the names of a vice president, U. S. senator, federal judge, and militia general, as well as colonels, doctors, bankers, and assorted nabobs. Some lived in Chicot, while others resided in Kentucky or Mississippi and employed overseers. Large chunks of the county also belonged to absentees who bought unimproved land in anticipation of rising values. Indeed, Chicot's two biggest landowners of 1840 were speculators. Chester Ashley, a Little Rock attorney, held more than 23,000 acres in the county, while the American Land Company, a realty trust, owned in excess of 25,000 acres. Investors from New York and Boston formed the American Land Co. in 1835, at the height of the cotton boom, and Erastus Corning, president of the New York Central Railroad, was a leading trustee. Using a capital of $1,000,000, the corporation spent $400,000 to buy unimproved cotton land in Mississippi, $250,000 to acquire tracts in Arkansas, and the rest for city lots and farm land in other parts of the South and West. Altogether, the American Land Company accumulated more than 200,000 acres, much of it swamp, for resale to slaveowning planters. Unfortunately for stockholders, the
company's purchases were less discriminating than those of, say, Silas Craig, or other knowledgeable scouts who looked at the land in person. Consequently, much of its holdings lay in areas that could not be reclaimed without massive investments in levees and drainage—improvements the company could not provide. Table 7.2 shows the names and acreage of several of these non-resident speculators. The roster included: Col. Andrew Hynes of Nashville, Tenn., the favorite son-in-law of Joseph Erwin of Iberville Parish, La.; John Kerr, a planter of the Natchez vicinity, associated with the Minors of Concordia; and Frederick Notrebe, the fur and cotton merchant of Arkansas Post.56

**TABLE 7.2**

SOME NON-RESIDENT SPECULATORS IN CHICOT COUNTY LANDS, 1840

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Owner</th>
<th>No. Acres</th>
<th>Owner</th>
<th>No. Acres</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chester Ashley</td>
<td>23,241</td>
<td>John D. Murrell</td>
<td>1,080</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Land Co.</td>
<td>25,175</td>
<td>D. L. McKay</td>
<td>2,684</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wm. Beazley &amp; Wm. Day</td>
<td>2,466</td>
<td>J. W. Michie</td>
<td>391</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert H. Bailey</td>
<td>2,013</td>
<td>Alanson Morehouse</td>
<td>476</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isaiah Craig</td>
<td>708</td>
<td>Samuel Parker</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carneal &amp; Warfield</td>
<td>969</td>
<td>Prather Payne</td>
<td>3,490</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wm. Cummins &amp; F Notrebe</td>
<td>1,511</td>
<td>A. B. Reading</td>
<td>3,530</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Fulton</td>
<td>3,200</td>
<td>Wharton Rector</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H R H Hill &amp; P G Rives</td>
<td>3,200</td>
<td>John Snodgrass</td>
<td>2,265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Col. Andrew Hynes</td>
<td>3,426</td>
<td>Micajah Tarver</td>
<td>2,250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Hutchins &amp; R Gaines</td>
<td>702</td>
<td>Isham Talbot</td>
<td>160</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alexander Hodge</td>
<td>6,821</td>
<td>G. P. Theobalds</td>
<td>1,371</td>
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<td>John Knight</td>
<td>1,502</td>
<td>Charles Turner</td>
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<tr>
<td>John Kerr</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>George Vashon</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some absentee land barons were less than scrupulous in how they acquired property. Chester Ashley, for example, a native of Massachusetts, figured in numerous schemes. He helped rig the sale of lands granted to New Madrid
earthquake victims. He was involved in disposing of fraudulent Cherokee land donations. With Ambrose Sevier, the territorial delegate to Congress, and William Woodruff, editor of the *Arkansas Gazette*, he was accused of concealing the passage of a preemption law in order to gain time to snatch improvements from actual settlers. However, the *piece de resistance* seems to be his role in the John J. Bowie claims of 1830, in which forged signatures of Spanish governors were attached to 124 grants, supposedly made in the course of thirteen years, but all confirmed by the same three witnesses and written in no more than four persons' handwriting! Bowie, the man to whom the claims were assigned, retained Ashley and Robert Crittenden as his legal counsel, and they all objected to a fraud inquiry made by the General Land Office. Nonetheless, Ashley's personal papers contain receipts for $500 paid to two of the subscribing witnesses, as well as for travel and lodging costs for all three. A sublist of 65 "Spanish" claims shows that 22 of the grants were reassigned to Ashley and 9 to Crittenden. Arkansas historian Charles Bolton viewed the episode as evidence of "bold fraudulence . . . and the environment in which it flourished." Yet, Ashley was not disgraced. The Arkansas Superior Court allowed the forgeries to be withdrawn without reprisals, and no charges were filed. Ashley married Mary Worthington Elliot, a cousin of Stephen F. Austin, and became a director of Arkansas's Real Estate Bank. He built a fine
mansion in Little Rock, and in 1844 went to the U. S. Senate. Obviously, some viewed the public domain as their own private stock of convertible securities, and the public did not always contradict them.57

Mention should be made of the Real Estate Bank of Arkansas's role in promoting Chicot's development. The first act of Arkansas's state legislature created the bank in 1836 at the peak of the cotton boom. Sales of state bonds provided a start-up capital of $2,000,000, but the bank was supposed to repay it. Planters pledged land to buy stock in the bank, then could borrow up to half the stock's value for reinvestments in plantations. Unfortunately, the appraisers were caught up in a "flush times" euphoria and assessed the swampland at inflated levels. For example, Horace Walworth received $30,000 in bank stock by mortgaging 684 acres. Its value for tax purposes was $24,535, but for bank stock purposes, $35,400. Ambrose Sevier obtained $15,000 from a mortgage on 1,084 acres. In his case, the tax assessor rated the value at $13,975, but the bank appraiser set it at $32,000. Anthony Davies of Connecticut, Chicot's state representative and the author of the bank bill, pledged 1,926 acres and got a $30,000 loan, with only 185 acres actually in cultivation. Altogether, 28 favored investors in Chicot County obtained almost 30 percent of the bank's stock, as well as a branch office for Columbia. Had the Panic of 1837 not intervened, they might have been able to meet the bank's obligations.
As it was, the loans were not repaid, the planters did not face foreclosure, and people in other parts of the state accused them of chicanery. In November of 1837, Bank President Wilson, who also happened to be the state Speaker of the House, stabbed a bank critic to death on the floor of the Arkansas House of Representatives. When Wilson left for Texas, Anthony Davies became bank president. Chicot's leadership role expanded, and The Family obtained a major share in its operations. Judge Benjamin Johnson acted as a director in the Little Rock headquarters and Joel Johnson in the Columbia branch. With assistance from the bank, as well as from their families and factors, Chicot's gentry arrivals were typically able to buy upwards of a thousand acres for planting. They brought slaves with them to clear and cultivate the land, and bought more slaves on credit. Farming on this scale would have been inconceivable for the old wood-selling pioneers at Point Chicot. But capital, credit, and connections provided these new investors with the means for attaining wealth.58

A glance at the siblings of Vice President Richard Johnson shows what the most affluent and determined planter clans could achieve. His sister Betsy married General John Payne of Scott County, Kentucky, and bore 13 children. Her son, Romulus Payne, moved to Chicot and opened a plantation prior to 1840, as did James Peak, husband of Emeline Payne. The other Johnson sister, Sallie, married General William Ward and had 8 children. Members of that family,
such as Junius Ward, planted in Washington County, Missis­sippi. James Johnson, Richard's eldest brother, became one of Kentucky's richest men, with shipping, mining, and stagecoach interests. He also served in Congress. Benjamin Johnson, the third son, was named by President Monroe to be a federal judge in Arkansas Territory in 1821. Presidents Adams and Jackson retained him in that capacity, and in 1840 Ben owned almost 2,000 acres in Chicot, worked by 55 taxable slaves; his daughter Juliette married Senator Ambrose Sevier. The fourth son, John Telemachus Johnson, acted as William Henry Harrison's aide-de-camp and served on the Kentucky Supreme Court, in the legislature, and in Congress, but gave up politics to preach for the Christian Church. William Johnson, the sixth son, operated lumber, powder, and paper mills. Henry Johnson, seventh and youngest, opened plantations in Washington County. On the basis of swamp cotton, Henry became the richest Johnson. In 1850, his Washington County slaves numbered 442.59

Of course, the success of alluvial plantations was anything but inevitable, even for the charmed circle. For example, Joel Johnson, the fifth and least distinguished Johnson, bought riverfront land and 23 slaves in Chicot County from Fielder Offutt in 1832. Its price of $20,000 was supposed to be paid over five years. Johnson gambled that cotton markets would stay strong so his harvests would pay for the purchase. Fortunately, they did, and by 1833, Joel was the largest slaveowner there, soon owning more
than two thousand acres. It helped, of course, that his wife, Verlinda Offutt, was a relative of the seller; that Joel and his brother Ben obtained directorships in the Real Estate Bank; and that his niece had married the territorial delegate to Congress. Networking helped Joel Johnson to amass a fortune in spite of himself, whereas people like the DeHarts faded into relative obscurity. By 1840, Joel had 2,000 acres and 57 taxable slaves. Yet, rather like Wynant DeHart, he died six years later from a swamp fever contracted in Chicot County. The plantation then passed to his son Lycurgus Johnson and daughter-in-law Lydia Taylor (more planter solidarity, even among rival clans!).

With the advent of the planters, Chicot's population rapidly changed. The census of 1840 shows that the number of slaveless households dropped slightly after 1830, but the county experienced an enormous increase in the number of plantation-sized households. For example, just two of Chicot's households contained twenty or more slaves in 1830, while the county held 45 such households ten years later. In fact, 41 of Chicot's 1840 proprietors owned more slaves than its second-wealthiest slaveowner did in 1830. Demographics reflected the impact of these developments, for although Chicot's white population grew 24.4 percent from 1830 to 1840, its slave population rose almost 900 percent. Whites made up 76 percent of Chicot's population in 1830, but composed less than 30 percent by 1840.
In many respects, the county in 1840 resembled a Wild West boom town. Entrepreneurs descended with slave gangs and managers to reap quick profits in the global marketplace. They knocked its trees down as fast as possible, wrenched cotton from the soil, and gave little thought beyond. All the operatives seemed poised for flight if better prospects materialized. Except for pre-existing family and political ties, planters and their helpers were less a community than a collection of newly arrived prospectors in a common scramble for gold. As shown in Table 7.1, of 75 slaveowners assessed for taxes in Chicot in 1840, only 8 were slaveholders there in 1830. Just one --Horace Walworth--could be classed as a planter throughout the decade. And, tax records show that Chicot's economic growth in the 1830s occurred in the field crop sector rather than with the herder/grazers. Workforces for planting multiplied at much faster rates. For example, the number of taxable slaves (of working age) increased from 137 to almost 1,800 in the 1830s--an increase of 1200 percent. Because of the size of the plantations, whites were scarce in the river townships, and a comparison between the census and tax list of 1840 reveals the presence of about 39 overseers managing for absentees. Even the animal mix changed. For instance, the number of horses (for plowing) grew by 485 percent, but the number of taxable cows increased by only 130 percent. Since slaves and planters both hunted game for recreation, for food, or
to sell it to steamboats, the county's wildlife ratios also changed. A bounty was even laid on wolf scalps, to exterminate predators and aid in the preservation of domestic livestock. These are just a few ways in which the advent of planters affected the county. Before long, they would alter the landscape too, with levees.62

Of course, agrarian capitalist expansion occurred throughout the United States in the 1830s, particularly in the Lower Mississippi Valley. The nation's mentality was marked by what historian John Higham has called "boundlessness." This buoyant feeling of confidence was accompanied by faith in God, Andrew Jackson, and Henry Clay; high cotton prices, easy credit, and generous land policies; western migration, internal improvements, the removal of Native Americans, the expansion of slavery, and agitations for reforms to improve the quality of life. Government often played a part in aiding the growth conditions. For a summary of federal contributions, one should consult Paul Gates's The Farmers' Age: Agriculture, 1815-1860. On the state level, Charles Bolton's Territorial Ambition: Land and Society in Arkansas, 1800-1840, reveals how national and state policies promoted growth in the state at large. Policies of the Real Estate Bank and acts of the legislature also affected the rate of progress. However, physical infrastructure—the framework for daily life—was generated at the county level. County governments coordinated basic services such as roads, ferries, slave
patrols, and jails. The county judge and justices were the people's most visible representatives, and the involvement of the county, when empowered by state authority, was the critical factor for securing useful public works.63

One might ask at this point, when do we encounter the levees? In Chicot, economic and environmental factors delayed their construction. From 1834 to 1839, the cotton economy steamed ahead, and no significant floods transpired in this part of the Mississippi. Since most of Chicot's planters were operating on borrowed money, they naturally preferred the planting of seventeen-cent cotton to the precautionary act of levee building. True, there had been a major flood on the Arkansas in the spring of 1833, but planters scorned that part of Chicot County. George Featherstonhaugh passed through in December of 1833 and called it a region of painted trees, where the rampaging Arkansas had stained the trunks "chocolate-red" as high as forty feet from the ground. He concluded that this portion would "require a great capital to be laid out in embankments, or levees, as they are called, to secure the cotton crops." Rather than attempt to reclaim the irreclaimable, Chicot prudently gave the section of worst overflows to the new county of Desha in 1838. Frightened by flood damages in 1833, the planters in Washington County, Mississippi, secured a county levee law from their legislature. Chicot's planters, on the other hand, risked
a few more years without protection, and Old Man River rewarded their carelessness with low water.  

Undistracted by flooding, Chicot's riches multiplied and its tax revenues for 1839, paid in 1840, displayed a decade of achievement. This county which collected only $25 in territorial taxes for the year 1830 paid $3,340 into state coffers for the year 1839. The change came not from significantly higher tax rates, but from the increased value of Chicot's property. In 1840, Chicot paid the most state taxes of all Arkansas counties. It had the greatest assessed value of real estate and the largest number of slaves. Its county revenues also rose, from $206 in 1830 to about $12,000 in 1840. From a fiscal perspective, Chicot was enjoying stellar success because of the value of its cotton.

In the fall of 1836, Mississippi Valley cotton classed "good & fine" sold for 19 cents a pound in New Orleans, and even the trashy "ordinary" grade was bringing 13 cents. Two hundred bales might be worth $15,200. As a result, riverfront, lakefront, even bayou land was pressed into service where freight service could be obtained. Planters in Washington County, Mississippi, opened plantations on Lake Washington and Deer Creek. To penetrate the interior, they even issued paper money to fund a railroad. Their new levees and proposed railroad seemed to promise Washington County a technological advantage over Chicot, but the Arkansans prospered in spite of unpreparedness. The
Mississippi stayed low through several fine crop years, and planters on Lake Chicot used a bayou to take their cotton to the river. To them, levees and railroads seemed like a needless waste of money. Furthermore, when the national economy started to sour in 1837, Chicot people congratulated themselves on a timely escape from debts for public works.66

Throughout the U. S., banks and internal improvement companies issued floods of paper currency in the mid 1830s. Settlers and speculators used it to buy public lands, but much of the paper traded at substantial discounts. To protect treasury interests, the U. S. government in 1836 required people to use hard currency for public land purchases. Soon, the value of most paper money collapsed, and a shortage of specie prevented Westerners from meeting their pre-existing obligations. Credit evaporated; loans were called in. Unable to cover specie withdrawals, banks also closed. Simultaneously, a curtailment of British investment in U. S. internal improvements led to defaults and repudiations. Bonds lost their value, and uncompleted projects died for lack of capital. Then, cotton prices declined. By November of 1838, "good and fine" brought 14 cents, "middling" fell to 11 cents, and "ordinary" found no buyers. Falling cotton prices meant reduced incomes, as well as lower land and slave values. The need for acreage slackened, and by October of 1839, notes of the Lake Washington and Deer Creek Railroad Company were trading at
a 50 percent discount. Meanwhile, the Arkansas Bank paper that supported Chicot's growth traded at a discount of just 8 to 10 percent, and the county owed no public debts. This was good news. Soon, though, the situation worsened. Levy's *Price Current* reported in December of 1839 that "since hearing from Britain the cotton crop is gloomy." 67

Overproduction, saturated world markets, unsold inventories, mill closings, and stop-purchase orders caused sudden dismay to swamp planters on the Mississippi, for steamboats were already en route to New Orleans at the end of 1839 stuffed with the year's cotton crop. A writer for the New Orleans *Times Picayune* said that "if cotton were a nutritive plant, we should say some modern Pharaoh, anticipating a seven years famine, was storing his graineries." Cotton buyers digested bad news from England, and prices at New Orleans fell in December to 6 1/4 cents for "ordinary" and 8 cents for "middling." Four months later, in March of 1840, "ordinary" lowered to 5 1/4 cents, with "middling" at 6 cents, and about 10 cents for "good & fine." In less than a year, cotton had lost almost half its value. 68

Having sunk time and money into illiquid plantation improvements, 1840 was not a time to quit but to retrench and save the mortgage. Swamp planters accepted risk, and they believed in the following principle: "When you find a better place for your money, put it there." No other form of slave-based enterprise held out the hope of better rewards, and, of course, investment counselors always warn
against selling in adverse markets. After all, in the big picture, alluvial cotton lands in good climate zones were still excellent investments. The Missouri Compromise meant that, prior to 1845, bottomlands on the Middle Mississippi were the final frontier for American planters. Accessible, elevated, and cheap swampland in southeast Arkansas and northwest Mississippi was not only a finite commodity, it was probably the best remaining land left open to slavery in the country.69

Some economists in the United States recognized that such swamplands ought to be in cultivation, because the country's position as the world's predominant cotton supplier depended on its ability to sustain or increase market share. Commissioner Ellsworth of the Patent Office pointed out that U. S. cotton production increased 7 percent per annum from 1824 to 1837, but only by 4.4 percent after 1837, and by just 3 percent per year in the early 1840s. He also noted that climatic conditions limited the prime cotton-growing zone to an area one degree of latitude above and below the Arkansas-Louisiana state line. The ideal region contained the counties of Chicot and Desha in Arkansas, Washington and Warren in Mississippi, and the Louisiana parishes of Tensas, Madison, and Carroll. Further north, above the mouth of White River, Ellsworth said "the crop . . . is uncertain," whereas "below 32 degrees its quality very much deteriorates." Pine lands in these zones grew inferior cotton, could not
be efficiently manured, and were generally inaccessible for water transport. There being no substitute for alluvium's natural fertility and the Delta's navigable waterways, Ellsworth clearly thought that planters on the Middle Mississippi should cherish and improve their accessible swampland as a limited resource of great commercial value and even national importance. If cotton could not be produced in sufficient quantities, the United States might lose control of the world market to competitors in Bengal, Surat, Madras, Brazil, and Egypt. This, at a time when cotton supplied the bulk of America's exports and its balance of trade. Although Chicot only contained 232 households in 1840, in Ellsworth's panoramic vision its large cotton growers bore a weighty responsibility. They, their overseers and slaves were pillars of the Republic and a key ingredient in the success of its foreign policy.  

Quantified by township, the 1840 census clearly shows where Chicot's slaves and planters were most numerous. River townships held the most slaves and largest plantations, namely: Oden Township, around Columbia, which had 924 slaves (81 percent of its population), and Louisiana Township, in Chicot's southeast corner, with 845 slaves (89 percent of its population). Plantations worked by smaller gangs surrounded Lake Chicot in Old River Township (392 slaves, 86 percent of its population). Floods from the Arkansas inhibited plantation growth in Franklin Township in the northern part of the county. Chicot's least
improved township, Franklin's 95 slaves composed 42 percent of its minute population. In Bayou Mason Township, whites and small farmers predominated with 149 slaves (33 percent of its population). Furthest from the riverfront were two thinly populated townships on Chicot's west side: De Bastrop Township with 102 slaves (38 percent of its population), and Bayou Bartholemew Township with 191 slaves (61 percent of its population). Altogether, Chicot contained 2,698 slaves to 1,108 whites in 1840. On the riverfront, racial disproportions reached the greatest extremes. Oden and Louisiana Townships housed 1,769 slaves but only 320 whites, and that included the merchants, professionals, and tradesmen of Columbia.71

In discussing plantation personnel, it would be a distortion to ignore the role of overseers in Chicot's development. Approximately thirty-nine overseers acted as heads of household in Chicot in 1840. On many plantations, they were in charge of production and crisis management, as well as the superintendence and deployment of labor. Greatly outnumbered by slaves, adrift in exposed and dangerous situations, many overseers died in the swamps, or eventually retired to settle as independent farmers. Table 7.3 lists their names, the number of slaves they supervised, the number engaged in farming, and where the overseer resided in 1850. If disaster struck, as in 1840, they and the resident planters were the first line of defense in the maintenance of order.72
### TABLE 7.3

CHICOT COUNTY OVERSEEERS AS HOUSEHOLD HEADS, 1840,
FROM COMPARISONS OF CENSUS AND TAX RECORDS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of Slaves in Household</th>
<th>Overseer's Name</th>
<th>No. Engaged in Agriculture</th>
<th>Where Living, 1850</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Samuel Blanks</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Sevier Co. AR?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56</td>
<td>Alexander Brown</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Sevier Co. AR?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Benjamin Burch</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Chicot Co. AR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Richard Buseley</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Carroll P. LA?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>George Camp</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>DeSoto Co. MS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>Henry H. Collins</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Chicot Co. AR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>78</td>
<td>Elie T. Daimond</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>Phillips Co.Ar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>William Davidson</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Pulaski Co. AR?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57</td>
<td>Mitchell S. Duke</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Sabine Co. TX?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Edwin Gaines</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>JEFFERSON C.MS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69</td>
<td>Samuel Galloway</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Jefferson C.MS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Dennis Gibson</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Claiborne C.MS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>James A. Gorman</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Chicot Co. AR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>John D. Heard</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Phillips Co. AR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>Spencer C. Heard</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Pulaski Co. AR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Reese Hewitt</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Phillips C. AR?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>J. B. Holt</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Caldwell Co. TX?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58</td>
<td>James H. Hunnicutt</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Chicot Co. AR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Abram Hyner</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Phillips Co. AR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>E. S. Johnson</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>HotSpring C. AR</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>Peter Johnson</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Neesom Lamb</td>
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<tr>
<td>73</td>
<td>Leon Lafeyre</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>C. C. McDonald</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Union Par LA?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>Benjamin Melton</td>
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<td>Caldwell Co. TX?</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Joseph L. Mercer</td>
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<td>Chicot Co. AR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Alexander H. New</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Kemper Co. MS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>William New</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Robert Rafferty</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Kemper Co. MS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67</td>
<td>Greenberry Rainey</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>Samuel Rector</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Kemper Co. MS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>117</td>
<td>Aaron Register</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>Chicot Co. AR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Daniel B. Roberts</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Rapides P. LA?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>John M. Robinson</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Chicot Co. AR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Robert B. Rowe</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Dallas Co. AR?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64</td>
<td>Thomas Saunders</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>Chicot Co. AR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>Tully Sawyers</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Chicot Co. AR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Grandison Smith</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Union Co. AR?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>James Williamson</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Chicot Co. AR</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As if the collapse of cotton prices was not enough to handle in 1840, planters in Chicot finally dealt with Old Man River. After a few years of beginners' luck, the
flood of 1840 demonstrated that without levees, Chicot County was a fool's paradise. Until then, landowners avoided levee construction and got away with it. However, even if some of them did care for nothing but "money, money, money, and whiskey," in 1840 they learned to also care for levees. Those homely piles of dirt were the only thing that might save them from ruin. Notwithstanding, the virtues of preparedness only appeared after the fact.

Deep snow, warm temperatures, and heavy rain in the Mississippi's drainage basin caused the river to rise quickly in 1840. New Orleans papers complained of rain in February that made streets "navigable for small boats." According to one journalist, "cats and dogs, pitchforks [and] cataracts . . . fell from the skies . . . in such a manner as would have astonished old Noah." Meanwhile, ice and snow melted swiftly in the North, where land had been cleared along upper tributaries. Deforestation speeded drainage, and the runoff carried vast amounts of timber. Vicksburg's Daily Whig warned of driftwood and high water threatening the levees. By early March, the Mississippi had overflowed its natural banks as far as Memphis, but water levels were not expected to peak until June. The Natchez Free Trader spoke of the river's "stormy grandeur," as if the water longed to "roll over the levees and inundate the shores." According to the New Orleans Commercial Bulletin, "the cry of the upper waters is still they come, they come!" It warned people to "look well to their
levees, and be prepared for the worst." Chicot, of course, had no continuous levees, but its neighbor, Washington County, Mississippi, did. If overflows occurred, the water excluded from Washington would simply pour onto the fertile, mortgaged, and negligent County of Chicot.\(^7^3\)

What existed in Chicot County that was liable to be damaged? A tax report for the fiscal year 1839, printed in the *Arkansas State Gazette* of November 18, 1840, gives very definite information. An Auditor's Office recapitulation, based on reports from county sheriffs, showed that Chicot contained 192,918 acres of privately owned land with an assessed value of almost $1.5 million. There were 54 town lots at Columbia and Villemont. They, and the buildings upon them, were valued at almost $80,000. Retailers in the towns owned about $25,000 worth of merchandise. The 1,648 taxable slaves (aged eight to sixty years) carried an assessed value of nearly $1 million. As to livestock, there were 756 adult horses worth about $50,000; 213 mules worth approximately $15,000; and nearly 3,000 adult cattle worth almost $30,000. Industrial facilities, other than gins and presses, seem to have been absent, for the county contained no taxable sawmills, tanyards, or distilleries. Luxury goods were likewise scarce. For example, the state exempted household furniture from taxation if worth less than $400 per family. On that basis, Chicot County contained only $1,215 worth of taxable furniture, and just one household owned a carriage. However, the net worth of
Chicot's taxable property at the beginning of 1840 was set at $2,652,516. In 1840, this total was by far the largest single-county figure from across the state, for Chicot was Arkansas's richest and most highly improved county. Its planters watched the Mississippi, therefore, in 1840, with fear and trepidation.74

A playful letter to the Arkansas Gazette claimed that the high water in 1840 was Van Buren's fault. According to this correspondent, the episode showed the President's unfitness for office, while the very frogs croaked "Harrison and Reform." Steamboat captains watched woodcutters on the banks, who normally refused less than $3.50 a cord for firewood, hailing boats to take it for $2 rather than see the logs float away. Vicksburg's Daily Whig viewed this as proof of the flood's seriousness. On the other hand, the New Orleans Bee commented that if overflows must come, 1840 was a good time for it, since the year's cotton crop would probably not bring more than $20 a bale. "Ordinary" sold for as little as $21 in March and "good and fine" for no more than $40. The Bee advised Delta planters to grow corn instead. In case of a flood, corn would mature even if planted after the water receded.75

Chicot had little choice but to follow the Bee's recommendation, for it was wedged between two overflows. Editors in Arkansas spoke of rain that "ran through the streets of Little Rock like a river." Fences and corn washed away in the Arkansas's floodplain, and "failures of
the mail must be expected." In the alluvial interior, cattle and livestock drowned in the swamps; bayous and sloughs backed over clearings; water stood on the fields; fixtures floated away. The Arkansas Gazette mournfully counseled, "We must anticipate ruined crops, and a sickly autumn." The lower Arkansas, unable to drain, resembled "a vast ocean." Chicot flooded from the Arkansas due to the lack of levees in Desha County, and overflows in Arkansas's Delta were reported from Pine Bluff to the Mississippi. Meanwhile, on the Mississippi itself, Vicksburg papers quoted Captain Russell of the Empress as saying that one more foot in the channel would cause a general overflow: "the ruin to our planters on the river will be immense." In that event, Chicot's frontlands and backlands would sink from the west and east simultaneously. 76

The captain of the steamer Independence, who passed Chicot during the flood, saw 500 slaves working on levees in Bachelor's Bend and about the same number engaged in levee work at Lakeport Bend. They were desperately trying to save plantation improvements, but most, if not all, of the activity was taking place in Washington County, where levees already existed. Even if some of Chicot's planters built levees prior to 1840 on their own plantations, it was too late during the flood to construct a line for the whole county. The captain indicated that riverfront properties in southern Chicot were "nearly covered," and the Arkansas Gazette said overflows had "nearly ruined" several Chicot
County plantations by mid May. Then, after coating the county in thick slime, the waters receded. On June 3, 1840, the Gazette noted with satisfaction that "the [Arkansas] river is falling; so is Whiggery. There is hardly water sufficient for boats of light draught to reach Fort Gibson; of the latter there is scarcely enough left to swear by." Water levels in the Mississippi fell too, and the Natchez Free Trader now proclaimed that "cotton prospects in Miss. are grand almost beyond parallel where the soil has suffered no inundation." Leveed planters in Washington County rejoiced at the salvation of their crops. Chicot, on the other hand, picked its way out of wreckage. A newspaper reported that Arkansas's newly elected U. S. Senator Ambrose Sevier had returned to Chicot on "pressing personal business," namely "damage done to his plantation by overflow." If the flooding was bad enough to extract a new Senator from Washington, one can be sure it impressed other planters as well. The abstract knowledge of what a flood might do was suddenly converted into conviction based on experience. In Chicot, the reality of dead cows, malarial disease, lost planting time, mortgage payments, forfeited income, and costly repairs could not be evaded. The county's ability to compete with other cotton regions had been damaged, and even its credit-worthiness was called into question.

Other economic consequences drove the point further home. With so much cotton land out of production in 1840,
short crops resulted. Demand increased and prices rose.
By the end of the year, leveed planters who escaped the
flood could sell "ordinary" lint for 7 3/4 cents a pound,
"middling" for 8 5/8, and "good and fine" for 12 1/2. An
"ordinary" bale worth $21 at the start of 1840 attained a
value of $31 by year's end (a 48 percent increase), while
"good and fine" bales rose from $40 to $50 (up 25 percent).
Corn, on the other hand, experienced "small sales," mostly
for domestic consumption. So much for the Bee's advice.
Chicot's planters lost at least a year's income, besides
damages, and the scale of their losses may be inferred by
contrasting the county's tax revenues for 1839 and 1840.
Items assessed for taxation covered all a planter's major
capital investments, such as land, slaves, and livestock.
Based on the worth of these assets, Chicot County taxes
collected in 1840 (for the year 1839) amounted to $11,757,
whereas those of 1841 (for the year 1840) yielded only
$6,952. In other words, the assessed value of the county's
property declined 41 percent from 1839 to the end of 1840.
It took until the end of 1842, after two years of arduous
labor, for the county to recover its former position. The
tax yield for 1842 reached $11,942. Meanwhile, though,
Chicot's leveed competitors had surged ahead. 79

A census taker in Washington County became so over­
wrought by the excitement of bumper crops and rising prices
in 1840 that he recorded cotton production for each planter
in the county. The standard census form did not require
crop information, but he inserted it anyway. His figures emphasize how badly Chicot fared from losing its lint to overflow that year. With cooperative, vigilant upkeep, the levees of Washington prevented flooding, and in 1840 its planters reported a crop of 32,463 bales. Figured at an average price of $40.50 per bale (halfway between the year-end low for "ordinary" and the high for "good and fine"), the county's cotton production sold for about $1,315,000. Putting this in perspective, the sum represented approximately half the assessed value of Chicot's whole portfolio of taxable assets at the start of 1840! Planters in Washington County, like Stephen Duncan of Natchez and Robert J. Turnbull of Vicksburg, formerly of Charleston, hugged their levees all the way to the bank (pun intended). Why? The census shows that Duncan's 173 slaves in Washington County raised 857 bales (worth about $44,000), while Turnbull's 158 slaves grew 720 bales (worth about $30,000). Other proprietors prospered as well, according to their workforce and acreage. Mentally speaking, the Washington County planters were equipped to build levees. Several of its planters came from the counties of Adams, Jefferson, Claiborne, and Warren in southwest Mississippi, where they had already become accustomed to the need for levees through their families' ownership of plantations in Louisiana parishes such as Pointe Coupee, Concordia, and Tensas. In those places, they routinely submitted to the levee codes of parish governments in building and upkeep.
Why not apply the same discipline to their undertakings in Mississippi? Habits of preparedness saved their fortunes in 1840 and presented a stark contrast to the devastation across the river. 80

The humiliation those Mississippians inflicted on the planters of Chicot must have been bitter indeed. What made the rivalry even worse was that several of Chicot’s leading proprietors—such as the Johnsons, Offutts, Worthingtons, and Wards—had relatives in Washington County who saved and sold leveed crops. No one likes to be outdone by a relative on a comparable investment. Too, it was not as if Chicot’s planters had never been warned. Washington County’s leading levee advocate, William Hunt, had served as Chicot’s county surveyor from 1829 to 1836, and he must have frequently warned the people about the dangers of overflows. Unfortunately, the Arkansans ignored his advice. Until 1840, they had no compelling reason to listen. 81

The career of William Hunt demonstrates what a man of talent and character could do in the swamps, with luck, intelligence, and sufficient labor. A native of Vermont, Hunt moved to Natchez in the mid 1820s to engage in business. He learned that cotton planting offered greater rewards, but also knew that his slim resources prevented him from buying cotton fields in the already-improved Natchez District. Instead, Hunt discussed his plantation dreams with a friend, businessman Thomas B. Warfield, who

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had similar hopes. Together, they contemplated the potential of unimproved swamps in northwest Mississippi. Using a contrarian strategy, these would-be planters planned to buy what other people did not yet value, or things whose worth had been temporarily compromised by sudden catastrophes. Consequently, during the flood of 1828, when many aspiring landowners were vowing never to set foot in a swamp, Warfield and Hunt scouted the riverside for high ground. Warfield, not liking to get muddy, traveled upriver on a steamboat and declared he would buy the highest vacant land above overflow he could see from its decks. Hunt, a part-time surveyor, came into more intimate contact with the terrain. Near Point Chicot, they chose adjacent sites on the Mississippi's east bank which they developed as cotton plantations called "Highland" and "LaGrange." Hunt began his improvements first. In 1830, he was at "LaGrange" with a household of 40 slaves and one other white man. For extra money, he rowed back and forth to Chicot to do surveying. Warfield, meanwhile, first appeared on the Washington County tax rolls in 1833 with 28 slaves making improvements. Many single men of gentry status lived in Washington County in those days, hoping to strike it rich as planters. So did the families of Abraham and John DeHart, Jr., but they moved in different circles. As a member of the suave and convivial "Bachelor's Bend" dinner club, near what is now the city of Greenville, Hunt courted and married Prudence Blackburn of Kentucky, "one of
the gentlest and noblest of women." Her influence and breeding helped to cement Hunt's position as a Southern gentleman. Soon, politicians extinguished Washington County's Indian titles, and Hunt was able to buy the ground he had chosen. He made improvements, including levees, during the 1830s. By reinvesting his earnings while cotton was valuable, Hunt added to his labor force, so that by 1840 he owned 117 slaves. The census of 1840 shows that he employed 90 of them in agriculture and raised a crop of 750 bales that year, worth about $30,000. Warfield's 102 slaves grew a smaller crop, 523 bales, but only 67 of his people were field hands. At any rate, neither man had room to complain. Profits from leveed cotton catapulted them into the first rank of Delta cotton growers. Locals honored the Yankee Hunt with the title of "Major," and he became president of the county's Board of Police. They even attributed the success of their levees to Hunt because of his "unusual business capacity and knowledge of the conditions and men to be dealt with." Meanwhile, his former employers across the river in Chicot sat mud-bound and deeper in debt.82

Bluntly stated, loss of income and investments, coupled with shame and embarrassment, finally triggered a consensus for levee building in Chicot County in 1840. Amid the wreckage, its individualist and self-centered planters mobilized for action and secured a county levee law from the Arkansas state legislature. Their stress and
humiliation had forged a new levee-building community, but one which now faced an old challenge—that of transforming a desire for dryness into the actual dirt, upkeep, and administration of a local levee system. The task would require a greater degree of organization and submission than they were accustomed to, but levees would well repay their efforts in security and fortune.83

ENDNOTES

1Landscape composite from William Thorndale and William Dollarhide, Map Guide to the U. S. Federal Censuses, 1790-1920 (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1987), 33-34; Thomas Foti, "The River's Gifts and Curses," in Jeannie Whayne and Willard B. Gatewood, eds., The Arkansas Delta: Land of Paradox (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1993), 30-51; Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Southern Arkansas (Chicago: Goodspeed Publishing Co., 1890), 1058; Marion Bragg, Historic Names and Places on the Lower Mississippi River (Vicksburg: Mississippi River Commission, 1977), 127-28; O. M. Blanton, "Some Washington County Genealogy," in William D. McCain and Charlotte Capers, eds., Memoirs of Henry Tillinghast Ireys: Papers of the Washington County Historical Society, 1910-1915 (Jackson: Mississippi Department of Archives and History and Mississippi Historical Society, 1954), 337; Amos Stoddard, Sketches, Historical and Descriptive, of Louisiana (Philadelphia: Mathew Carey, 1812; Baton Rouge: Claitor's Publishing Division, 1974), 202. O. M. Blanton explained that Shirt-tail Bend derived its name from squatters who sold wood to steamboats. When boats docked at night to buy wood, the sleepy squatters came down in their nightshirts to receive the money. This diverted the gentry; they sold wood also, but had slaves or overseers to tend to sales at odd hours. One is reminded of Kate Stone's astonished reaction to news that a nearby planter's slaves had run away during the Union invasion of Madison Parish, La.: "The ladies actually had to get up and get breakfast!" John Q. Anderson, ed., Brokenburn: The Journal of Kate Stone, 1861-1868 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995), 173. With the passing of squatters from the riverside, Shirt-tail Bend became known as "American Bend," and the planters who replaced them assumed the role of presiding patriot. Sir Charles Lyell, a visiting British geologist, pronounced the Bends to be singularly lacking in variety. "The traveler becomes tired of always seeing a caving bank on one side and an advancing sand-bar, covered with willows and poplars, on the other."


Evidence for the backcountry's interest in certain types of internal improvements appears throughout the antebellum Chicot County Court Minutes, 1830-35, 1840-59, Arkansas History Commission, Little Rock. A desire for navigation improvements on a large scale is seen in a petition from the General Assembly of Arkansas to the U. S. Congress, 26 November 1838. Residents requested federal aid for clearing timber from Bayou Bartholemew, a 250-mile-long stream running from near Pine Bluff, Ark., to the Ouachita River, near Monroe, La. Petitioners said the bayou could carry steamboats of 75 to 100 tons' burden for eight months per year if cleared. This would not only assist settlers, it would promote public land sales and enlarge the national treasury. Of course, the petition said "the expense . . . would be trifling, compared with the benefits to be derived." Acts Passed at the Second Session of the General Assembly of the State of Arkansas (Little Rock: Edward Cole, 1839), 130-31. See also p. 135, a petition for a national military road from Columbia, Chicot County, to intersect the military road from...
Natchitoches to Fort Towson. In 1833, 125 Chicot County citizens signed a petition to Ambrose Sevier, Arkansas's territorial delegate to Congress, asking for federal aid to dig a canal from the "Washataw" River to Bayou Bartholemew, to unite its waters to the Mississippi. Etheridge, 66.

Hardships of transportation from bayou to riverfront also prevailed in Washington County, Miss. W. W. Stone's memoir of pioneers tells about the road from the bayou known as Deer Creek to a shipping point on the Mississippi:

It is difficult for a most vivid imagination to conceive how desperately impassable this road became during the winter season. Picture to yourself a heavy stout wagon, drawn by six mules or four yoke of cattle, loaded with one bale of cotton to ship, with a return load of a barrel of pickled pork and a barrel of flour, requiring two and sometimes three days to make the trip, and you have not fiction but actual fact. This condition was endured for many years. Let him who will say that those were not plucky people.


Summary of the improvement interests of lake planters derived from a study of Chicot County Court Minutes, 1830-35, 1840-59, Arkansas History Commission. Gradual unions of interests in diverse geographic areas--once they all had access to cotton markets and marketing facilities--have been explored in such works as Joyce E. Chaplin, "Creating a Cotton South in Georgia and South Carolina, 1760-1815," Journal of Southern History 57 (May 1991): 171-200; Lacy K. Ford, "Self-Sufficiency, Cotton, and Economic Development in the South Carolina Upcountry, 1800-1860," Journal of Economic History 45 (June 1985); Rachel N. Klein, Unification of a Slave State: The Rise of the Planter Class in the South Carolina Backcountry, 1760-1808 (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1990); and Joseph P. Reidy, From Slavery to Agrarian Capitalism in the


6Fortescue Cuming, Sketches of a Tour to the Western Country (Pittsburgh: Cramer, Spear, & Eichbaum, 1810), 273-74.


8Ibid., 199-200. A number of miles downstream, the keelboat's Captain Richardson noted "several small cabins, the water almost in them, where we went and got some milk & wood." William Richardson, Journal from Boston to the Western Country and down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers to New Orleans by William Richardson, 1815-1816 (New York: Privately printed for Valve Pilot Corp., 1940), 29. J. G. Flugel, "Pages from a Journal of a Voyage Down the Mississippi to New Orleans in 1817," ed. by Felix Flugel, Louisiana Historical Quarterly 7 (July 1924): 417. In the early days of the settlement, Native Americans are said to have harassed people at Point Chicot, but left the Le Fevre family undisturbed because Madame Le Fevre was herself an Indian. Doubtless the husband was, or had been, a professional hunter. Frederick William Allsop, Folklore of Romantic Arkansas (New York: Grolier Club, 1931), I, 182.

9A good overview of circumstances affecting the pace of western settlement can be found in Ray Allen Billington, Westward Expansion: A History of the American Frontier, 4th ed. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1974), especially pp. 298-312; 394-97. Reacting against negative and value-laden assessments of the period following the War of 1812, historian Daniel Feller sought to explain the Jacksonian...

For 1820 Arkansas County population statistics by township, see Morgan, 90-91, 95. Changes in county boundaries appear in Thorndale and Dollarhide, 32-34.

Baird, 65, 68; Arkansas Gazette, 27 December 1825. On Crittenden's character, see Farrar Newberry, "Some Notes on Robert Crittenden," Arkansas Historical Quarterly 16 (Autumn 1957): 243-56; Lonnie J. White, "The Election of 1827 and the Conway-Crittenden Duel," Arkansas Historical Quarterly 19 (Winter 1960): 293-313; ibid., Politics on the Southwestern Frontier: Arkansas Territory, 1819-1836 (Memphis: Memphis State University Press, 1964); and John J. Crittenden Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University. Crittenden's career never recovered from the scandal over his attempt in 1831 to trade his mansion to the territorial government for ten sections of land which Congress granted to fund the building of a capitol. He killed Henry Conway, Arkansas's territorial delegate to Congress, in a duel in 1827, thereby incurring the wrath of "The Family" which composed the leadership of Arkansas's Democratic Party. Family candidate Ambrose H. Sevier, Conway's cousin, succeeded Conway in office in preference to Robert Oden and Richard Searcy, whom Crittenden championed. A heated attack on Crittenden is found in a letter to the Arkansas Gazette by Judge Thomas Eskridge. Composed at Batesville on 13 July 1833 and reprinted in the Kentucky Gazette, the letter refuted Crittenden's accusations in the shocking terms and painted him as a consummate villain. After Crittenden died in 1834, his clique became Arkansas's Whigs. See the Kentucky Gazette, 10 August 1833.

Franklin Wharton, "Journal," 12 June 1825, in Wharton (Edward Clifton) Papers, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, LSU. The journal dates from 3 May to 7 July 1825. Wharton wrote during a fast friendship formed with William H. Parrott, protege of Robert Crittenden. Eskridge sneered at Parrott as one of Crittenden's friends who "render him ridiculous." Kentucky Gazette, 10 August 1833. Wharton felt friendly to Parrott because: he was from Georgetown, D. C.; they were both young attorneys; and "he, like myself, had once been in prosperous circumstances and now was seeking his fortune in this new country." Wharton's opinions may have moderated later, for he was but twenty-one when he composed the journal and had known Parrott only a short time. On the same trip, Wharton also admired Eskridge, "whose soft and bland manner were only equalled by the elegance of his form," and with whom Wharton "felt every disposition to cultivate a friendship." Not content to attack Indians on their refusal to make improvements, Parrott also impugned their morals. It would be well to mention that one of Wharton's companions, a Miss Duvall, sternly criticized Wharton's second-hand viewpoints and rebuked him to his face after he quarreled with Harris, a Cherokee in their
party. Wharton, 9 June, 13 June, 25 June 1825. For a study of the effects of Benthamite utilitarianism on the ideas of a chemistry professor who served as president of South Carolina College from 1820 to 1834, see Daniel Kilbride, "Slavery and Utilitarianism: Thomas Cooper and the Mind of the Old South," Journal of Southern History 59 (August 1993): 469-86.

14Wharton, 3 May, 1-3 June, 6 June, 3-5 July 1825. The meaning of removal for the disposed can be found in James Taylor Carson, "Searching for the Bright Path: The Mississippi Choctaws from Pre-History to Removal," (Ph.D. diss.: University of Kentucky, 1996); and Baird, 61-80.


16"Chicot County," in Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Southern Arkansas, 1061, 1064-65. The author informed his readers that Chicot County was only 4/5ths alluvial, while East Carroll Parish was entirely so. Perceptions of hunters and farmers are explored in Daniel J. Herman, "American Natives: The Farmer, the Naturalist, and the Hunter in the Genesis of an Indigenous Identity" (Ph.D. diss.: University of California, Berkeley, 1995). As to the concept of swamp planters having "built" the land they developed, comparisons are in order to environmental histories of the Low Country on the eastern seaboard, such as Peter A. Coclanis, The Shadow of a Dream: Economic Life and Death in the South Carolina Low Country, 1670-1920 (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); Bernard L. Herman, The Stolen House (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992); Mart A. Stewart, "Land Use and Landscapes: Environment and Social Change in Coastal Georgia, 1680-1815" (Ph.D. diss.: Emory University, 1988); ibid., "Rice, Water, and Power: Landscapes of Domination and Resistance in the Lowcountry, 1790-1880," Environmental History Review 15 (Fall 1991): 47-64; and ibid., "What Nature Suffers to Groe": Life, Labor, and Landscape on the Georgia Coast, 1680-1920 (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996).
17Population data derived from Arkansas County tax lists, 1818-1821, in Morgan; also, Arkansas and Chicot County taxpayers, in Ronald Vern Jackson and Gary Ronald Teeple, eds., *Arkansas Sheriff's Censuses, 1823 & 1829* (Bountiful, Utah: Accelerated Indexing Systems, 1976); and microfilms of original Chicot County tax assessment books, 1830, 1834, at the Arkansas History Commission, Little Rock. Mobility is addressed in Donald H. Parkerson, "How Mobile Were Nineteenth-Century Americans?," *Historical Methods* 15 (Summer 1982): 99-109. John W. Monette reported the flood of 1823 extending west from the Mississippi to Bayou Macon and Ouachita River. Monette, "The Mississippi Floods," *Mississippi Historical Society Publications* 7 (1903): 443-444. The flood of 1828 was exacerbated in Chicot by high water in the Arkansas, Ouachita, and Yazoo. Monette said "thousands of cattle, horses, and stock of all kinds were drowned or died of famine upon the eminences to which they had fled." Monette, 444-45. He does not note the flood of 1833; its effects were more-or-less local, due to overflows from the Arkansas within its own floodplain. These would, however, have been felt in Washington County, Mississippi, which lay directly opposite the worst flooding in Arkansas. Thus, the flood of 1833, though limited in extent, did prompt the passage of a levee law and the construction of levees in the county of Washington. On the Arkansas River, according to the *Arkansas Gazette*, 12 June 1833, "the distress . . . is indescribable." Areas which were never known to flood sank under several feet of water. In other places, water rose as much as fifteen feet higher "than it has ever been known before the settlement of the country." At the height of the flood of 1840, the Arkansas was still five feet below its high water mark from 1833. *Arkansas Gazette*, 12 June 1833, 13 May 1840.

idea that the American masses were uninterested in profit and contends that Democrats, especially the leaders, were just as elite, self-seeking, and avaricious as their rivals. The concept of a "market revolution" occurring in the Jacksonian backwoods is encompassed in a political context in Harry L. Watson, *Liberty and Power: The Politics of Jacksonian America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1990). Watson viewed the era's democratization and party developments as an outgrowth of market transformation, in which "millions of economic actors... began to live lives according to the shifting signals of prices, hoping always to maximize profit in an economy based on buying and selling." Watson, 28. Certainly this is seen throughout my dissertation, for the planters who moved into swamps acted in almost perfect synchronization with increases in the price of commodities they meant to produce. Land values, and the stimulus for levee construction, rose accordingly. Watson rightly noted, however, that the degree of market involvement varied considerably by region and class. An entire issue of the *Journal of the Early Republic* 12 (Winter 1992) was devoted to discussion of Sellers's *Market Revolution*, and historiography on the question of agrarian capitalism, as well as the impact of market involvement on planters and plain folk, is abundant. For example, James Oakes, in *The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982), contends that yeomen and small slaveholders were capitalists just like their economic superiors. Eugene D. Genovese's numerous works, such as *The World the Slaveholders Made* (New York: Random House, 1969), show an evolving picture of slaveowning as a patriarchy with an anti-capitalist and feudal dimension which included a non-bourgeois preoccupation with honor and noblesse oblige. Morton Rothstein's "The Ante-bellum South as a Dual Economy: A Tentative Hypothesis," *Agricultural History* 41 (October 1967): 373-82, suggests that planters participated in a capitalist market economy, but that the backcountry farmers labored within an undeveloped, precapitalist economy. *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850-1890* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), by Steven Hahn, explained Hahn's conviction that the upcountry preferred a non-market, subsistence ethos but was forced or lured into capitalist relations by such devices as estray laws, railroads, and credit via crop liens. Throughout the debate, some scholars take extreme positions which others try to qualify. Michael Merrill's "Cash is Good to Eat: Self-Sufficiency and Exchange in the Rural Economy of the United States," *Radical History Review* 3 (1977): 42-71; and James Henretta, "Families and Farms: Mentalite in Pre-Industrial America," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 35 (1978): 3-32, lead the way in asserting the preponderance of a non-capitalist, communal, and subsistence-oriented "moral" economy for many early Americans. Allan Kulikoff, using a
primarily Marxist perspective in *The Agrarian Origins of American Capitalism* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992), argued for a culture clash between subsistence farmers and market farmers. Kulikoff depicted semi-savage yeomen in communal, anti-capitalist communities at odds with bourgeois farmers whose values of individualism, commerce, domesticity, and child nurture meshed neatly with the interests of planters who enlisted the bourgeois against the yeomen. In Kulikoff's view, the American Revolution promoted the destruction of the yeoman economy by enshrining the dominance of capitalists. Then, the Civil War confirmed the victory of capitalism through the subservience of free labor to industrialization.

Historians less wedded to theory have, thankfully, produced less abstract explanations for the actions of Southern farmers. Lacy K. Ford, Jr., in "Self-Sufficiency, Cotton, and Economic Development in the South Carolina Upcountry, 1800-1860," *Journal of Economic History* 45 (1985): 260-67, reasons that the planting of cotton as a cash crop was itself an act of self-sufficiency. The growing of small amounts by non- or small-slaveowning households helped them escape creditors and accumulate cash reserves. For most families, it did not preclude the planting of foodstuffs required for subsistence. This, of course, is what I found to be the case among the small leveed farmers of the Acadian Coast and the parish of St. John the Baptist.

An eloquent defense of squatters and their preemption rights can be found in a petition from the General Assembly of Arkansas to the U. S. Congress, 16 December 1838:

The pioneer of the western wilds is not a lawless intruder, who settles upon the lands of the government with the unrighteous design of robbing the public, and obtaining by trespass a claim against the government. He is, in truth, the greatest benefactor of the public. Had it not been for his adventurous and daring spirit . . . civilization would not at this day have reached the Mississippi. The wealthy . . . are not the men to penetrate the wilderness. The pioneer must first, with his axe and rifle, open the path. The country must be somewhat settled, before there arises any demand for the public lands.

Acts Passed at the Second Session of the General Assembly of the State of Arkansas, 131-32. Of course, the wealthy meant to buy preemptions once the squatters had made improvements.


20 Christopher Owen to Joseph Owen, Deed of Gift, 11 November 1807, Ouachita Parish, La. Deed Book A/B, 54; Estate of Joseph Owen, 7 May 1814, Ouachita Parish, La. Probate Book A, 182-84; Prenuptial Agreement between Jane DeHart Owen and James C. Cooper, 13 November 1815, Ouachita Parish, La.; Estate inventory and sales records, 29 December 1829-1 May 1830, Probate File, Estate of James C. Cooper, Ouachita Parish, La.; Christopher C. Davenport, Looking Backward: Memoirs of the Early Settlement of Morehouse Parish (Mer Rouge, La.: Mer Rouge Democrat, 1911), 33. William W. Owen, son of Joseph Owen and Jane DeHart, remained on the family land. In 1860, William Owen's real estate (849 acres) was valued at $33,900 and his personal estate at $13,875. Besides the Owens, the household contained about fifteen slaves, plus three white hired hands and a school teacher. William's half-brother, James C. Cooper, Jr., lived on 800 acres nearby and owned about twenty slaves. Acquaintances remembered them as stock-grazers, as well as cotton planters. For example, William Owen reported a crop of 40 bales of cotton in 1860, but also owned 36 milk cows, 62 beef cattle, 12 sheep, and 100 swine. The farm of James C. Cooper, Jr., was more commercially oriented. He owned 12 milk cows, 74 beef cows, 5 sheep, and 100 swine, but grew 140 bales of cotton. See Eighth Census of the United States, 1860, Louisiana: Schedules of Population, Slave Population, and Agriculture, Parish of Morehouse.

21 Baron de Bastrop to John and Abraham DeHart, Confirmation of grant, 27 July 1805, Ouachita County,
Territory of Orleans, Deed Book A, 10; Davenport, 22-23; Sheriff's sale, 11 December 1815, Ouachita Parish, La., Deed Book D, 16; Abraham DeHart to James Brown, Sale of 200 acres in Prairie Mer Rouge, 1815, Ouachita Parish, La., Deed Book D, 17; Abraham DeHart to Margaret Knox, Sale of 400 arpents on Prairie Mer Rouge, 1822, Ouachita Parish, La., Deed Book F, 142; Heirs of John DeHart to Margaret Knox, Sale of 400 arpents on Prairie Mer Rouge, 1822, Ouachita Parish, La., Deed Book F, 142; James DeHart to Andrew A. H. Knox, Sale of 400 arpents in De Bastrop grant, 1820, Ouachita Parish, La., Deed Book E, 404; James DeHart to Margaret Knox, Sale of 400 arpents on Prairie Mer Rouge, 1822, Ouachita Parish, La., Deed Book F, 142; James DeHart to Diana Terry, Marriage Records, 4 March 1816, Ouachita Parish, La.; James Logan Morgan, 1820 Census of the Territory of Arkansas (Reconstructed); Jackson and Teeples, Arkansas Sheriffs' Censuses, 1823 & 1829; Notice of Wynant DeHart's death and Inventory of Louisiana property in his estate, 9 December 1823, Ouachita Parish, La., Probate Book C, 192; Ouachita Parish Tax Receipts for taxes billed to Mrs. Winnie DeHart, 1823, and heirs of Wynant DeHart, 1825, 1829, 1831, 1832, 1834, Private manuscript collection, Joe Cooper Rolfe, Oak Ridge, La. The problem of traveling from Morehouse Parish to the Mississippi persisted throughout the antebellum period. For example, William Bonner, a doctor in Bastrop, the Morehouse Parish seat, wrote his inability to visit:

We have had and continue to have immense quantities of rain. Our byous [sic] and rivers have been flooded with water for several weeks. It is almost impossible to go any where unless you take a steam boat. There has been no passing between this and the Mississippi for several weeks. It has been impossible for me to get across the swamp, and it is impossible for me to say when I will be able to cross it now.

William [Bonner], Bastrop, La., to Dear Mother, 9 May 1858, in Bonner (Samuel C., and Family) Papers, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, LSU.

Tax assessments for 1830, 1831, 1832, Chicot County, Arkansas, Arkansas History Commission; McCain and Capers, 291. In Washington County, Mississippi, the 1830 census showed 121 slaveless households, whereas by 1840 there were only 20. In 1830, there were 20 households with 20 to 49 slaves and 4 households with 50 or more slaves; but in 1840, 52 and 54 such households, respectively—a huge planter influx! Mortgage of Charles McGlothlin to Abraham DeHart, 1 September 1828, Washington County, Mississippi, Deed Book A, 9; Trustee Deed of John DeHart, 1st part, George Mooney, 2nd part, and Abraham DeHart, 3rd part, 9 November 1832, Washington County, Miss., Deed Book B, 204;
Estate of John DeHart, Mildred DeHart, Administratrix, Deed
Forfeiture of land to creditors George Ward and Thomas
Stephens who had loaned the money to buy it, 24 April 1837,
Washington County, Miss., Deed Book F, 323; Estate of John
DeHart, Probate Court Minutes Vol. 1, 175, Washington
County, Miss. In 1850, Mildred Merriweather DeHart of
Bayou Mason, Chicot County, Arkansas, a native of Kentucky,
widow of John DeHart, Jr., was fifty years old and
illiterate. Her household consisted (apparently) of a
widowed daughter, a spinster daughter, her widowed
daughter's brother-in-laws, three grandchildren, and a
nephew. The widowed daughter was listed as head of
household and a farmer. The three adult males in their
early twenties were "laborers." The household contained no
slaves, and the real estate—25 improved acres, 100
unimproved—was valued at $300. Livestock consisted of 1
horse, 9 milk cows, 12 beef cows, and 35 pigs. Using $15
worth of farm implements, the family raised 2 bales of
cotton, 20 bushels of Irish potatoes, and 25 bushels of
sweet potatoes, but, incredibly, no corn. That commodity
must have been produced by a nearby relative, perhaps to be
exchanged for potatoes or butter. See Seventh Census of
the United States, 1850, Arkansas: Schedules of Population,
Slave Population, and Agricultural Production, Chicot
County. According to Leona Sumner, Chicot's first church
building was raised by the Presbyterians of Mt. Carmel,
around 1845, in the Eudora vicinity on the ridge of Bayou
Mason. People of all denominations worshiped there, and
Sumner said the bayou residents were "intelligent, refined
and religious." Young people maintained a Mt. Carmel
Literary Society, and schools were an important component
of the Bayou Mason community. Leona Sumner Brasher, 9-10.

23Paul Wilhelm, Duke of Wurttemburg, Travels in North
America, 1822-1824, trans. W. Robert Nitske, ed. Savoie
Lottinville (Stuttgart und Tubingen: Verlag der J. G.
Cott'schen Buchhandlung, 1835; Norman: University of

24Bernhard, Duke of Saxe-Weimar Eisenach, Travels
through North America, during the Years 1825 and 1826
Other journals with Arkansas connections in the Early
National period include: John Pope, A Tour through the
Southern and Western Territories of the United States of
North America; the Spanish Dominions on the River
Mississippi, and the Floridas; the Countries of the Creek
Nations; and Many Uninhabited Parts (Richmond: by the
author, 1792); Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, Journal of a Tour
into the Interior of Missouri and Arkansaw . . . Performed
in the Years 1818 and 1819 (London: Sir Richard Phillips &
Co., 1821); Basil Hall, Travels in North America in the
Years 1827 and 1828, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: Cadell & Co.;
London: Simpkin & Marshall, 1829); Robert Baird, View of

County Court Minutes, Book A, Chicot County, Arkansas, microfilm copy, Arkansas History Commission, Little Rock; Leona Sumner Brasher, "Chicot County, Arkansas: Pioneer and Present Times;" and Mrs. P. J. Rice, "Travels of an Arkansas Pioneer: Reminiscence by an Early Resident of Chicot County," Arkansas Manuscripts (Miscellaneous), Archives and Special Collections, Ottenheimer Library, University of Arkansas, Little Rock. Prior to 1830, county business was transacted through circuit courts along with regular legal proceedings.

Arkansas Gazette, 15 January 1820; Featherstonhaugh, II, 234-35; Boyd W. Johnson, "Frederick Notrebe," Arkansas Historical Quarterly 21 (Autumn 1962): 270-76. According to Chicot County tax assessments and county court proceedings, Cummins and Notrebe owned 1,511 acres of unimproved land in Chicot County in 1840 and were among the first proprietors tapped for enforced levee construction in 1841. In the late 1830s, Notrebe's depot on the Mississippi became the town of Napoleon, in Desha County, and William Drole acted as his New Orleans factor. Cultural implications of access to cotton markets through rural merchants are explored in Craig T. Friend, "Merchants and Market-houses: Reflections on Moral Economy in Early Kentucky," Journal of the Early Republic 17 (Winter 1997): 553-74. As to market conditions, from 1826 to 1832 cotton prices ranged from about 8 cents to 11 cents a pound, depending on quality and demand. Mississippi River Delta cotton brought higher prices than upland cotton from Alabama and Tennessee. See price quotes in the Kentucky Gazette, 27 October 1826, 20 October 1828, and 18 February 1832. Cotton receipts of Joseph Erwin's in Louisiana show his estate received about $36 a bale from the crop of 1830, $66 per bale from the crop of 1831, and $58 per bale from the crop of 1832. Alice P. White, "The Plantation Experience of Joseph and Lavinia Erwin," Louisiana Historical Quarterly 27 (April 1944): 389-90. On Southern sharecropping arrangements, see

27Sealsfield (Postl), II, 111-13, 116-17; J. E. Alexander, Transatlantic Sketches (London: Richard Bentley, 1833), II, 59. As to interior decor, some cabins may have featured items like those described in a hunter's house in the northeastern Louisiana Delta. There, a country editor knew a bayou bachelor with bearskin carpets and "a whole regiment of antlers" on the walls. His objects d'art included "a dozen preserved alligators, and various other mementoes of the chase, too numerous to mention." Concordia Intelligencer, 9 March 1844.

28Morgan, 1820 Census of the Territory of Arkansas (Reconstructed); Jackson and Teeples, Arkansas Sheriffs' Censuses, 1823 & 1829; Chicot County, Arkansas, Census of 1830; Fifth Census of the United States, 1830, Mississippi: County of Washington; Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Southern Arkansas, 1062; Sumner, "Chicot County, Arkansas: Pioneer and Present Times." A diary of Horace Ford, one of Horace Walworth's overseers, is in the collection of the Arkansas Territorial Restoration, Little Rock.

29Chicot County Court Minutes, Book A, 6, 12, Arkansas History Commission, Little Rock.

30Chicot County Court Minutes, Book A, 11, 14, 27, 63, 74. According to Book A, 74, Oden Township's first slave patrol was composed of Eli K. Roden, captain; Samuel Parker, Henry Latting, Stephen Johnson, and Hugh White, Jr., assistants. Taxable households and public monies were figured from Chicot County assessment lists of 1830, 1831, 1832, 1833, and 1834, Arkansas History Commission.

31Sumner, "Chicot County, Arkansas: Pioneer and Present Times."

32In 1836, Columbia consisted of Patrick O'Hara's saloon, Hugh White's tavern and inn, a slave jail, and about thirty houses. Judge J. W. Bocage, "Memoirs of the Old Second Judicial District," Jefferson County Historical Quarterly 5 (1974): 13-14. It fell into the Mississippi in 1855. Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Southern Arkansas, 1061. The 1850 census is the first to give a person's state or country of origin. According to that document, a preponderant number of Chicot County's planters who had lived there since the 1830s were Kentuckians.

33Steven A. Channing, Kentucky: A Bicentennial History (New York: W. W. Norton & Co. for the American Association for State and Local History, 1977), 59, 102. In a land unsuited to monoculture, Kentucky elites diversified into such things as grain, processed tobacco, gunpowder, paper
mills, health resorts, distilling, livestock breeding, ferries, toll roads, and merchandising. Channing, 40-56, 95. The diverse interests of one Kentucky planter scion, Robert W. Scott, are well chronicled in Thomas D. Clark's *Footloose in Jacksonian America: Robert W. Scott and His Agrarian World* (Frankfort: Kentucky Historical Society, 1989). This multi-faceted improver, a twenty-year-old planter's son touring the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic, was eager to investigate machinery, factories, engines, railroads, penitentiary workhouses, and improved breeds of livestock, as well as the temperance movement, education reforms, and African colonization. Of course, hemp sustained the plantations which supported Scott and those like him. It also led to an interest in a managed political economy, because Russian hemp competed strongly against the Kentucky product. From 1824 to 1861, Kentuckians lobbied Congress to lay duties on imports to protect American planters. See Paul W. Gates, *The Farmer's Age: Agriculture, 1815-1860* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1960; New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1968), 116.

Jackson's rise endangered tariffs for he opposed Clay, who forged an alliance between hemp and sugar growers. Even the Kentucky Gazette, a Jackson paper, sometimes sniped at tariffs. On 27 June 1828, for example, it featured an editorial signed "Hemp Stalk" and an anti-Whig "Ode to the Herd of New Orleans." The paper also told about the Ebonies, a political clique which seems to have been active in preserving slavery. On the Era of Bad Feelings and the inability of Kentucky agriculture to achieve economies of scale, see Channing, 46, 78-87, 95. Banking is discussed in Dale M. Royalty, "Banking, Politics, and the Commonwealth: Kentucky, 1800-1825," (Ph.D. diss.: University of Kentucky, 1971). On the issue of planters dealing in slaves, see Michael Tadman, "The Hidden History of Slave Trading in Antebellum South Carolina: John Springs III and Other 'Gentlemen Dealing in Slaves,'" *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 97 (January 1996): 6-29; also, ibid., *Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders, and Slaves in the Old South* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989). For escalating cotton prices, see Kentucky Gazette, 18 February 1832, 5 January 1833, 23 November 1833. Kentuckians investing in Washington County, Mississippi, receive ample treatment in McCain and Capers, *Memoirs of Henry Tillinghast Ireys: Papers of the Washington County Historical Society, 1910-1915.*

34 According to the New Orleans Port Register, Silas Craig acted as captain of the Johnson in 1818, and H. J. Offutt captained the Thomas Jefferson in 1821. Henry E. Chambers, *A History of Louisiana: Wilderness, Colony, Province, Territory, State, People* (Chicago: American Historical Society, 1925), 7, 526. Descriptions of Craig come from *Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Southern Arkansas,* 1064; Bocage, 12. For Kentucky's ethos, see...

35 Channing, 43-47, 92-93, 96, 102. County courts in Kentucky--the state's most visible and active bodies of government--were frequently dominated by "self-appointing, self-perpetuating cliques." Many were the counties that practically borrowed themselves into bankruptcy to enhance the commercial prospects of their planters. Channing, 73, 89. See also Robert M. Ireland, The County in Kentucky History (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1976).

36 Chicot County Court Minutes, Book A, 75-76, 102-4; Chicot County Tax Assessments, 1834.

37 Chicot County Tax Assessments, 1830, 1834, 1840.

Bolton, Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994); Bradley G. Bond, Political Culture in the Nineteenth-Century South: Mississippi, 1830-1900 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995); Susan E. Gray, The Yankee West: Community Life on the Michigan Frontier (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); and Scott A. Sandage, "Deadbeats, Drunkards, and Dreamers: A Cultural History of Failure in America, 1819-1893 (Ph.D. diss.: Rutgers University, 1995). Bolton argues that poor white tenants who moved rather often did so because they were poor and their status was not improving. The profitability of slave-based agriculture limited their chances and drove land prices beyond reach. Yeomen were better off while land ownership provided an independent livelihood, but landless children might easily decline into tenant status, unless they moved for better opportunities. Bond points out that Mississippian of all classes and regions engaged in commercial activity. Sales of commodities such as cotton, timber, and cattle provided money incomes; and the ability to profit from "amended self-sufficiency" was a crucial component of self-concepts of success, "independence, and virtue." Bond believes the desire for market involvement caused even backwoodsmen in Mississippi to be eager for railroads and navigation improvements. That planters held no monopoly on a desire for profits is clear when one studies frontier development from a Northern perspective. Gray's look at southern Michigan, 1830-1870, shows plain-folk families in a fervent quest for property development, cash-crop farming, and access to markets. Here, families sent children to develop new land or businesses for themselves and the family at large. "Family" constituted a personnel pool for land development which would promote the welfare of all. R. Douglas Hurt, in American Agriculture: A Brief History (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1994), simply concludes that American farmers have always been more commercially oriented than many writers believe. A reluctance to attribute acquisitiveness and self-interest to ordinary people has more to do with the values of historians than with evidence from the past. My findings support the conclusions of Oakes, Bond, Gray, and Lacy K. Ford, Jr.

39David Stewart, Deposition, 22 July 1851, in "Report of the Commissioner of the General Land Office in compliance with the Act of March 3, 1851, for settlement of certain classes of private land claims within the Bastrop Grant," General Land Office Report, 6 December 1852, Monroe, La., U. S. Senate Documents, vol. 4, copy in Local History Collection, Public Library, Monroe, La., 749-50

40James Burns Wallace Diary, 13 January 1836, 16 January 1836, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley
McDermott illustrates the high cultural origins of some of Chicot's new arrivals. Born to a Louisiana planter family in 1808, he attended Yale in the early 1830s and was a classmate of Judah P. Benjamin while Lyman Beecher served on the faculty. As a physician, McDermott sometimes wrote Scientific American about the germ theory of disease (in which he believed). He planted in Chicot until the end of the Civil War, then exiled himself to Spanish Honduras. His Presbyterian criticisms of the Catholic church made him unpopular and he became the object of assassination attempts. Upon returning to the U. S., his medical practice allowed for some recovery of fortune. Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Southern Arkansas, 1078.


Alonzo Snyder, Blue Lick Springs, Ky., 13 July 1844, in Snyder (Alonzo) Papers, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, LSU. Kate Stone used the term "swamper" to describe herself and her elite cohort, as in: "Capt. Harper's company is nearly entirely of poor Bayou Macon men who naturally have an ill feeling against the 'rich swampers.'" Sarah Katherine Stone, Diary, 16 December 1862, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, LSU. On widespread feelings of loneliness among back bayou planters as revealed in plantation names, see Jeffrey Alan Owens, "Naming the Plantation: An Analytical Survey from Tensas Parish, Louisiana." Agricultural History 68 (Fall 1994), 61. Not all slaveowners were equal to the pressures of swamp management. John Brannin of Henry County, Ky., invested in a southside Chicot County plantation but sold it to Aaron Goza, a seasoned planter in Carroll Parish, La. Brannin's sister wrote in January of 1850 that "Brother John came up just after dinner--has sold his plantation to Mr. Goza--is on his way to Kentucky. He is wearied with southern life & negro property--and is rejoiced to quit. Says the only thing he regrets is leaving me here." She told John not to worry, but admitted privately that "the mouth does not always speak the language of the heart." In her husband's absence, she slept with a Bowie knife under the pillow and a trusted slave boy in the next room. Brannin recommended these precautions. Hilliard (Mrs. Isaac H.) Diary, 25 December 1849, 17 January 1850, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, LSU.

Tyrone Power, Impressions of America: during the Years 1833, 1834, and 1835 (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea, & Blanchard, 1836), II, 101, 136-38. James C. Cobb's meditation on the capacities of swamp planters in The Most Southern Place on Earth: The Mississippi Delta and the Roots of Regional Identity (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), led to conclusions compatible with those of Power. Delta planters impressed Cobb with their ability to adapt to economic and labor arrangements, as well as to manipulate and manage outside capital or government aid. Cobb identified the Mississippi Delta's business policy as, basically: to borrow money and count on tomorrow. As for contented ladies, one high-bred swamper consort, Mrs. H. B. Tibbets of Carroll Parish, La., reacted plaintively to news that a sister-in-law's visit could not take place. Yet, she wrote:

We can be happy even here in this lonely region. Habit is everything. I am so used to living here that I never can say I am lonesome. We visit sometimes and have some choice friends who come to see us and on such occasions we have quite a holiday, and besides I have my husband and dear children and who could complain, not I certainly.
L. S. Tibbetts, Carroll Parish, La., to Mrs. Sophia Tibbetts, Boston, Mass., 23 January 1853, in Tibbetts (John C.) Correspondence, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, LSU. See footnote 41 for Miriam Hilliard's feelings of insecurity and fear on a plantation in south Chicot's overwhelmingly black Louisiana Township. See also the terror which struck fictional Northern-born heroine Annie Hastings, in Thorpe's The Master's House, upon her arrival amid the slaves of "Heritage Place," her husband's swamp plantation in Concordia Parish, La. As the skiff pulled aside the landing at night, a dozen slave men with torches reached to carry her and she blurted out, "in unqualified terror," "'No, no, don't consign me to these men.'" Her husband ordered the hasty construction of a catwalk to calm her and get her ashore. Thorpe, 90-91.

43Chicot County, Ark., census and tax records, 1830 and 1840. On the issue of planter alteration of the landscape, see environmental histories of swamp planting in Low Country of South Carolina and Georgia in footnote 16.

44Featherstonhaugh, II, 238, 240, 246-48, 255. The Englishman's comments resonate with conclusions drawn by Joan E. Cashin in A Family Venture: Men and Women on the Southern Frontier (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991). In her analysis, a move to the West allowed men to gain independence and throw off entanglements that impeded the exertion of their own will. While women clung to family ties and felt a sense of alienation from new environments, the West furnished escapes for men from the duties and baggage of social ties which they experienced in their home communities. Cashin thinks a move to the West shifted power into the hands of men, permitting them to grow more patriarchal, but less paternalistic. However, this view seems rather condescending. Some women may have been fragile beings, easily disoriented from cultural moorings, but others were not. Nor were all men alike.

45Lewis's book contained four autobiographical sketches, plus twenty-one others based more loosely on experience and imagination. Episodes are divided into three groups of seven: life of a medical student in Louisville, Ky., life in the Mississippi Delta, life in the swamps of northeast Louisiana. [Henry Clay Lewis], Odd Leaves from the Life of a Louisiana "Swamp Doctor" (Philadelphia: A. Hart, 1850); John Q. Anderson, ed., Louisiana Swamp Doctor: The Writings of Henry Clay Lewis, alias "Madison Tensas, M. D." (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1962), 38-39, 47, 55-57, 69. Dr. Ben Montgomery, a swamp doctor of Fayette Co., Miss., and Tensas Parish, La., recorded in his diary in 1851 that he had just read the Swamp Doctor. He believed many of the skits to be true stories, and thought they seemed plausible. Dr. Benjamin Franklin Montgomery, Diary,

46 "Improvement," in northeast Louisiana's Concordia Intelligencer, 29 April 1843, stated that improvement in agriculture could be continuous, just as in art or science. In the Intelligencer's opinion, those who refused to attempt it were either ignorant, lazy, prejudiced, or stubborn. A fine study of agrarian improvement can be found in Joyce E. Chaplin, An Anxious Pursuit: Agricultural Innovation and Modernity in the Lower South, 1730-1815 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1993). Improvements in matters like water pollution and road siting can be examined in Judith A. McGaw, Early American Technology: Making and Doing Things from the Colonial Era to 1850 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1993). Internal improvements as economic reforms are seen in Thomas A. Becnel, The Barrow Family and the Barataria and Lafourche Canal: The Transportation Revolution in Louisiana, 1829-1925 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989); James D. Dilts, The Great Road: The Building of the Baltimore and Ohio, the Nation's First

For the murder of Gilleam Murrell, see Bocage, 12-14. James Stuart, a Highland Scot on the Mississippi in the spring of 1830, said of the Arkansas riverfront that "people of this country all carry a large sharp knife ... in the side pocket of their breeches." Noting these "wild people on the Mississippi," his account hints that people who operated wood yards and taverns or provisioned boats endured considerable rowdiness. However, the business paid well. Stuart's conveyance, the *Constitution*, burned 26 cords a day at an average price of $2 each. In the course of a year, such a boat burned almost $19,000 worth of wood. James Stuart, *Three Years in North America* (London: Whittaker and Co.; Edinburgh: Printed for Robert Cadell, 1833), II, 299, 301, 303. Franklin Stuart reappears in Chapter Eight.

Atkinson, McDermott memoir, 261; Blanton, in McCain and Capers, 335; *Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Southern Arkansas*, 1062; Columbia Meeting, *Arkansas Gazette*, 7 June 1843. As late as 1855, a posse from Columbia surprised river pirates at Robber's Nest on Old River Lake. They killed the gang and burned their boat in a channel now called Whiskey Shoot (Chute) which forms Stuart's Island. *Chicot County Spectator*, 18 June 1986. Western literature about organized crime in the Arkansas Delta includes Alfred W. Arrington, *The Desperadoes of the South-West* (New York: William H. Graham, 1847) and Friedrich Gerstacker, *Die Regulatoren in Arkansas* (Leipzig: Vereins-Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1846).


*Kentucky Gazette*, 12 January 1833.

On Arkansas politics and public works, see: Lonnie J. White, "Kentuckians in Arkansas Territorial Politics,"

52 Noblesse oblige during Lexington cholera epidemic is from the Kentucky Gazette, 29 June 1833, reprinted from the
Observer and Republican. The denunciation of the Observer appears in the Kentucky Gazette, 18 May 1833. For Joel Johnson's declaration against Taylorite Sam Keene, see the Georgetown Patriot, 28 September 1816, and for a rebuttal, consult Georgetown Patriot, 5 October 1816. Thomas DeBlack includes studies of the Johnsons' affairs in Kentucky and Arkansas in "A Garden in the Wilderness," 3-27.


54 The U. S. Senate elected Johnson to be Van Buren's Vice President in March of 1837, no candidate having gained a majority in the electoral college. For a perspective on his achievement, see Vance Robert Kincade, "Solving the Vice Presidential Dilemma: The Elections of Martin Van Buren and George Bush," (Ph.D. diss.: Miami University, 1996). In November of 1840, Democrats Van Buren and Johnson lost to the Whig candidates, William Henry Harrison and John Tyler. For Johnson's holdings in Chicot, see Chicot County Tax Assessment, 1840. The naming of Columbia can be contextualized with Charles Whitney's "The Naming of America as the Meaning of America: Vespucci, Publicity, Festivity, Modernity," Clio 22 (Spring 1993): 195-219.

55 Chicot County Tax Assessment, 1834, Arkansas History Commission, Little Rock; Featherstonhaugh, II, 67-68. The rationality of swamp planting is explored in Joyce E. Chaplin, An Anxious Pursuit: Agricultural Innovation and Modernity in the Lower South, 1730-1815 (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1993). Chaplin studied swamp planters in the Low Country of the eastern seaboard to see relations between economic choices, mentality, learning, and ideology. She found that they believed themselves to be enlightened modernizers, and concluded that those who succeeded were well-informed and willing to experiment. They adapted to market conditions, used sophisticated management methods; adopted technological improvements, medical advances, and mechanization; and gave considerable attention to improved patterns of land use.

56 Chicot County Tax Assessment, 1840, Arkansas History Commission. On the American Land Company, see Gates, 82; First Annual Report of the Trustees of the American Land
Company (1836); and Irene Neu, "Business Biography of Erastus Corning," (Ph.D. diss.: Cornell University, 1950).

57 The expose of Chester Ashley appears in Bolton, Territorial Ambition, 64-72. Fifteen boxes of Ashley's personal and business papers can be examined in the Chester Ashley Papers, Archives and Special Collections, Ottenheimer Library, University of Arkansas, Little Rock.


59 DeBlack, 17-24; *Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Southern Arkansas*, 1083; Bevins, *The Ward and Johnson Families*; Henry V. Johnson, *Memoirs*, 1852-1931, Public Library, Georgetown, Kentucky; Chicot County Tax Assessments, Arkansas History Commission; *Sixth Census of the United States, 1840*, Arkansas: County of Chicot; *Seventh Census of the United States, 1850*, Mississippi: Slave Schedule, County of Washington. The self-promotion of the Johnsons of Kentucky would not surprise Allan Kulikoff, who viewed clannishness, cliquishness, and exclusivity as the operational principles for advancement among America's colonial and early national gentry. For his views on this "tangled cousinry," see *Tobacco and Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680-1800* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1986). Trevor Burnard, in "A Tangled Cousinry? Associational Networks of the Maryland Elite, 1691-1776," *Journal of Southern History* 61 (February 1995): 17-44, takes issue with Kulikoff by qualifying his emphasis on family ties. Burnard says family had its place, but in business and politics, elites were pragmatic enough to expand the circle to others whose status, talent, and reputation made them desirable acquaintances. Gentility's value exceeded that of mere family ties, Burnard claims, because the usefulness of relatives was often limited. However, "politeness, liberality, sociability, hospitality, and stewardship," when added to wealth, esteem, and correct behavior, were always welcome. In other words, high society was not a mere cousinry, but an open society based on demanding terms of association. The ultimate solidarity of planter elites, whatever their familial, political or denominational persuasions, was virtually inevitable.


John Higham, *From Boundlessness to Consolidation: The Transformation of American Culture, 1848-1860* (Ann Arbor: William L. Clements Library, 1969). George Fredrickson, in *The Inner Civil War: Northern Intellectuals and the Crisis of the Union* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), claims that individualism and romantic volunteerism gave way to institutionalized reform, as well as discipline and professionalization. Higham detected an earlier eclipse for American boundlessness, dating it at the end of the 1840s, after the close of the Mexican War. Throughout this dissertation, I contend that in alluvial planting districts boundless individualism terminated as soon as planters demanded protection from overflows. At that point, society contracted around the undisciplined or unequipped, forcing them to leave or comply with regulations. Reform sprang from the rational self-interest of practical people who were focused on the accumulation and protection of wealth. Nature thus stimulated a greater degree of cooperation and social discipline than would ordinarily have been the case. However, William J. Novak, in *The People's Welfare: Law and Regulation in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill:
University of North Carolina Press, 1996), contends that degrees of "liberty" have always been exaggerated. He says early Americans submitted to much government regulation, and private interests were frequently subordinated to the public good. For ways in which government promoted settlement, see Gates, 51-98; and Bolton, 57-76. Powers of county courts are enumerated in "An Act to Establish County Courts," 7 November 1836, Acts Passed at the First Session of the General Assembly of the State of Arkansas (Little Rock: Woodruff & Pew, 1837), 178-80.


Arkansas State Auditor's Office, Table "Exhibiting each species of property taxed in the several counties in the State, for the year 1839," 1 October 1840, Arkansas State Gazette, 18 November 1840. Taxes paid in one year were those assessed for the preceeding year. Chicot's county tax revenues progressed as follows: $206 (paid in 1830, for 1829); $472 (paid 1831, for 1830); $489 (paid 1832, for 1831); $728 (paid 1833, for 1832); $900 (paid 1834, for 1833); $11,787 (paid 1840, for 1839); $6,952 (paid 1841, for 1840); $11,942 (paid 1842, for 1841). Chicot County Tax Assessments, 1830-1842, Arkansas History Commission.

Cotton prices, New Orleans Bee, 6 September 1836. The Washington County railroad was designed to carry goods from ridge plantations at Deer Creek and Lake Washington to Princeton on the Mississippi. "An Act to incorporate the Lake Washington and Deer Creek Rail-Road and Banking Company," Laws of the State of Mississippi, Passed at a Regular Biennial Session of the Legislature, held at Jackson, in January & February, A. D. 1836 (Jackson: G. R. & J. S. Fall, 1836), 203-15. Many details about the enterprise, including symbolic designs on the banknotes, appear in McCain and Capers, 293-306.


68Levy's Price Current, 7 December 1839; New Orleans Times Picayune, 8 December 1839. Peter Temin's Jacksonian Economy and Gavin Wright's Political Economy of the Cotton South give excellent information about the connection between recessions in Britain and the U. S.


70"The Cotton Crop--Important Facts," Based on research by Ellsworth, Commissioner of Patents, Civilian and Galveston Gazette, [Galveston, Texas], 10 July 1844. See also Sixth Census of the United States, 1840, Arkansas: County of Chicot. On the idea that swamps ought to be plantations (at later period but in a similar and nearby landscape), see Jeannie M. Whayne, "The Power of the Plantation Model: The Sunk Lands Controversy," Forest and Conservation History 37 (April 1993): 56-67.

71Breakdown by township, Sixth Census of the United States, Arkansas: County of Chicot.

72Sixth Census of the United States, 1840, Arkansas: County of Chicot; Chicot County Tax Assessments, 1840; Seventh Census of the United States, 1850, Indexes of Arkansas, Mississippi, Texas, Louisiana, Tennessee, etc., 1850. On the topic of overseer transience, see journal kept by Horace Ford, overseer on one of Horace Walworth's Chicot County plantations. On 5 January 1849, Ford wrote that Mr. Hinen, an overseer on a Walworth place, meant to whip the slave Levi. Levi told Ford, and Ford told Walworth. The next day, Walworth and Hinen parted ways. On 13 January 1849, "A Mr. Cox is here and I think Mr. Walworth is about employing him Overseer." A month later, Cox resigned, "because he could not manage just as he was a mind to." Horace J. Ford, "Book kept as Overseer for Horace Walworth," Arkansas Territorial Restoration, Little Rock. The classic work on overseeing is, of course, William K. Scarborough, The Overseer: Plantation Management.


State Auditor’s Summary of Taxable Property in the State of Arkansas, County by County, 1839, 1 Oct. 1840, printed in Arkansas State Gazette, 18 Nov. 1840.

Arkansas Gazette, 6 May 1840; Vicksburg Daily Whig, 7 March 1840; New Orleans Bee, 28 March 1840. On 17 March 1840, the Vicksburg Daily Whig reported that cotton factors at New Orleans, whose livelihood depended on dry fields, were very worried about the prospect of an overflow. Based on city news from March 10th, the Daily Whig stated:

The principal object of excitement at present is the river, and businessmen who perhaps have not seen the sun rise twice in a twelve month for the last half century, may now be seen at the first glimpse of daylight hurrying down to the levee to see how the river comes on. The river has suddenly become an object of great interest, and as many anxious enquiries are made after it as were ever made after a new heir to a wealthy inheritance.

Arkansas Gazette, 29 April 1840, 6 May 1840, 13 May 1840; New Orleans Bee, 5 May 1840; New Orleans Commercial Bulletin, 4 May 1840, 9 May 1840; Vicksburg Daily Whig, 30 April 1840. By mid May, the Ouachita River was at flood stage, within three feet of the level reached in the flood of 1828. New Orleans Commercial Bulletin, 20 May 1840.

Log of the steamer Independence, printed in New Orleans Commercial Bulletin, 13 May 1840; Arkansas Gazette, 20 May 1840. The editor of the Arkansas Gazette expressed the opinion, on May 20th, that newspapers in rival cotton regions were extending mock sympathy through their coverage of Arkansas’s flood news. He thought the real motive was
to frighten settlers away from Arkansas and increase migration to their own communities. The Gazette did admit, however, that considerable damage occurred from Mississippi and Arkansas River backwater as far west as Pine Bluff.

Arkansas Gazette, 3 June 1840; Natchez Free Trader, quoted in New Orleans Bee, 29 June 1840. The Arkansas Gazette, 12 August 1840, said that Colonel Sevier had not returned to campaign against the Whigs, but to see to his "strong personal interest" in the rescue of his property; otherwise, "he would not have been so soon relieved from his seat in the Senate." The flood occurred just as planters were also having to deal with reduced incomes (from the falling price of cotton) and the closure of the Real Estate Bank. Incredibly, Absalom Fowler, the Whig candidate for governor in 1836, opposed the establishment of state banks in Arkansas, whereas leading Arkansas Democrats, particularly Sevier, considered the ability to charter banks to be one of the principal advantages that would come from Arkansas statehood. As territorial delegate to Congress, Sevier introduced the resolution to form a state constitution and apply for statehood. The Real Estate Bank bill was the first to pass the new state legislature. See Acts Passed at the First Session of the General Assembly of the State of Arkansas (Little Rock: Woodruff & Pew, 1837); Tucker, 21-22; Worley, 67.

Cotton prices at New Orleans, 7 March 1840, from the Arkansas Gazette, 18 March 1840; cotton prices and market reports from New Orleans Commercial Bulletin, 23 December 1840. Chicot County Tax Assessments, 1840, 1841, 1842. Business observers warned that "it ruins more than one year's crop when a long continued inundation takes place." New Orleans Commercial Bulletin, 7 March 1840. To assess the business dimensions of what failure meant to a planter, consult Edward J. Balleisen, "Navigating Failure: Bankruptcy in Antebellum America" (Ph.D. diss.: Yale University, 1995); Kilbourne, Debt, Investment, Slaves, 24, 64.

Sixth Census of the United States, 1840, Mississippi: County of Washington; Cotton prices from New Orleans Commercial Bulletin, 23 December 1840. Gentry families of southwest Mississippi or northeast Louisiana who operated in Washington County in 1840, included the following: Buckner, Dromgoole, Dunbar, Duncan, Elliott, Ferriday, Fulton, Gibson, Griffin, Hall, Knox, McAlister, McCaleb, McNutt, Messenger, Montgomery, Percy, Preston, Scott, Sparrow, Turner, and Turnbull. They were familiar with levees, from their swamp holdings in the parishes of Pointe Coupee, Concordia, Tensas, Madison, and Carroll, as well as in Warren County, Mississippi, whose levee law debuted in 1819. Washington County's Kentuckians included such families as: Blackburn, Campbell, Flournoy, Hood, Johnson, Miller, Offutt, Smith, Theobald, Warfield, Ward, and
Worthington. The circumstances of their coming to Washington County are described throughout McCain and Capers.

81 Henry Johnson of Washington County, brother of Vice President Johnson and Judge Ben Johnson of Chicot County, became richer than his siblings. His daughter, Mrs. Erwin, built the mansion "Mount Holly" which still stands on Lake Washington. Indian guides led Junius Ward of Kentucky to Lake Washington in 1827. His settlement became a spearhead for others by his relatives among the Ward, Ely, Johnson, and Dudley families. Dr. Zack Offutt of Georgetown, Kentucky, settled on Ashbrook Point, immediately across from Chicot County's Gaines's Landing. Joel Offutt owned a plantation in Chicot, and Mrs. Joel Johnson was an Offutt. William R. Campbell of Bowling Green, Kentucky, was one of seven brothers, settled at "Argyle" on the Mississippi in Washington County, just above Point Chicot. His Chicot relatives included planters J. B., C. W., R. M., and G. W. Campbell. William R. Campbell acted as one of Washington County's levee commissioners and a member of the Board of Police. Samuel Worthington of "Wayside," Dr. William W. Worthington, and Isaac Worthington, brothers, settled in Washington County. The other brother, Elisha Worthington of Chicot County, though very rich, was a "black sheep" for openly keeping a black mistress and acknowledging mulatto children. By the end of the antebellum period, Elisha had one of the finest camelia japonica collections in the U. S., a 5,000 volume library, and a slave orchestra with brass and stringed instruments. For biographical sketches, see McCain and Capers, 123-24, 166-68, 240, 288-89, 343, 350-56; Channing, 56; and Willard B. Gatewood, Jr., "Sunnyside: The Evolution of an Arkansas Plantation," Arkansas Historical Quarterly 50 (Spring 1991): 6-13.

82 McCain and Capers, 67, 259, 285-89, 343; Chicot County Court Minutes, Book A; Tax Assessments, Washington Co., Miss., 1828-1834; Fifth Census of the United States, 1830, Mississippi: County of Washington; Sixth Census of the United States, 1850, Mississippi: County of Washington. Warfield, a native of Lexington, Kentucky, went to Vicksburg as a merchant in the 1820s. Steven Channing points out that Dr. Elisha Warfield operated a "legendary" horse-racing farm called "The Meadows," near Lexington. The Warfield property in Chicot was owned in partnership with their relatives the Carneals. McCain and Capers, 288, 343; Chicot County tax assessments, 1840; Channing, 56.

83 "An act to authorize and enforce the construction of levees along the bank of the Mississippi river in the county of Chicot," Acts Passed at the Third Session of the General Assembly of the State of Arkansas (Little Rock: George H. Burnett, 1840), 25-28. The workings of the 1841 levee law will be the subject of next chapter.
HOLDING BACK THE WATERS: LAND DEVELOPMENT AND THE ORIGINS OF LEVEES ON THE MISSISSIPPI, 1720-1845

VOLUME III

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in The Department of History

by
Jeffrey Alan Owens
B.F.A., North Texas State University, 1983
M.A., The University of Texas at Tyler, 1990
May, 1999

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On the 18th of December, 1840, Governor Archibald Yell sent his secretary to an evening meeting of the Arkansas General Assembly to announce the signing of bills which had passed the legislature. Representatives waited in candle-lit, high-ceilinged rooms at Gideon Shryock's stately new capitol to hear if Yell had signed the bills constituents wanted. The men en chambered at the statehouse would have included Anthony H. Davies, Chicot County's state representative and the head of Arkansas's Real Estate Bank, and General John Clarke, Chicot's state senator. Both men had guided bills of local interest through the labyrinths of Little Rock and were anxious about a new law for Chicot County whose fate would soon be announced.  

At this time, Arkansas had only been a state for four years, and it was still largely a "natural state" with few items of man-made infrastructure for social or economic development. The state seldom funded projects directly, but through charters it gave life to corporations which could either obtain loans or raise money through subscriptions. State charters laid out a company's purpose and mode of operation as a matter of public record. This
FIGURE 8.1

COTTON PRODUCTION IN ARKANSAS IN 1850, BY COUNTIES

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FIGURE 8.2

CHICOT COUNTY, ARKANSAS, SHOWING ITS WATERNAYS, ROADS, AND PLANTATIONS AS THEY EXISTED AROUND 1860

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(hopefully) inspired confidence among investors and served as a legal contract between subscribers and management. Unlike a private business venture, investors would not be personally liable for debts of the company and could only lose the amount they subscribed if it failed. If promoters could demonstrate a project's general usefulness, the state might even subscribe for some stock out of the treasury, or approve the issuance of bonds. Another method of state-sponsorship of improvements was the granting of expanded powers to county governments for special works. Counties had broad powers over improvements in an abstract sense, but the singling-out of particular projects allowed a county court to proceed with dispatch. And, if the state explicitly authorized a county to raise monies for designated purposes, the county's taxpayers had no grounds for objection. The same principle applied if a county imposed a new labor requirement as a tax in kind. A county so empowered could call upon its sheriff to execute collections, confiscations, and fines. A state bill to permit county improvements also made the county clerk available as project bookkeeper and placed state courts at the county's disposal. Clearly, there were many benefits to be received from the granting of state charters or special bills of county empowerment. The ability of a state to authorize such works was one of the principal advantages of statehood. Arkansas's statehood advocates, like the planter Democrats of Chicot, meant to make the most of it.
Consequently, Governor Yell and the Arkansas General Assembly approved numerous incorporations across the state in 1840: some to schools, such as Rocky Comfort Academy; others to transportation or resource companies, like the White River Turnpike and the Arkansas Coal & Mining Company. The favorable response must have encouraged the politicians from Chicot, for they and their constituents desperately wanted to grow and sell some cotton.

Therefore, on the night of December 18th, 1840, Davies and Clark had reason to rejoice. The laws that Yell signed included "An act to authorize and enforce the construction of levees along the bank of the Mississippi River in the county of Chicot." This levee bill constituted Arkansas's first excursion into state-sanctioned flood control, and it proposed solutions fervently desired by a very influential lobby, namely, the planters of the state's richest county. Cotton planters in Chicot, lately devastated by floods, now admitted they needed levees to protect crops from overflow. In the aggregate, they probably controlled a sufficient labor pool to build them, including about 1,700 slaves of working age, but the building of continuous levees would only succeed if the state permitted the coercion of landowners. Otherwise, the slackness of those who refused or delayed construction would endanger those who complied.

The significance of the levee law of 1840 as a stimulus to levee building is beyond dispute, but the state only granted Chicot two things: permission for its county
court to supervise levee building within the county, and the right of appeal to state courts in disputes about enforcement. Monetary assistance from the Arkansas State Treasury was out of the question. Since most of the legislature represented areas that lay above overflow, their constituents held that people who wanted to escape flooding should move out of the floodplain. If wealthy planters chose to develop the swamp, the problems were self-inflicted; majority opinion concluded that since the cause of hardship sprang from the swampers' own actions, so should the remedy. With these opinions prevailing, to subsidize improvements in the state's richest county, with money taken from the other thirty seven, would have been politically intolerable. Hence, the legislature only permitted legally organized levee building if Chicot's landowners and county court performed the task without asking for state funds.

Fortunately for Chicot, the wealth, energy, and audacity of its proprietors, the value of their improvements, and the physical strength of their slaves did make levee building feasible in 1840. It was the only county in Arkansas's Delta where such conditions existed. Flood control would have benefited other Delta counties, but unlike Chicot, they had no significant planter cohort to agitate for improvements or to congeal as a levee-building community. Outside of Chicot, Arkansas's riverfront and the Delta interior continued to harbor a non-levee-building
society of "hunting farmers," wood cutters, and steamboat provisioners, such as inhabited Chicot before the planters' arrival in the mid-1830s.

Statistics in Table 8.1, derived from the 1840 census, clearly demonstrate the superiority of Chicot's labor resources for the task of levee building, when compared to the rest of the Arkansas Delta. The critical ingredient was the ownership of slaves. Slaveholdings of twenty slaves or more are generally thought to have been large enough for an owner to operate on a plantation scale. Proprietors with twenty or more, depending on the number of working age, could divide them into gangs for varied tasks, such as the building and upkeep of levees.

Table 8.1 shows the quantity of potential levee-builders (planters and slaves) in various counties of the Arkansas Delta. Compare, for example, the plantation labor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County [On the Mississippi Riverfront]</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th># of Slaves</th>
<th># Hshlds w/ 20+ Slaves</th>
<th># Hhlds w/ 0-5 Slaves</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>1,410</td>
<td>293</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crittenden</td>
<td>1,561</td>
<td>454</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phillips</td>
<td>3,547</td>
<td>912</td>
<td>328</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desha</td>
<td>1,598</td>
<td>407</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicot</td>
<td>3,806</td>
<td>2,698</td>
<td>2,124</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County [In the Alluvial Delta Interior]</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th># of Slaves</th>
<th># Hshlds w/ 20+ Slaves</th>
<th># Hhlds w/ 0-5 Slaves</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poinsett</td>
<td>1,320</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monroe</td>
<td>936</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>1,346</td>
<td>361</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8.1 shows the quantity of potential levee-builders (planters and slaves) in various counties of the Arkansas Delta. Compare, for example, the plantation labor.
resources of Chicot and Phillips, the two most populous counties. At the time of the levee law's passage, Chicot had 45 households in which twenty or more slaves resided, while Phillips had 8 households of that type. As Chicot's planter cohort was larger, so was the number of potential levee-builders. According to the 1840 census, slaves made up 71 percent of Chicot's total population, but just 26 percent of Phillips's. Slaves in plantation households comprised 56 percent of Chicot's population, but only 9 percent of Phillips's. Furthermore, the number of slaves in plantation-sized households totaled 2,124 in Chicot and only 328 in Phillips. Other census data, not shown on Table 8.1, reveals that fewer than three-fourths of Chicot County's slaves were farm laborers. In all counties, only about 75 percent of the slaves in planters' households were eligible for levee work or hard agricultural tasks because age or physical limitations. When this is taken into account, it reduces the number of potential levee builders to approximately 1,593 in Chicot and 246 in Phillips.  

As striking as the above figures appear, the actual disparity of levee-building personnel for Chicot and Phillips Counties was even greater than that, because topographical factors placed many of Chicot's slaves at the riverside, but removed those of Phillips to higher ground in the interior. Chicot's highest tracts were the alluvial landforms that always marked floodplain areas: riverbanks on the Mississippi, shores of oxbow lakes, and ridges on
bayous. In Phillips, on the other hand, early proprietors avoided banks and bottoms in preference for Crowley's Ridge. This unique piece of naturally occurring high ground runs from north to south through the upper Arkansas Delta and terminates near the Mississippi at Helena, the seat of Phillips County. Though surrounded by swamps, Crowley's Ridge is non-alluvial in its geological origin. It varies from one to twelve miles in width and reaches up to two hundred feet in elevation in Phillips. Needless to say, Crowley's Ridge offered an unusual degree of security from flooding by Delta standards. Though hilly, broken, and sparsely watered, it provided homesites to many small farmers who thumbed their noses at the river. Ridge lands were not as fertile as alluvial bottoms, were prone to erode, and produced approximately two-thirds as much cotton, but the ridge farmers grew little cotton, owned few slaves, and were mostly interested in subsistence. A residence on the river suited them far less than it would a planter who wanted big fields and a steamboat landing. Actually, the first planters in Phillips occupied a small raised area called Sugar Tree Ridge which lay close to the river. It usually withstood overflows without levee protection and was more fertile than Crowley's Ridge. Swamps, meanwhile, covered only two-fifths of the county. Though productive, they were the last area of Phillips to be developed. Hence, a planters who wanted a swamp plantation with the possibility of public support for levees
would have been foolish to move to Phillips. Non-planter uplanders predominated in 1840, and they shaped public policy to suit themselves. As shown in Table 8.1, there were 392 slaveless households in Phillips and 132 households of nineteen or fewer slaves in 1840, compared with just 8 of plantation-size. One Phillips County family, that of William Polk, owned 129 slaves. This was 40 percent of the slaves owned in plantation-sized households! In Chicot, the Polks would have found a cohort of planters with an interest in levees and the means to build them. Instead, living in Phillips, they had to restrict their farming to plantation sites which could be worked (to an extent) without levees. Effective community support for levee building did not exist in Phillips in 1840, because there were no incentives or resources to bring it about. 7

If a lack of riverside planters retarded levee building in Phillips County, Table 8.1 shows that other counties of the Arkansas Delta were even less equipped. Mississippi and Crittenden contained only three or four plantation-sized households in 1840—far too few for continuous levee construction. Census manuscripts for Desha are scrambled and useless for household demographics, but from aggregate population figures, one sees that its labor resources resembled those of Crittenden rather than Chicot. Few planters lived in Desha in 1840, and those who did farmed high ground on the banks of the Mississippi or Arkansas Rivers without levees. In counties of the
alluvial interior, such as Poinsett and Monroe, plantation workforces were virtually unknown. Table 8.1 shows only two "planter" households in Monroe and none in Poinsett, but more than three hundred slaveless households. The largest slaveowners in Monroe and Poinsett employed twenty and sixteen persons in agriculture, respectively. Communities here could give practically no aid to programs of flood control. Indeed, many who lived on interior waterways such as the Tyronza River supplemented their income with logging, a trade they could only follow if water stood on the land. Levees would not serve their interests because embankments inhibited the transport of lumber. Yet, a lack of *navigable rivers* and dry land discouraged plantation development. For planters, the flood problems of interior counties, complicated by backwater, surpassed even those of the riverside. Needless to say, Monroe and Poinsett built no levees at this time.\(^8\)

As indicated in Table 8.1, the county of Arkansas, a much older settlement, featured a few plantation-type slaveholdings in 1840. However, it contained a population which was conservative in spending and generally refrained from public works. People in this county inherited a legacy of non-improvement from the colonial era. Their conservatism was shown in a horror of debt. For example, a local historian wrote in 1890 that the closest thing Arkansas County ever had to a public debt was in 1867 when hardships of war and Reconstruction, combined with crop
failures, produced a state of near starvation. At that time the county court issued $5,000 in scrip to buy food, but its corn commissioner only spent $2,000 and the county quickly repaid the loan. Arkansas County also took pride in low taxes, which it reduced whenever possible. It is hardly surprising that Chicot County, rather than Arkansas, took the lead in levee building. Planters in Chicot were experienced in the use of debt as a resource for expansion. Credit underwrote their relations with factors, banks, and vendors of slaves and real estate. If levee construction required the issuing of county scrip as a public debt, the planters of Chicot would get the county court to print some. They knew that capital spending was a necessary cost of doing business, and they expected the local government to be their "partner in progress." In Arkansas County, on the other hand, slaveless proprietors outnumbered slaveholders of plantation size by 25 to 1. People without slaves had little collateral; hence, could not benefit from credit and were unskilled in its use. Even the planters of Arkansas County were poorer than those of Chicot. Lovey Raffell, the largest Arkansas County proprietor in 1840, owned but 41 slaves, and the richest creole resident, Charles Bogy, had but 8 slaves. Chicot, meanwhile, featured planters like Horace Walworth with 117 slaves and Richard M. Campbell with 92 slaves. In 1840, twenty-four of Chicot's planters outstripped the richest Arkansas County proprietor in the amount of slaves owned. 9
Nor did levees appear in Mississippi County in 1840. White settlement in that county was generally restricted to the Mississippi riverfront, "closed in on the west by impenetrable cane brakes and impassable swamps." Its interior contained Sunk Lands of St. Francis, a wild and swampy region formed by the earthquake of 1811. As shown in Table 8.1, the county's slaveless households numbered 142 in 1840, while those of plantation size totaled no more than three. Osceola, the county seat, consisted of about fifty people in huts on the banks of the Mississippi. Its schoolteacher lived in a shanty made of steamboat debris and kept the post office in a cracker box! Some spots on the riverfront, such as Pecan Point in the southern part of Mississippi County, formed natural elevations which could be farmed without levees. A few absentee from Middle Tennessee, like Felix Grundy, Jacob McGavock, and David Craighead, developed plantations here. However, as late as 1850, the county contained only three cotton producers among 213 farms. This was definitely not a levee-building community. Indeed, more than a hundred Native Americans lived in Mississippi County and used mounds as a refuge from flooding. Tribesmen such as Big Knife, Keshottee, and Corn Meal were well-known local characters. They fished, hunted, and grew vegetables just like the Quapaw had, while poor whites, of whom there were many, followed the same lifestyle. Bread was scarce; most lived on wild game. Settlers like William and Diadema Bishop told of traveling
forty miles by water to Hornersville, Missouri, to grind corn into meal. John and Jennie Bowen of Barfield Point operated a produce boat and bought pelts from settlers in exchange for coffee and shirting. Residents wore homespun clothes, home-tanned shoes, and caps of otter hide. For entertainment, they traveled up to fifty miles by pirogue to attend dances in log cabins where gourd fiddles played. With such an ethos and but three plantations, one could hardly expect Mississippi County to build levees.  

A national Military Road led from Memphis to Little Rock, and Crittenden County was less isolated than Mississippi County because of its nearness to Memphis. As the east-west route through Arkansas's Delta, the Military Road carried considerable traffic. However, adjoining lands could not be guarded from overflow, and settlement hovered on the banks of the Mississippi which formed Crittenden's eastern border for about seventy miles. Table 8.1 shows that the county contained only 4 households with twenty or more slaves in 1840, compared to 175 households with five slaves or less. The number of slaves in plantation-size households totaled just 140 (9 percent of the population), and the plantations were not large. David Spurlock operated the biggest with 55 slaves; Alexander Mason supervised 31; Sterling Brown, 29; and Samuel Turner, 25. These men probably managed for absentees. The leading residents were poor by Chicot standards. Men of prominence, as derived from county court records, included
A. B. Hubbard with 11 slaves, Daniel Harkleroad with 8 slaves, Judge Charles Blackamore with 4 slaves, and Wm. D. Ferguson and George S. Fogelman with 5 slaves each. The early farmers of Crittenden grouped on the Mississippi at Hopefield, opposite Memphis, and on Lake Grandee. Unfortunately, caving banks plagued the river settlements. In the early 1800s, for example, chunks of Hopefield fell in the river. Then, three Ferguson brothers founded Greenock on the Mississippi as the county seat. Named for their ancestral home in Scotland, it fell in the river in 1836-37. Thereafter, Crittenden's county seat moved to Marion on Lake Grandee.11

As a land developer and county sheriff, William D. Ferguson, the father of Greenock, took a keen interest in Crittenden County flood control. In 1828, the year of a great flood, he wrote Ambrose Sevier, the territorial delegate to Congress, about a proposal for an overland levee. Ferguson suggested that the federal government should build a levee to run west from Greenock and through the swamp to the St. Francis River, in order to protect its Military Road. With such a levee, overflows would be channeled into Wapannoca Bayou and Tyronza River, then flow into the St. Francis and the Mississippi. The national road would be saved, and the levee could protect improvements made by private persons. They might buy public lands along the route without a fear of flooding, which would bring cash flow to the national treasury. However, Sevier
knew the plan had no chance for success in Washington, so he ignored it. Thereafter, Ferguson tried local means to get a levee for Greenock alone. In this, he appears to have succeeded. The county was left to its natural flood patterns, but an attempt was made (however feeble) to safeguard the county seat.12

Crittenden's county court minutes of 1830-32 show that Ferguson served as the contractor for a courthouse and jail in Greenock which cost the county $327. The county also appropriated $25 in 1830 to build a levee for Greenock. It funded the improvements with a county tax raised at the following rates: on lands, half-a-cent per acre; on adult white males, 75 cents each; on horses, mares, and "mewls" above the age of three years, 37 1/2 cents; on neat cattle aged three years and up, 10 cents; on slaves aged 16 to 45 years, $1.50; plus a $10 franchise on the Memphis ferry and a $2 franchise on the Blackfish Lake ferry on the Military Road. Greenock's levee, however, fell into the river with the rest of the town on caving banks after the flood of 1836. For $25, Crittenden could hardly have built anything substantial, so it was no great loss. People in new towns did not have the money to spend much on public works. The real wealth was in planting, and planters were not in Crittenden County. Without the means to build adequate levees, people had no option but to relocate. Thus, by mid-1837, the county court minutes describe the felling of trees for a town square at a county seat on Lake Grandee,
where levees would be less necessary. By all accounts, Crittenden's expenditures still stood at a very low level. The man who cleared Main Street received $20, and courthouse furnishings consisted of a table, six split-bottom chairs and two stoves. Meanwhile, when an Army engineer actually finished a cross-country levee through Crittenden in 1837 (the embankment served as the Military Road) he calculated that it cost the national government $146,457.00 and contained more than a million cubic yards of dirt. Since Crittenden's county tax yield for the years 1838 and 1839 brought less than $3,200 combined, it is very clear that the county could not execute a major levee project on its own. The policies of Congress brought a quasi-levee in the form of a road. The policies of Congress would also more-or-less take it away. 13

In the late 1830s, political winds blew a different direction and the national government actually suspended upkeep on the Military Road. Crittenden's court records indicate that the cross-country levee/road swiftly began to decompose. In 1843, the court ordered landowners along the route to work the Military Road like a county road, but much of the area was uninhabited. Money was scarce and laborers, few. By 1844, the county could not even afford wheelbarrows for levee/road crews! Due to the depreciated condition of Arkansas money and county scrip, area merchants rejected the $20 the court appropriated for wheelbarrows. The man commissioned to buy them reported in

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he was unable to make a purchase. "It is therefore ordered by the Court that [he] . . . pay the money back."

Under the circumstances, Crittenden had little choice but to watch its federal levee/road crumble away. In this region devastated by the flood of 1844, the sheriff reported 96 delinquents in his taxpayer list for the year. Bearing in mind that there were only 192 households in the county's census of 1840, the number of defaulters in 1844 was simply enormous. Many flood victims in Crittenden fled the county and left their erstwhile "lands" to evaporate at leisure. A place without the means to buy $20 worth of wheelbarrows could hardly afford initial construction on a riparian levee seventy miles long, nor could they combat flooding in the interior. As in Mississippi County, many Crittenden residents were "hunting farmers" and lumbermen. Levee building as a public work was beyond their reach, and planters were too few in number to effect a change. Of 192 farmers in the county in 1850, only ten produced cotton.14

Thus, Crittenden's experience, as well as the preceding examples of other counties, shows the absolute necessity of independent resources for levee construction in 1840. No other funds were available--state or federal. The only sure means of attaining flood control was for a self-reliant cohort of wealthy planters to act in concert as a levee-building community, in clear pursuit of vital self-interests. Chicot County was the only one with the ability to build levees. Now, with the passage of a levee
law, they had obtained the legal permission to put their resources to work.

Given that the citizens of Chicot County acquired a levee law in 1840, what exactly did it allow them to do? Terms and conditions of "An act to authorize and enforce the construction of levees . . . in the county of Chicot" appeared in fourteen sections of law, some of which were strictly applied, while others proved unworkable. The document presented the county with an idealized form of equitable levee building; however, officials in charge of its implementation frequently ignored parts of the code in order to save the spirit and to get things done. The law was a guideline, but the county court exercised considerable latitude to modify, interpret, or tacitly discard pieces of it in the interest of what worked. After all, planters who built levees were practical people doing practical things. Far from being wedded to legalism or to an insistence upon individual "rights," the levee-building community's primary goal was to achieve maximum protection with a minimum of expense and inconvenience. By selectively observing the law, they proved themselves to be pragmatic, not dogmatic. Nor were they enslaved to learned theories of flood control expounded by hydraulic engineers. These levee builders received degrees from the school of trial and error, and people outside the county who might differ with them as to means and methods were simply irrelevant.
Several officials participated in the levee program, but the county court emerged as Chicot's principal levee boss. Since this is so, a brief description is in order. In Arkansas, county courts consisted of justices of the peace and a county judge whom the justices elected for a two-year term. The court appointed justices of the peace to fill vacancies on the court, and justices represented the county's various townships. The county judge presided at county court meetings and voted with justices on county business. After 1836, he maintained a separate probate court. For pay, a county judge received four dollars a day while actually presiding in court. Justices of the peace served without compensation, but received exemptions from road, militia, and jury duty. The judge and two justices formed a quorum for business; in the judge's absence, three justices could act. Everywhere in Arkansas, county courts had jurisdiction over county taxes, spending, and county improvements. Their duties included the appointment of road crews and overseers, the building of bridges, the licensing of ferries, and other items of public order, such as slave patrols, the superintendence of paupers, the holding of inquests, and the maintenance of jails. To add levee duties to their works was a natural progression, but could only be included when communities requested the obligation and had the means to perform it. Many parts of eastern Arkansas flooded in 1840, but only prosperous Chicot dared to add levee building to its public works.¹⁵
Under the 1840 levee law, the county court in Chicot received specific authority to cause levees to be built along the Mississippi and to dam the beds of bayous that flowed out of the river. No other county government in Arkansas received these powers from the state because the law applied only to Chicot. Furthermore, though water from other counties might flood Chicot, its county court's authority to build levees and dams pertained only to works done within the county. This, in its simplest form, is what the 1840 levee law required: (1) landowners on the riverfront had to build levees on their properties by order of the county court; (2) the county clerk would write the court's orders and place them in the sheriff's hands; (3) the sheriff would deliver orders to resident landowners in person, but notify non-residents through advertisements printed for three months in an Arkansas newspaper. In his capacity as tax collector and conductor of sheriff's sales, the Chicot County sheriff could sell the property of those who failed to perform levee duties. The law authorized him to give a perfect title to lands sold by the county court for levee costs.16

In essence, the order to build levees in 1840 was a new tax laid on riparian landowners. Naturally, concerns were voiced that people on Lake Chicot and the interior bayous would benefit from riverfront levees while owing no obligation to build them. The 1840 levee law did, however, aim at a more equitable distribution of responsibility.
For instance, several sections of the law consisted of sharing clauses which were supposed to spread the cost of levee building throughout the population. Unfortunately, these clauses proved difficult to apply and may have caused considerable controversy even before the bill's passage. A newspaper report from the Arkansas General Assembly, dated Dec. 9, 1840, shows that a Senate amendment to the Chicot County levee law was disagreed to in the House. The law went back to the Senate with a request from the House that it recede from the amendment. One cannot be sure that the sharing clauses were the source of legislative discord, but they were the law's most debatable features. Anthony Davies, Chicot's House representative, was a planter on Lake Chicot, and he had first-hand knowledge about the problem of levee cost-sharing. In October of 1841, the County Court named Davies (along with planters Silas Craig and William McDowell Pettit) to serve as a levee commissioner to close the bayou that connected Lake Chicot to the Mississippi. In funding this bayou levee/dam, the court tried to share expenses through a voluntary subscription. The plan failed miserably, and Davies learned from the experience that it would be hard to truly spread the costs. As a political ploy, the sharing features made the law appear to be more equitable, therefore, more palatable to constituents and easier to vote upon in the affirmative. Sharing clauses seemed to relieve front proprietors of the sole burden of levee construction. In practical terms,
though, the riverfront landowners still bore the brunt of the law's effects. The assessment of degrees of benefit to interior proprietors was simply too complex to carry out, and there is little evidence in county court minutes that Chicot put its sharing sections into practice.17

The 1840 levee law's requirements about cost-sharing were as follows. Section Four instructed county officials to summon a jury of five disinterested freeholders to consult about each levee which the court ordered to be built. Members of this five-man jury had to be residents of the county with no immediate interest in the levee under consideration. They would view the site of a levee built by a front proprietor on his own land and then deliberate as to who else's land would be benefited by the construction. The jury was to attribute a dollar amount to the benefits that other landowners would gain from the levee. The dollar value assessed would reflect the increased worth of the real estate after its retrieval from overflow. According to Section Four, the benefited proprietors would pay the front proprietor shares of his costs in proportion to benefits received. Disinterested juries determined the shares. Since lawmakers expected some front proprietors to default on levee duties, Section Three said that if a front owner failed to build a levee or missed the court's deadline for completion, the building of the levee would be contracted to the lowest bidder. Then, the front landowner and those who received benefits from
his levee's construction would pay the costs of an adjudicated contract. The sheriff placed a lien on the property to cover the amount paid to the contractor, and lands would be sold to cover the costs. Section Five stated that persons who felt "aggrieved" by the jury's assessment of cost-shares could appeal to the county court for a new appraisal, but did so at their own risk, being bonded and bound to pay what the court decided. Its decision in the matter would be "final and conclusive." However, Section Seven laid the burden of collecting the cost-shares (the money owed to the levee builder by those his levee benefited) on the levee-building landowner! He not only built the levee, but also inherited the duty of forcing neighbors to pay their contribution. Furthermore, the jury's decision only gave him the right to sue other landowners for payment after he finished the levee "at his own expense." The jury verdict showed that a debt was "due and owing," but front proprietors must collect the money for themselves.18

Obviously, serious difficulties were involved in getting money out of the pockets of "benefited landowners" and into those of a front proprietor. To begin with, it would have been extremely difficult to extract a disinterested jury from Chicot's limited gene pool. Jury members had to be adult white males and citizens of the county, which disqualified the non-residents who owned some of the largest river plantations. In addition, disinterested
parties were hard to locate among the residents. According to the 1840 census, Chicot County contained just 344 white men aged twenty to eighty. There were only 76 and 43 adult white males in the major riparian townships, Oden and Louisiana, of whom a goodly number were overseers. Overseers could serve on a cost-sharing jury, but were hardly prone to form opinions that might threaten their jobs. As to planters, many in Chicot (both resident and non-resident) were related by blood or marriage, social circles or political influence. Nor were landowners who lived off the river likely to be impartial. To lay assessments against each other not only established precedents that might be used against themselves, but could also invite retaliation. And, pray tell, how were ordinary citizens to determine the dollar amount of benefit a landowner would gain on higher property values for lands saved from overflow by levees yet to be built? Whatever decision a jury reached would be hypothetical and subjective because prices for cotton land depended on the price of cotton, a factor which no one could predict. Nor could a jury know what degree of protection a levee might provide. Altogether, the sharing sections of the 1840 levee law were more useful for calming anticipated objections than for an actual redistribution of costs. The features may have aided the law's passage, but minutes of the county court do not show them having a significant impact in how the law was actually practiced. In general,
the riverfront landowners of Chicot County did the same thing in 1841 that riparian proprietors did in every other alluvial plantation county on the Lower Mississippi. They built levees at their own expense for their own protection under orders of the county court. If other landowners received benefits, this was just a happy by-product which the front proprietor probably resented and for which he had scant prospect of compensation. The only workable sharing features in the law were those that pertained to the closing of waterways and the leveeing of school sections. These truly public duties could not be imposed on any one individual, so the county did share costs in those cases through public funds or contracts. However, even in these instances, Chicot's success in administration resulted as much from trial and error as from an exact following of the law as it came from the legislature. With the Apostle Paul, the levee-builders of Chicot knew when to ignore a law: "the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life." Life is what they wanted—live cotton, as well as live slaves and livestock. The law was not an end in itself, but a tool to accomplish a purpose.19

As noted in Chapter Seven, many of Chicot's planters hailed from areas where levees had been unneeded and unknown. Very few of them had lived in Chicot for more than five to seven years. They lost money and obtained a levee law in 1840, but had no experience in organized, community flood control. Naturally, a degree of
nervousness prevailed. They worried that levee-building would take time away from plantation tasks, but they also knew that the expense would increase if they had to rebuild levees built incorrectly. How much better it would be if one person was appointed to superintend and coordinate the project. A full-time levee commissioner could study Chicot's situation, make recommendations, and compose a plan for the entire county. Thus, the 1840 levee law authorized the county court to name a levee commissioner(s). He would be sworn into office, answer to the county court for job performance, and be compensated as the court deemed "reasonable and proper." Minutes of court meetings from April 1841 to October 1842 show that Chicot's levee commissioner received $1,750 in that period. In comparison with the pay obtained by the county judge, it was a large sum which showed the importance the community attached to his work. In Chicot, the levee commissioner joined a small group of officials--judge, clerk, and sheriff--who drew a county paycheck. And, he was the only county levee commissioner in Arkansas.20

According to law, Chicot's levee commissioner would study flood patterns, determine where levees should be, and decide which waterways to close. He would recommend proper sizes of levees, oversee their construction, and supervise needful repairs. Since his tenure in office was tied to that of the county court--the justices of the peace and their judge-elect--a turnover in administration might lead
to his loss of employment. However, the law's immediate object was not to put food in his mouth or to establish a public works bureaucracy, but simply to found a levee line. While the levee law of 1840 gave no directions on how to remove a levee commissioner, he was essentially an overseer—the agent of planters and their court to handle a task none of them wanted.21

Although the levee law went into effect from the date of its passage, December 18, 1840, it could not be acted upon until a meeting of the county court. The court needed time to prepare, so it postponed the January meeting until February. Thereafter, Chicot's county court minutes provide invaluable details about the implementation of the levee law. When combined with data from tax lists, memoirs, and census records, the minutes reveal (much more than the law itself) the ways in which Chicot's public works came into being. One learns about such topics as the dimensions of Arkansas's first county levees, the costs of construction, and the identity of early levee contractors, as well as pitfalls and controversies which might arise. The use of supplementary data helps to flesh out the people involved and reveals their interests in a levee agenda.22

At the February 1841 session, Dr. Albert W. Webb of North Carolina presided on the county court, having recently been chosen as county judge by justices of the peace. Webb was a twenty-nine-year-old physician who practiced medicine at Columbia and had debuted in Chicot's
public life as captain of the Oden Township slave patrol. The tax list of 1840 shows that he owned 3,415 acres of land in the county (valued at about $20,000), 6 taxable slaves, 5 horses, 12 cattle, and a well-appointed house. People in Arkansas could own $400 in furnishings without paying taxes on it, but Webb's furniture exceeded that amount by $600. Since there was only $1,246 in taxable furniture in the county, and just $8,500 more in the whole state, it is clear that the Webbs lived in an elaborate style by frontier standards. He and his wife, who was a Pennsylvanian, had just named a baby son for Dr. Benjamin Rush of Philadelphia, an educator, politician, and scientist who opposed slavery. However, like many doctors in Southern towns, Webb wanted a leading social role and probably aimed at becoming a planter. To preside over the installation of Chicot's levees would be quite a "feather in his cap." Yet, levees proved to be less than politically rewarding for Webb. Why not? The census of 1840 shows that none of his nine slaves worked in agriculture. As a non-planter, he lacked the ability to relate to Chicot's most important group as an equal. Nor, unfortunately, were his lands subject to the court's levee orders, and it looked bad for a county judge who ordered the building of levees to own 3,000 acres which escaped the orders he issued to others. After rushing levees into being in 1841, Webb lost his post as county judge in 1842 and left the county in 1844—the year of a great flood. By
1850, he appeared in the census with his wife and son as boarders in a stylish Little Rock hotel.23

Yet, since Webb's court was directly responsible for the installation of Chicot's levees, it would be appropriate to profile some officials who influenced the project. In holding court at the February meeting in 1841, Webb was aided by justices of the peace who represented the county's interests: James Clarke and Charles Campbell. Clarke owned 1,459 acres in Chicot valued at about $29,000, along with 30 taxable slaves, 11 horses and mules, and 30 cattle. He was probably a brother of John Clarke, Chicot's state senator who helped enact the levee law. Whereas Webb owned land as a speculator and lived in town, Clarke ran a working plantation and also administered the Tulling estate, a property which received levee orders. The other justice of the peace, Charles Campbell, was twenty-two in 1841 and a co-owner of 1,418 acres of land in the county (valued at about $21,000), as well as of 40 taxable slaves, 13 horses and mules, and 43 cattle. He and other Campbells were in a clique of Kentuckians who were said to care for nothing but "money, money, money, and whiskey." Whatever their social priorities, four Campbells owned plantations in Chicot in 1840 and they were all subject to levee orders. Unlike Webb, the presence of Clarke and Campbell on the court demonstrated the resolve of the community to submit to this new levee law. They were not submissive by
nature, but followed the court orders for the sake of the protection they all received.  

Anthony H. Davies did not sit with the Webb court in 1841, but was keenly interested in the proceedings. As head of the Real Estate Bank, Davies wanted Chicot's plantations to stay dry because his bank held the mortgages. However, when one examines Davies's personal history, it is clear that he invested more than money and time in levees. Like his Washington County contemporary, George Hunt of Vermont, Anthony Davies was a man "on the make:" a Northern adventurer who turned himself into a Southern gentleman through marriage, planting, and public service. Like Hunt, Davies saw the value of levees for economic growth and social progress. The success of the Chicot County levees also enhanced his honorable reputation as a leader in Southern society.  

Born in Connecticut in 1798, Davies went south at an early age to seek his fortune. In Nashville, he became a bookkeeper for Flowers and Co., then opened a store on the Mississippi at the new river town of Columbia. Davies appeared on Chicot's tax list as a slaveless resident in 1834, but soon left the county. While claiming to be bored as a shopkeeper, he may have resented the superior social status of the planters who descended on Chicot with their slaves. In Alabama, Davies met a lady who apparently brought wealth to the marriage, for he returned to Chicot as a planter. He served in the state constitutional
convention of 1836 and bought land on Lake Chicot which he named "Lake Hall." Unfortunately, swamp life did not agree with his wife and she expired in 1839 on a visit to Louisville (a city which attracted many Delta invalids). By 1840, Davies was involved with levees, the Bank, and the legislature. Though prominent, he only owned 229 acres in Chicot County (valued at $1,145), along with 19 taxable slaves and no livestock. However, in partnership with a man named Ware, he had another 967 acres (worth $14,405), 17 taxable slaves, 16 horses and mules, and 60 cattle. A large loan from the Bank promoted his fortunes, and in 1841, Davies consoled himself by marrying twenty-six-year-old Mildred Gaines of Kentucky, whose brothers stood among the county's richest planters. Major Benjamin Gaines built a palatial house at "Homestead" plantation on the Mississippi. William F. Gaines lived at Gaines's Landing and was interested in railroads. General Richard M. Gaines of "Macon Lake" was a lawyer, a friend of Andrew Jackson, and spouse of Elizabeth Hutchins, whose ancestors were colonial Natchez elites. In short, Mildred Gaines bolstered Davies's position as a member of high society. His in-laws, the Gaineses, became deeply involved in levees and even acted as levee contractors. Davies's interests merged with theirs, and they all grew quite rich from leveed planting. Never mind that in 1842 he owed the Real Estate Bank (in receivership) more than $50,000. By 1850, Davies owned 1,250 acres and 86 slaves with which he made
245 bales of cotton. By 1860, he had more than 3,000 acres and produced 735 bales. Like Hunt, Davies also obtained the esteem of his companions, being voted to three terms as county judge in the 1850s. In 1862, he died, while other New Englanders steamed downriver to end slavery. This formed an ironic conclusion to his career—but in 1841, it was two decades away. In 1841, Davies and Chicot's county court blithely embarked on levee building, confident that their efforts would be rewarded.25

County court members Webb, Clarke, and Campbell performed three major items of levee business in their February 1841 meeting. They wrote a memorial, approved a contract, and appointed Chicot's levee commissioner. The "memorial," though interesting, may be more nearly a case of frontiersmen speaking their mind than something composed with the expectation of its being granted. It was, in fact, a notice sent to Congress that Chicot wanted to tax federal lands at the same rate as other unimproved tracts. The county offered to apply the funds so raised to its new project of community levee construction.

As usual, the court appointed a committee to draft the document. Indeed, one could easily characterize local governments of that day as being "governments by committee," for respectable white males of all classes were expected to serve in group appointments without pay. Committees formed an impromptu bureaucracy, bound for specific tasks and remanded to the public once the jobs
were done. The willingness of adult white males to perform these sometimes demanding works kept taxes low and civic participation high. Whether called to physical labor, as in levee or road duty, or to intellectual labor, as in writing petitions and negotiating contracts, adult white males were deeply involved in the day-to-day functioning of county governments. Those who achieved the greatest prominence were those performing the most difficult tasks.

In the case of this levee petition to Congress, the court ordered William Van Dalsem, Thomas Ware, and John A. Craig to write Chicot's complaint. All the committeemen were interested in its outcome. Van Dalsem was county treasurer and an agent of the Commercial Bank of Rodney, Mississippi, from whom Chicot rented its courthouse. Ware was the Columbia merchant who acted as Anthony Davies's farming partner on Lake Chicot. Craig, a young attorney, built a "large plantation and elegant home" on the river north of Columbia. He was closely related to "Old Si" Craig, the land scout who first identified many of Chicot's plantation sites. John, Silas, and Josiah Craig all served as business and planting associates for prominent persons such as the Johnsons, Taylors, Todds, and Peaks. And, county proprietors subject to levee orders in 1841 included: Silas Craig; William, James, and John Taylor; James Peak, and Anthony Davies (as executor for John Fisher). In writing the petition, levee builders and their friends doubtless objected to the fact that U. S. public
lands would receive benefits of flood control without Congress spending one dime to bring levees about. To them, Washington had an obligation to pay for its share of protection. Nonetheless, there is something impudent and far-fetched in what Chicot proposed. In the words of the county court, the petition prayed: "Congress to give the County Court of Chicot the right to tax all lands, subject to overflow in said County and owned by the General Government, at the minimum price fixed by the laws of this state." Chief Justice John Marshall expounded the doctrine of national law being supreme to the taxing power of states in *McCulloch v. Maryland* (1819), but this failed to deter the bankers, lawyers, and land developers of Chicot from making a bold push on behalf of their county levees. The court told its committee to canvass the county for signatures and forward the document to Congress. And, incredibly enough, when one recalls that Chicot's proprietors included Vice President Richard Johnson, U. S. Senator Ambrose Sevier, and federal Judge Benjamin Johnson, it is not unlikely that the petition obtained a hearing. Indeed, within the decade Congress did grant overflowed lands to Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi to fund the building of levees. Chicot's county court may have seemed presumptuous in making such a request in 1841, but future events justified its boldness. According to the petition, the proceeds of the tax on federal lands would "be applied to the construction of said levees . . . as provided for by
our late Levee law." Again, Chicot's levee law became a catalyst for action, because it empowered competent citizens to take care of themselves. Congress did not help the county in 1841, but at least Chicot showed it was doing something tangible to improve the public domain. Could Congress say the same?26

The second major business at the county court meeting of February 1841 involved the closure of a bayou which fed from the Mississippi into Lake Chicot. In October of 1840 the court had named Anthony Davies, Silas Craig, and William McDowell Pettit (another Lake Chicot planter) as a committee to dam the bayou. Its river connection devastated lake plantations in the 1840 flood, and adjacent landowners demanded action even before the passage of the levee law. Davies, Craig, and Pettit were supposed to find someone to close it, but in the first days of the session, they failed to report a contract and were about to be fined for contempt when they revealed an arrangement with Elisha Worthington. He agreed to close the bayou for $1,500 paid in advance from the county treasury. Furthermore, Worthington bound himself to the commissioners to repay the $1,500 with 10 percent interest if he failed to finish by December 1, 1841. Worthington's securities were Thomas Ware and William H. Sutton, the county judge whose term had ended in 1840.27

The money paid to Worthington for the contract was not inconsiderable, but one should not imagine him to be a...
professional levee contractor equipped to build at any location. Levee contractors of that type became common in the 1850s, but this was one of Chicot's resident planters. Worthington took the job because he wanted a levee for his own use and because he owned slaves who could work there with a minimum security risk from sickness or running away.

Many Irishmen came to the United States from 1845 to 1847 to escape the Potato Famine. In their poverty, they accepted dangerous forms of unskilled labor, including levee construction, and were considered expendable by their managers. Professional levee contractors, or "bosses," frequently neglected the shelter and nutritional requirements of Irish workers and literally worked them to death. When rising cotton prices caused a greater demand for swamp land reclamation in the 1850s, slaves rose in value along with the price of crops, and planters came to prefer the contracting of levees to outsiders rather than use their slaves for that work. Too, the passage of Congressional Swamp Land Acts in 1849 and 1850 opened the door to state contracts for public levees where planters and slaves did not yet reside. Thus, in poor riparian counties like Crittenden and Desha, it became common in the 1850s for itinerant levee contractors to go from place to place with crews of Irishmen. They lived in tents on the riverside on wages paid by the state, and their labors were stimulated with copious doses of whiskey. Not surprisingly, these "professionally contracted" embankments were often poorly

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built, with leaves, logs, and stumps in the earthwork. Such levees frequently developed holes that caused crevasses, but the contractor would not suffer the results. He had already been paid and owned no farm property in the neighborhood, so the quality of his work was of little concern to him. In the 1840s, however—the time of Chicot's levee projects—these circumstances did not exist. Levee contracting was undertaken by landowners with a pressing interest in the levees to be built. Worthington and his slaves had a stake in the levees' success. For he and other planters, a levee failure meant loss, fines, and humiliation in the midst of one's peers. For slaves, it meant rebuilding a flooded plantation. Planters and slaves participated in the levee-building community in a way itinerant builders never could. They lived with the results of their labors everyday, not just on payday.28

Elisha Worthington actually lived on Lake Chicot, where he owned 2,215 acres and 42 slaves which he bought in 1840 from ex-Sheriff Abner Johnson. This "Sunnyside" plantation cost him $60,000, but would be paid for in cotton. The terms said that for ten years, Worthington had to pay Johnson 250 bales annually. Unfortunately for the former Sheriff, cotton hit a low price of about 5 1/2 cents a pound in 1844 and stayed low throughout the 1840s. On the other hand, it reached an average of about 12 1/2 cents in the mid 1850s. Thus, while paying Johnson, Worthington juggled second mortgages, paid his bills in cheap cotton,
and made investments in land and slaves. The maneuvers paid off when he cleared "Sunnyside"'s mortgage. By 1860, Worthington owned 543 slaves and about 12,000 acres, including other Lake Chicot properties such as "Redleaf," "So So," and "Eminence." In 1840, however, the flooding on Lake Chicot made a happy outcome seem anything but certain. The levees of Elisha's brothers, Samuel, Isaac, and William Worthington, who lived on the Mississippi in Washington County, stood firm in 1840. They made great profits, and the planting community honored their piety and worthiness. Elisha, on the other hand, had to cope with community disgust as well as overflows. In November of 1840, he married a young Kentuckian and brought her to Chicot, only to watch her go home in six months because of his refusal to give up a black mistress. Kentucky's legislature annulled the marriage in 1843. Nevertheless, Worthington eventually acknowledged two mulatto children and even sent them to Oberlin College. Thus, at "Sunnyside," Elisha had much to protect. He assembled a five thousand volume library, a slave orchestra, and one of America's biggest collections of conservatory-grown Camellia Japonicas. In luxurious living, he could ignore the slights society paid to his companion and heirs. Riches insulated him from open scorn, but none of his indulgences would have been possible without levees. Worthington was not, you see, a "typical" levee contractor, but a man deeply involved in the success of flood control for the sake of his own preservation.29
The third item of business in the court's February meeting of 1841 was the appointment of Chicot's county levee commissioner. This would not be merely someone on a committee, but an actual bureaucrat: a levee superintendent. Judge Webb and Justices Clarke and Campbell chose Franklin Stuart to be the "Commissioner of Levees in and for said county of Chicot." Thereafter, over the next two years, Commissioner Stuart, Judge Webb, and the justices of the court furnished Chicot with a complete levee line. Regrettably, little is known of Stuart's fitness for the position or why he was thought to be qualified. A man in his forties, he lived in Oden Township on the Mississippi. It may be that his appointment as levee commissioner was linked to a sense of community gratitude toward one who had struck a blow against disorder. In 1836, Stuart killed the gambler Gillem Murrell, and his cousin Virgil Stuart had betrayed the Murrell gang to authorities.  

Stuart did farm on the riverfront but was not a planter, and his circumstances were far from opulent. The 1840 census shows that his household contained eight persons, seven of whom engaged in agriculture, and he owned four slaves. According to the tax list, Stuart also owned 523 acres, 7 horses, and 9 cows. In accounting for his appointment, it is worth noting that Franklin Stuart first appeared in Chicot's court minutes in October of 1840 as a member of Judge Webb's Oden Township slave patrol. The two men had served together in this public capacity.
Furthermore, the census indicates that Stuart's next-door-neighbor was Silas Craig. According to the 1840 tax list, the former land-scout held more than 6,000 acres in Chicot in his own name and in partnerships with Todds, Taylors, and Peaks. Since Craig was deeply involved in Chicot's land development and had three tracts subject to levee orders in 1841, it may be that he and his associates had a special influence over Stuart which they hoped to use to their advantage. The camaraderie, if it ever existed, did not last. Silas Craig saw Murrell's last faro game, and in 1845, two years after the Levee Commissioner's discharge, the county paid Craig $37 for testifying in The State v. Franklin Stuart. Nevertheless, the naming of Stuart as the county levee commissioner ushered in a new, "professional" phase of community development. Sheriff Wilford Garner notified Stuart of his appointment, and he "appeared in open court" to be "duly sworn according to Law." The court authorized Stuart to hire a surveyor to help examine the county's topography, and it designated the first Monday in March for a special session to act upon the Levee Commissioner's report.31

Judge Webb and Justices Hiram Bryant and William Taylor assembled in Columbia on March 1, 1841, to receive Stuart's recommendations, only to learn that an "unavoidable accident" kept him from finishing the survey. Perhaps his dog ate it. At any rate, he offered to tell the court about the region from the Louisiana state line to the
county seat. Instead, the court deferred its levee meeting until April. Apparently the river was low in the spring of 1841; the court felt no sense of urgency. Yet, the April term of 1841 proved to be a marathon session lasting five days as the court tried to comply with the 1840 levee law. At this session, the court received Stuart's levee report, issued levee orders to landowners, designated waterways to be closed at public expense, and instigated an inquiry to the Real Estate Bank of Arkansas about a $20,000 loan for the levee program. With Anthony Davies as bank president and Chicot County planters owning much of the bank's stock, the request stood a good chance of success.32

Now that Stuart's levee report had actually been written and treasury deficits were in the air, public interest mounted and a large turnout graced the chambers of the county court. The court's personnel in April of 1841 consisted of Judge Webb; his summoned assistants, Justices of the Peace Anthony Davies and James Clarke; and six other justices: Charles W. Campbell, William Taylor, William W. Rose, Hiram Bryant, Daniel Hampton, and Samuel Jones. This group was more representative of the entire Chicot populace than the small quorums which had conducted levee business thus far. The justices came from townships on the Mississippi, on the lakesides, and along the interior bayous. Most were personally affected by the levee ordinance, and Campbell had already constructed an acceptable levee on his plantation by the time court assembled.
Planters Davies, Clarke, and Taylor received court orders to build levees, just like other riparian proprietors. Rose, a small planter on Lake Chicot, symbolized the former population of farmer-grazers who preceded them. Rose probably desired the closure of the lake's bayou-river connection, but he owned only 11 taxable slaves and ran a considerable amount of cattle in the swamps. His presence on the court reminded the ambitious new proprietors that some in the county had limited means or incentives for levee building and could not be unduly pushed to contribute. Bryant, a building contractor from Chicot's remote west side, had just finished the county jail at Columbia. The owner of three slaves, none of whom farmed, Bryant was more interested in navigation improvements for Bayou Bartholemew than in building levees on the Mississippi. Hampton and Jones, small slaveowners from Bayou Mason, appear to have had no immediate interest in the levee agenda, but did not obstruct it. Their input and that of Rose and Bryant reassured the county's plain folk neighborhoods. Chicot's riverfront planters would not be allowed to run wild with county funds, nor to compel them to perform levee duties on the lands of the rich. No matter what the levee law said in its sharing clauses, in democratic practice each leveed proprietor would bear his own burden, except where truly public levees were at stake. Nor is there any mention in the session minutes of a county loan from the Real Estate Bank. Justices from poor
townships probably squelched the measure. Their duty done, Hampton and Jones returned home before the session ended. The rest remained to implement the levee law.33

Late in the second day's session, the court paid $75 in Arkansas bank paper to the survey crew who helped Franklin Stuart. Then, it received Stuart's written report "of the several points and places" that ought to be leveed "for the general protection of the lands." Webb had this read aloud and adjourned till the next day. When court reconvened, it embarked upon the levee plan in earnest. Acting on Stuart's recommendation, Webb issued thirty one construction orders to residents of the county, eighteen to non-residents, and two to commissioners of school sections. Sheriff Wilford Garner served thirty eight notices in person, for which the court paid him one dollar each. Because some proprietors owned more than one tract, there were actually just forty-one people or partnerships involved in the levee orders. This group largely completed Chicot's levee line at their own expense. Only the gaps at waterways or school sections would be leveed with county funds.34

In building levees on private lands, the resident proprietors received December 1, 1841, as their completion date. This was Louisiana's traditional levee deadline and was thought to be safely in advance of high water. However, since the court expected delays from non-residents, it gave them a due date of two months earlier.
According to law, the county clerk would notify non-residents by three months' notice in an Arkansas newspaper. If they failed to build a levee by October 1st, Stuart would contract to the lowest bidder and delinquent landowners would bear the costs. 

It was wise for the court to protect Chicot's interests in this way. Persons classed as non-residents were usually speculators who owned vacant, unimproved land and lived outside the county. "Non-residents" in the 1841 levee orders were not operating the land as plantations; they had no slaves, overseers, or even livestock in residence. This type of landowner was not truly a part of the levee-building community. Like Uncle Sam, they were the landowners most likely to default on levee work. They frequently sold land when surrounding improvements raised its value, but seldom initiated costly projects themselves. Rather, non-residents wanted to hold potentially valuable tracts with as little cost as possible, and their speculations tended to impair the tax base. For example, in 1840, Chicot's resident landowners held 119,606 acres worth $1,152,449; while non-residents held 119,268 acres worth only $567,085. Non-resident acreage, though almost identical in extent, had a value of 51 percent less due to the lack of improvements. Court minutes for 1841 and 1842 show that at least ten contracts had to be made for delinquent non-residents after the levee orders. Since only fifteen landowners fell into the non-resident category, ten
represents a poor rate of compliance. In giving them an earlier deadline, the county acted with prudence. 36

To illustrate the annoyance that absentee proprietors might cause to neighborhoods and local governments, one turns to the example of Francis Surget, a Natchez "nabob" who invested in Arkansas. He came from a wealthy family, and in 1830, as a man in his thirties, owned 98 slaves on a leveed, riverfront property in Concordia Parish, La. Surget knew the value of fertile, alluvial soil, and he bought unimproved Arkansas swampland in suitable climate zones from the proceeds of his working plantation. If flood control materialized in Arkansas, the speculations would pay off in a big way. Profits from the leveed cotton gave him a cash flow and allowed him to hold unimproved land indefinitely. During the 1830s, commodity prices treated Surget well; by 1840, his Concordia plantation had 125 slaves in residence, under the direction of a man in his fifties. One hundred of these were field hands, so Surget's facilities were large and well-staffed. By 1850, his wealth had accumulated to the point that he had about three hundred slaves in Concordia. Purchases in Arkansas also multiplied. Meanwhile, people who actually lived in Arkansas resented Surget's engrossment of its Delta land. Levees were going up in several counties by that time (the mid-1850s), and a letter to the Arkansas Gazette on Feb. 16th, 1856, singled Surget out as a flagrant speculator who refused to sell to actual settlers at current prices.
because he wanted the value to rise. Although he annually shipped about 5,000 bales of cotton (they said), he cared nothing (they said) for the effects of large-scale vacancy and non-improvement in the counties where his tracts lay. Absentees only wanted low taxes, so possession would not cost very much. The critics obviously wished they had thought of buying swamp land when Surget did. In 1857, he died, and executors were so bewildered by the scale of his holdings that they hired three commissioners to locate and inventory them. The report revealed the ownership of 55,247 acres in eastern Arkansas, or 86 1/2 square miles, larger than the island of St. Croix. Surget owned: almost 29,000 acres in Jackson County; about 9,500 acres in Monroe County; nearly 8,700 acres in Randolph County; 5,603 acres in Phillips County; 943 acres in Ashley County; 934 acres in Chicot County; and 633 acres in Desha County. The appraised value stood at $268,206, but the report stated that Surget and his partner John Kerr (who was invested in Chicot as early as 1840) only paid $6,854 for the tracts! For tax purposes, values ran from 50 cents to $18 per acre. A marginal note next to one deeply overflowed 50 cent tract said it was "entirely worthless. Not worth paying taxes on, [but] must have been entered by mistake." Most of the land was assessed between $2 to $8 per acre, with much in the $4 to $5 range. The expensive tracts were those which had been improved and protected. Others only awaited the injection of capital, labor, and infrastructure. Clearly,
Surget's career as an Arkansas land baron stretches beyond the immediate parameters of levee building in Chicot County in 1841, but he, like the planters of that levee-building community, were planning for the long term. By definition, infrastructure entails a long view of future rewards. Surget built no levees in Chicot County in 1841, but he built them in Concordia and would build them in Arkansas if it seemed worthwhile. When it did not seem worthwhile, he, and others like him, left the land alone.37

Curiously, the levee orders issued in Chicot in 1841, on the basis of Stuart's report, contained little in the way of instructions on how to build them. For example, nothing was said about a levee's proper distance from the river or the borrow pits. Orders stipulated nothing about ground preparation, sodding, revetments, or drainage. The absence of such details suggests that the court did not, as yet, know very much about how levees were built. On the other hand, it was paying a good salary to a full-time levee commissioner to supervise the construction. The court probably left those matters to him. The item that seemed most important--the levees' height--was specified in the orders, and Stuart and his surveyor determined it from watermarks on the trees. They measured watermarks on all the riverfront lands, added a margin of safety, and made recommendations. On this evidence, Chicot's county court ordered the building of levees. It required 27 of Chicot's 1841 levees to stand thirty inches high, while 21 would be
thirty-six inches high. In exceptionally low spots, it ordered two levees and parts of two others to be four feet high, while one had to be five feet high. This landowner defaulted. In width, Stuart required a levee's crown to match its height. He also indicated overall proportions: four feet of base per foot of height. The orders generated short, narrow levees whose bases typically spread ten to twelve feet across. This was somewhat smaller than the levees of Louisiana, where the state levee law of 1829 specified five feet of base, per foot of height, for levees two to four feet high. Time would tell whether the sizes were adequate. 38

The levee order issued to Horace Walworth in Levee 7, Order 2, can serve as a typical example. The court told him to start his levee at the one to be built by the Benjamin Miles Estate. It was to follow the Mississippi across Walworth's land, then unite to "the Levee protecting the Town of Columbia." Walworth's levee would measure three feet high, with a twelve-foot base and three-foot crown. "For the sake of method," the court numbered Chicot's new levees from One to Fourteen. Numbers did not designate standing levee "districts" in the way one would designate a road district, but they were sections of levee that seemed distinct at the time of construction. Some of the numbered levees connected to private levees which had already been completed or to public levees the court would order to be built on bayous and school sections. The
orders mentioned six extant private levees on plantations, as well as extant public levees at Grand Lake Bayou (in the southern part of the county) and in front of Columbia.39

It would be interesting to know how Columbia built its "urban" levee. The county spent hardly anything to improve the town, and several examples could be given of its primitive state. For instance, the jail Hiram Bryant built in 1841 received a $20 appropriation for security devices: a chain, handcuffs, and leggings. Chicot rented its courthouse from an out-of-town bank, and Silas Craig repaired Main Street as the overseer of rural road district five. In 1842, the court paid $30 for a set of Arkansas's Revised Statutes to put in the courthouse (after nineteen years as a county!) and $50 for a stray animal pen. Only ten improved lots were taxed in 1840, and court minutes of the early 1840s tell of several liquor licenses, chiefly for "vinious and ardent spirits" sold at the Columbia Hotel, the Phoenix Exchange, a docked wharf-boat, a grocery, and the Union Coffee House "by less quantities than one quart". An overseer for Horace Walworth, H. J. Ford, described the town in December of 1848 as a couple of taverns, four or five stores, and thirty to forty houses, but no church or courthouse, "if we except an old dilapidated building which is used for one." The town was small, but improved in the 1840s. With levee protection, the number of houses, and the population itself, grew, because inhabitants catered to levee-building planters and followed careers that were
locally useful. For instance, the 1850 census reveals the presence of a gin-wright, a surveyor, four store-keepers, two grocers, three lawyers, two doctors, and a merchant who sold wood to steamboats. Life revolved around the landing. This is where planters shipped their cotton and merchants received and sold store-bought goods. Front Street was also called Levee Street. The Union Coffee House stood there for the convenience of its customers. The site seemed less convenient in 1855 when Columbia fell in the river, but then, town life was never the focus of attention in Chicot. The courthouse moved inland, first to Bayou Mason, then to Lake Chicot, but planters continued to plant on the riverside. They were the source of wealth. In Columbia's vicinity, they included: Kentuckians Benjamin P. Gaines, Joel J. Offutt, Sandford C. Faulkner, John A. Craig, Silas Craig, and Henry Collins; Virginians Claiborne Saunders, John Lewellyn, and Dr. Joe Holston; New Yorkers John P. and Horace Walworth; and a lone Arkansan, James B. Miles, son of pioneer planter Ben Miles.  

Forty one proprietors received orders to build fifty one levees at the county court meeting in April of 1841. Table 8.2 tells about those landowners: their names, whether the proprietor was "resident" (in person or by proxy) or "non-resident" (owning vacant, unimproved lands), and whether he built his own levee or it was contracted out. The table also gives information about the place to be leveed—the number of acres, the assessed value, and the
number of taxable slaves. For each proprietor, taxable slaves were those of working age (aged nine to sixty). Therefore, the 507 taxable slaves recorded for the group is probably close to the number of laborers who actually built the levees. Recipients of levee orders included planters with whom we are familiar, such as Silas Craig, Elisha Worthington, the Taylors, and James Peak; also old Point Chicotans, like Horace Walworth, the heirs of Hugh White, and heirs of Benjamin Miles. Among non-resident speculators, one notes such persons as: Frederick Notrebe, the Arkansas Post cotton merchant, and his son-in-law William Cummins (a Crittenden Whig); Chester Ashley of Little Rock; Victor Flournoy, who planted in Washington County, Miss.; and Peter Hanger, a poor land speculator who owned no slaves even at his residence. Orders also went to Archibald W. Goodloe, who eventually made trouble for Judge Webb and Franklin Stuart about some levee contracts.

Court minutes also reveal the identity of contractors who built for defaulting proprietors in Table 8.2. Generally, they were resident planters who lived nearby. Archibald Goodloe built levees for Manlius Thompson and William Dix. Samuel Walker made levees due from Chester Ashley, and Anthony Davies built those required of Notrebe and Cummins. It makes sense that this type of man acted as a contractor. Neighbors had strong incentives to want levees on adjacent properties and owned a workforce to do the task.
<table>
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<th>Name of Proprietor</th>
<th>Res. or Non</th>
<th>Contracted Out</th>
<th>Acres</th>
<th>1840 Tax List</th>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Dix</td>
<td>N-R yes</td>
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<td>Archibald Goodloe</td>
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Multiple tracts--S. Craig (3), Ashley (2), Hanger (2), H. Walworth (2), Notrebe & Cummins (2)
One should not imagine from the list of levee orders that these were the only levee builders in the community. In that case, the burden on them would be heavy indeed—forty-one landowners supplying levees for seventy miles of river-front. No, some proprietors had already built levees by the time the April court convened. After all, the law requiring levees passed in November. Some probably built in the winter prior to its enforcement so they could present the court with a fait accompli. Harvests were small that year because of the overflow, and slaves did comparatively little field work in wintertime. Therefore, they were available for levee duty while the flood was still on proprietors' minds. The orders of 1841 specifically referred to extant levees belonging to Dr. Gilly Lewis, Ford & Spears, G. W. & Richard Campbell, and James & Charles W. Campbell. Dr. Lewis and the Ford and Spears partnership received orders in spite of already completing some levee work. Possibly their levees' dimensions were inadequate and the court wanted enlargements. Numerous other proprietors, though known to be on the riverfront, did not receive levee orders in April 1841; one can infer that their levees also existed. These included the "money, money, money, and whiskey" Campbells and "The Family": Vice President Richard Johnson; Judge Benjamin Johnson; Joel Johnson; Lycurgus Johnson; Sandford Faulkner; the Craig, Peak, and Taylor partnership; Colonel Benjamin Taylor; and Senator Ambrose Sevier. Reports of
Sevier's sudden return from Washington in August of 1840 spoke of his pressing personal business because of the flood. It would not be remarkable if levee construction was among the tasks he called to his overseer's attention. Indeed, the acquisitive and intelligent Johnsons, who seem to have built levees voluntarily, may well have been the ringleaders who obtained the law's passage from behind the scenes. A few other landowners—like their political foes Cummins and Notrebe—had to be coerced. Even old-timers on the high ground at Point Chicot were obliged to comply.43

On the fifth day of the April levee session, Chicot's county court addressed the issue of public levees. Acting on Stuart's advice, the court embarked on a general program to close all the county's bayous that communicated with the Mississippi. Because rivers and bayous are public property, levee-dams to shut them had to be built at public expense under public authority. Money for the task came from the county treasury. As such, it originated from taxes paid by landowners, slaveowners, and poll-taxpayers from every township, even the plain-folk neighborhoods like Bayou Bartholemew and Bayou Mason that lay far from the river. Since non-riparian regions tended to resent levee appropriations, the court had to make sure it acted within its state-given authority to commission public works of this type. One public embankment, a dam to close the mouth of Grand Lake Bayou, was already finished by 1841. Another, being built by Elisha Worthington on Bayou Lake
Chicot, was under contract. Both these dams protected the planters on relatively populous ox-bow lakes. The next phase of bayou closures would seal the Mississippi from all its outlets in the county.\textsuperscript{44}

In later years, hydraulic engineers frequently debated the merits of this kind of policy. Those who advocated the closure of outlets were called "levees only" engineers, whereas proponents of diversified flood control argued in favor of "levees plus outlets." Historian George Pabis attached other names to the two schools of thought. The first group he called "dominationists" for their plans to forcibly confine the Mississippi to its channel. Others were viewed as "accomodationists" for insisting that the river had to be allowed to shift a certain amount of water into its floodplain. Otherwise, water within artificial banks would rise so high that levees could not be built tall enough to contain it. If, in their damming program of 1841, the Chicot County Court, The Family, and the county's planters technically qualified as "dominationists," this would probably come as no surprise to the slaves or to the bayou farmers. History is rich in double meanings. However, the members of this new levee-building community knew little about squabbles of hydraulic science. They expressed no philosophy of engineering, nor any deep concern for environmental consequences. They just looked around and saw wet cotton fields. Without caring about the regional impact or the effects of a diminished floodplain,
the county court followed "levees only" as a practical expedient. What else could they do? Chicot's justices of the peace had no authority to build reservoirs or to channel floods into the county. No one sitting on the court wanted to pour more water into Chicot through open bayous. If the Mississippi needed outlets to maintain its "natural regimen," as accommodationists claimed, then let the floodways be in the counties of Desha, Phillips, Crittenden, or Mississippi, or in the poor Mississippi Delta counties of Bolivar, Coahoma, and De Soto, where people inured to floods were helpless to prevent them. Levee-builders who wanted protection held the means to supply it. Let others fend for themselves. "Hail, Columbia."

Hail! Columbia, happy land! Hail! ye heroes, heav'n-born band, who fought and bled in freedom's cause, And when the storm of war was gone, Enjoyed the peace your valor won; Let Independence be your boast, ever mindful what it cost.

Immortal patriots, rise once more! Defend your rights, defend your shore; Let no rude foe, with impious hand, invade the shrine where freedom lies. In heav'n we place a manly trust, that Truth and Justice may prevail, and every scheme of Bondage fail.

Behold the chief who now commands, once more to serve his country stands, the Rock on which the storm will beat! But armed in virtue, firm and true, his hopes are fixed on Heav'n and you. When hope was sinking in dismay, when Gloom obscured Columbia's day, his steady mind, from changes free, resolved on death or Liberty.

Firm, united, let us be, Rallying round our liberty As a band of brothers joined, Peace and Safety We shall find.

Therefore, Judge Webb and the justices told Stuart they wanted bayou levee-dams by December 1st. Payment to
contractors would be in Arkansas bankpaper on terms Stuart accepted, and dimensions would be left to his discretion. The court also spoke of contracts for a land-based public levee in northeastern Chicot, north of the terminal plantation levee completed by Benjamin Gaines. The land beyond his plantation approached the mouth of the Arkansas and was so swampy that no one would buy it. To extend the levee from Gaines's to Cypress Creek was seen as a desirable improvement, but the court questioned its authority to order such an embankment. Without landowners, there was no one from whom to order a levee. The site was not a riverbed, and if built, the levee would be on public land which belonged to the United States. Did the court's authority extend to public works of that sort? Webb put the matter under advisement and asked for a report at the next session. So ended the levee meeting of April 1841.47

The next term of Chicot's county court met in July. Stuart made a progress report and received $400 in Arkansas bankpaper for his pay as levee commissioner. The only important transactions were levee contracts negotiated by two sets of school trustees. According to U. S. law, the sixteenth section of each federal township formed an endowment for education. The income a local government derived from the use of the property was supposed to fund public schools. In Chicot, the court reasoned that school sections which intersected the Mississippi would be more valuable with levees. Without levees, the county would
flood and there might be no students to attend a school. Hence, the use of school land as a payment for levee contracts seemed like a reasonable trade-off. A man named Johnson agreed with trustees Benjamin Gaines and William Geiger to levee the school section in township twelve, as well as to clear and fence forty acres, in return for a five year lease of the land. William and James F. Taylor, trustees of township fifteen's school section, split their tract into quarters. Nancy Gaines's guardian obtained a five year lease to one-fourth of the school section in exchange for leveeing the front and putting twenty-five acres in cultivation. Franklin Stuart leased the other three quarters himself, promising to clear and fence seventy-five acres and to make the required levee. In effect, he was "moonlighting" as a land developer to supplement his pay as levee commissioner.48

When the county court convened for its October session in 1841, it paid $350 to Levee Commissioner Stuart and $50 to his surveyor, General John Clarke. Then, the court received a shock. It asked Stuart for his report of contracts for the closure of bayous and found he had not made any. Although the court set a deadline of December 1st for completion and the high waters would soon arrive, its Levee Commissioner had "not complied with said orders; believing that the work might be done on better terms." Stuart complained of "a scarcity of bidders" for the bayou levee-dams. Those who did bid submitted such high
estimates that he felt acceptance was incompatible with the court's directive to take the lowest bid. By now, Stuart's priorities were definitely wandering from those of his employers. He worried so much about the cost of contracts that he forgot the expense of a flood! Aghast at the interpretation Stuart made of its instructions, the court ordered him to make contracts without delay. It explained (and one would love to hear the tone of voice) that he would contract "on the best Terms that he can, taking care to have written contracts . . . therein specifying the manner in which the work is required to be executed and the price thereof."49

At times, the quest for flood control in Arkansas's richest county must have resembled a comedy of errors. During the October court meeting, after Stuart's rebuke, he counter-charged that Silas Craig had failed to maintain road district five from Main Street to Sandford Faulkner's. Three landowners then pointed out that Stuart had scrambled the legal descriptions in several levee orders and told them to embank someone else's land. Yet, even if the Levee Commissioner was not infallible, alternative methods of organization presented hazards of their own. For instance, at a special meeting in November, a small planter named John Llewellyn asked the court to reimburse him for a levee he built on his own initiative across Dry Schute. The court scorned his request and warned that levees to close waterways belonged to the government's purview.
Unfortunately for the dignity of the court, the people of Chicot were grateful to Llewellyn for his maverick action and wrote a petition urging the court to adopt his levee as a public work. In 1842, the court accepted responsibility for the bastard levee-dam and paid $200 for its upkeep.50

A more striking example of problems caused independently of the Levee Commissioner can be seen in the levee-dam built by Elisha Worthington. Its history plainly shows why public levees were best funded through bureaucratic channels and regular taxation. The building of a levee on Bayou Lake Chicot, as well as a related bridge, had been a priority for the county since 1840. Anthony H. Davies, William McDowell Pettit, and Silas Craig worked with Elisha Worthington to get it started even before the levee law was implemented, and the $1,500 the county agreed to pay him was just half the contract price. The other $1,500 was to come from funds subscribed by landowners who would benefit from the bayou's closure. Chicot County paid Worthington its share of the cost when the commissioners officially received the bridge. Then, in November of 1841, the court told Davies, Pettit, and Craig to start collecting the subscription. Worthington would get half the money when he finished two-thirds of the levee and the rest when he completed it. At this point, Worthington's problems began. He did receive $750 from the subscription, but as late as April of 1844 was still waiting for the rest. With the levee in place, subscribers no longer felt a sense of
urgency. He complained about non-payment, and the court consulted a lawyer to see if it was liable for the shortfall. The next day, it gave another attorney the subscription list to see what could be collected. This, and similar episodes in some quasi-public county bridge commissions, showed that the surest way to get paid for public works was to fund them through tax money. It was simply more reliable to raise funds from county revenues collected by a sheriff, because he was authorized to confiscate and sell land for back taxes. In theory, it made sense for those who received a project's benefits to pay bigger shares of its cost; but in reality, people were always more ready to pledge a subscription than to pay it. Contractors could not depend on such amorphous systems when engaging in messy and toilsome jobs such as levee building. Subscribers might scorn a pledge collector. A sheriff's tax lien, on the other hand, could not be ignored.\textsuperscript{51}

As mentioned earlier, the 1840 levee law detailed a way to distribute levee costs among the population through jury decisions. In practice, the clauses were ignored. Only the first levee order—the one written to Shaw and Bowles in April, 1841—contained sharing clauses in the text. The other fifty levee orders did not bother to put the verbiage on paper. Everyone knew riparian landowners would bear the cost. Yet, if most sharing mechanisms of the 1840 levee law failed, those that related to public levees did work, because citizens paid for shares of public
levee contracts when they paid county taxes. In effect, the court's right to spend money for levees from the county treasury turned the whole county into a levee tax district. The money to shut riverfront bayous came all the way from Columbia to Bayou Bartholemew. This was really not unfair, for bayou flooding did impact the interior, and beds of bayous could not, by definition, belong to any one person. Too, the level of taxation was not oppressive. Riverfront planters paid the bulk of the county taxes through higher assessments, and the bayou farmers obtained public works for their neighborhoods from the county treasury just like the levee builders did. For example, at the same time levees were built to close riverfront bayous, county money was also funding $2,700 worth of bridge work on Bayou Mason and $1,000 in navigation improvements for Bayou Bartholemew. Perhaps the county's west end did not get expenditures in proportion to its voting population, but neither did bayou people pay as much into the treasury. In that day, citizens did not view public spending as a chance to redistribute wealth. Rather, they thought benefits should be returned in proportion to one's contributions. The land bounties paid to military veterans are a good example of this principle. Public works did not aim at social leveling, but merely to provide services that individuals could not supply for themselves. River planters probably had the greatest influence on the county court, but plain folk were not without power when they chose to exert it.
Planters could not "oppress" bayou farmers in levee matters. Indeed, bayou settlers were put to very little trouble. In practice, the costs did fall largely upon those would benefit—the private landowners on the riverside—even without the use of subscriptions. Anyway, Worthington's experience discouraged further trials of voluntary cost sharing. Funding through taxation became the prevailing mode of operation.52

In the disbursement of funds, timely payment was as important as collection. After the Stuart dilemma of unassigned contracts and the Worthington subscription fiasco, the county court realized it needed a more regular payment policy. Hence, the court's special meeting of November 1841 brought public finance to the forefront, and Judge Webb and the justices acted on the sheriff's delinquent tax list. They also examined the treasurer's report and initiated a warrant system to pay levee contractors. Warrants were, in effect, a promissory-note currency which bore 10 percent interest from the date of issuance, redeemable against future county revenues. One senses that Anthony H. Davies, president of the Real Estate Bank of Arkansas, and county treasurer William Van Dalsem, an associate of the Commercial Bank of Rodney, gave advice about the plan, because Chicot's county treasury now came to operate much like banks of that day. It no longer needed a loan of $20,000 from the Real Estate Bank of Arkansas; the warrant system gave Chicot its own funded
The court asked for "a good copper plate engraving of warrants . . . to be made at the city of New Orleans or Cincinnati." Nothing shabby would do, so it ordered five to ten quires (125 to 250 sheets of warrants) "printed upon good, fine banknote paper." Furthermore, the court told Stuart to advertise for contracts for the county's delinquent or public levees, specifying that payment would be in warrants. The 1840 levee law did not specifically authorize Chicot to use a system like this, but the court interpreted its law of 1840 on the basis of expediency and inferred whatever was necessary to best accomplish the task.53

In January of 1842, the levees were still incomplete, so the court issued Stuart some contracting guidelines. It told him not to offer more than 35 cents per solid yard for earthwork, to insist on bonds for faithful performance, and to post notices of available contracts at five of the most public places in the county. With advertisements of this type, contractors would primarily be local men who saw the signs. Table 8.3 shows a list of thirteen contracted levees from the county court minutes. The data includes the nature of the levee, the name of the contractor, his connection to the place to be leveed, the amount of earth the levee contained, and the price a contractor received. Each of the contractors were resident planters. For them, levee construction provided flood insurance and a second income.54
## TABLE 8.3

**LEVEE CONTRACTORS OF CHICOT COUNTY, ARKANSAS, 1841-44**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature of Levee</th>
<th>Name of Contractor</th>
<th>His Relation</th>
<th>Its Size</th>
<th>Contract Price</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M. Thompson, Delinquent</td>
<td>Goodloe Neighbor</td>
<td>8,217 cu yd</td>
<td>60&quot;x20'x60&quot;</td>
<td>$3,944.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wm. Dix, Delinquent</td>
<td>Goodloe Neighbor</td>
<td>2,920 cu yd</td>
<td>42&quot;x14'x42&quot;</td>
<td>$1,460.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chet. Ashley, Delinquent</td>
<td>Walker Neighbor</td>
<td>Goodloe Neighbor</td>
<td>2,028 cu yd</td>
<td>48&quot;x16'x48&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talbot Heirs, Delinquent</td>
<td>Gaines Neighbor</td>
<td>2,384 cu yd</td>
<td>42&quot;-48&quot; high</td>
<td>$834.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pete Hanger, John Fulton, &amp; Tom McKee, Delinquents</td>
<td>Clark Surveyor to Stuart &amp; Neighb.</td>
<td>11,244 cu yd</td>
<td>36&quot; high</td>
<td>$3,935.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wm. Christy, Delinquent</td>
<td>Campbell Unknown</td>
<td>6,336 cu yd</td>
<td>36&quot; high</td>
<td>$2,217.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. S. Peak, Delinquent</td>
<td>Campbell Unknown</td>
<td>6,308 cu yd</td>
<td>36&quot; high</td>
<td>$2,207.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Levee @ Talbot's B., Whiskey Bayou, Patton/Clark Bayou, Bayou Yellow Bend</td>
<td>Gaines Neighbor</td>
<td>41,147 cu yd</td>
<td>41,147 cu yd</td>
<td>$14,401.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Levee, Otter Bayous</td>
<td>Taylor Unknown</td>
<td>2,514 cu yd</td>
<td>35 ct p yd</td>
<td>$900.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Levee, Cross Bayous, Opossum Fork, Cypress Bend</td>
<td>Gaines Neighbor</td>
<td>6,336 cu yd</td>
<td>36&quot; high</td>
<td>$2,452.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Levee, in Opossum Fk. Cypress Creek</td>
<td>Gaines Neighbor</td>
<td>12,502 cu yd</td>
<td>35 ct p yd</td>
<td>$4,375.70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Because slaves did the labor of levee building and tilled the fields which were the object of levee protection, it is appropriate to note the amount of land and the number of taxable slaves that each of these contractors owned. According to the 1840 tax list, Major Benjamin Pollard Gaines controlled 1,894 acres and 26 taxable slaves at "Homestead" plantation on the Mississippi. His place marked the approximate northern terminus of the private levee line. Beyond that, the riverfront declined in elevation towards Cypress Creek as it entered Desha County, nearer the mouth of the Arkansas. Chicot's taxpayers paid Ben Gaines $18,777 in county warrants to enclose the river from his place to Cypress Creek. His brother, William H. Gaines of Gaines' Landing, owned 35 taxable slaves and 5,921 acres in his own right, plus 6,751 acres with General Richard Gaines of "Macon Lake" plantation. Chicot paid William Gaines $2,452 to close several bayous, including one at Isham Talbot's that frequently overflowed his own fields. Colonel Benjamin Taylor, who drowned in Chicot in the flood of 1850 while riding to meet his daughters, owned 1,642 acres and 34 taxable slaves. The county paid Taylor $900 to put four dams on various branches of Otter Bayou. Elisha Worthington, the contractor at Bayou Lake Chicot, owned 2,200 acres and 36 taxable slaves. He made at least $2,250 on the contract. John R. Llewellyn, who owned only 270 acres and 8 slaves, failed in business in Vicksburg in the Panic of 1837 and also failed to get compensation for
his levee at Dry Schute. Years later though, he achieved prominence as a member of a regional levee board. In the realm of levees built for delinquents, the 40 taxable slaves of Charles W. Campbell earned that planter $4,426 for levees on the Christy and Peak tracts, while Captain Samuel D. Walker's 40 taxable slaves raised about $4,500 from Chester Ashley. The slaves themselves probably received little or none of the proceeds as direct payments, but may have been paid overtime if they worked on weekends or holidays. Of course, slaves did obtain trickle-down benefits from levee work. Levee building conserved their own labor, health, food supply, and household goods. It also protected the master's health and the profitability of his plantation, thereby reducing the chance that death or financial reverses would cause the liquidation of assets and the break-up of a slave community. The advantages of levee completion spanned the whole social spectrum, unless one happened to be a snake, wolf, alligator, or cypress tree. In that event, one's days might be numbered.55

At the April court of 1842, Franklin Stuart reported the completion of several public levee contracts. The court tallied expenses for the year, saw that it needed $11,942 to pay bills, and figured the tax rate from the sheriff's assessment list. The local governments of that day did not set a tax rate in advance of expenditures, then hurriedly spend the budget at the end of the fiscal year. No, they spent frugally during the year, totaled the sum,
and figured a county tax rate which would raise that amount. What a novel idea. In 1842, the county's assessed worth was $2,328,852. To meet expenses for the year, the court needed a poll tax of one dollar (from each of the 294 resident white adult males) and a county ad valorem tax of .5 percent on assessed property, viz.: land, lots, slaves aged nine to sixty, pleasure carriages, household furniture in excess of $400, horses and neat cattle more than three years old, mules more than two years old, merchandise in stores, and money loaned at interest. Tax payments could be made in Arkansas banknotes or Chicot County warrants. The state tax rate was fixed at 1/8 of 1 percent.56

In spite of the court's efforts to balance its outlays between the riverfront and the backcountry, between levees for one and bridges for the other, a comprehensive levee agenda was bound to spark some resentments. Toughs who floated in and out of Columbia were ready to "stir the pot" on any subject. Class-based antagonisms surfaced between planters and plain folk when bayou settlers and pioneers were told to subsidize public levees for the new river and lake planters. Even among the gentry, some only cooperated out of compulsion. Too, there were "leaders" like Stephen Gaster and Archibald Goodloe who fancied themselves injured by the workings of the Webb-Stuart levee plan. They capitalized on community disenchantment by being spokesmen for the unsatisfied. Although Chicot was not as wild as in the days of the Murrellites, its people still knew how to
cause problems. Alcohol flowed freely, and in April of 1842, justices found it desirable to name a committee for Columbia and Oden Township to patrol "on each Sabbath, all holidays, and . . . as often as in their discretion it may seem necessary to keep order, decency, and sobriety."57

In regard to levees, the controversial items appear to have been: the Webb court's creation of a debt and warrant system; the use of tax money for levees; the granting of contracts to rich people like Gaines, Davies, Campbell, and Taylor; and the compensation paid to Levee Commissioner Stuart. For example, at a court session where the county paid Franklin Stuart $500 for six months as levee commissioner, citizens on Chicot's west side complained of obstructions in Bayou Bartholemew and asked for $5,000 to make improvements. To investigate the merits of their request, the court appointed Stuart, William Gaines, and a Bayou Bartholemew farmer, John Fisher, to study the situation. On the basis of their report, the court reduced the grant to $1,000. In this—the first recorded vote in Chicot's session minutes—Webb voted against the Bartholemew appropriation. Stephen Gaster, a recently active justice from Bayou Bartholemew, voted "yes," obtained its passage, and received the $1,000 contract. Again, disinterested public service was not the motive. The proposed improvements ran from Gaster's farm to the Louisiana state line, and he was one of the county's poorest, but most ambitious, speculators. In his own name Gaster owned more
than 3,000 acres in Chicot, but no slaves. The household of his partner, Peter Hanger, who owned 562 acres on the Mississippi, contained just four persons engaged in farming in 1840, none of whom were slaves. Together, Hanger and Gaster owned about 1,200 unimproved acres. Yet, unlike the Gaineses, Worthingtons, and others of that ilk, Hanger had no labor force to build levees. When the court issued its levee orders, he found himself saddled with the duty to build a line of embankments three feet high and a mile long. Instead, the levees were contracted, with those of John Fulton and Tom McKee, to General Clarke, Stuart's surveyor, for $3,935. Sheriff Garner then asked the court for authority to sell Hanger's land for back taxes from 1842. Tax sales also hung over pioneer families such as those of Hugh White, Thomas Ward, and William Weir, whose settlements long predated the levee-builders'.

Dissatisfaction with Judge Webb and Levee Commissioner Stuart finally erupted at the January court session of 1843. By now Chicot's levees were built, the county seemed safe, cotton prices were depressed, and taxes appeared to be rising. In the absence of danger, Webb and Stuart came to be painted as expensive extravagances. Court attendance had slacked off during the sessions that dealt with levee construction, but now twelve justices descended on Columbia to find fault with Webb's administration. His treasurer, William Van Dalsem, was nominated as county judge by Elisha Worthington, but Stephen Gaster served as the election
chairman, and he cast a tie-breaking vote to elect Colonel Archibald W. Goodloe as Chicot’s next county judge.59

Little is known of Archibald Goodloe as a person. He did not come to Chicot with the planter cohort of the 1830s, nor does he seem to have been in residence during the flood of 1840. Instead, he arrived in late 1840 or early 1841 and lived on the Mississippi in proximity to Judge Ben Johnson’s "Florence" and Vice President Johnson’s "Tecumseh." Goodloe may well have been a connection of theirs who acted as a Family mouthpiece, for it took remarkably little time for him to be accepted as a leader. Nor did he remain long in the county. A chronicler of 1890 noted him as the improver of "the Goodloe tract" which passed, along with "Tecumseh," to Francis Griffin ("the world's largest cotton planter") prior to 1860. Memoirist Leona Brasher mentioned Webb and other county dignitaries, but said nothing about Goodloe. Nor does he appear in the 1850 agricultural schedule. Yet, he served two terms as county judge from 1843 through 1846. In that time, Goodloe and the justices reorganized Chicot's levee system.60

Levee controversies surrounded Goodloe's career from the beginning. As a contractor, he accepted jobs from Franklin Stuart to build levees for delinquent landowners: Manlius Thompson, William Dix, and the heirs of George Vashon. The contract price of 48 cents per cubic yard was substantially higher than that received by the Campbells, Taylors, Clarks, or Gaineses. It was also in excess of
what the court authorized Stuart to pay for public levee work, but these were private tracts where the county had work done and then tried to recover costs from the owners. In all, Goodloe was set to earn $7,132 on the contracts. However, Levee Commissioner Stuart found fault with the levee built for Dix and refused to accept it at the April term of 1842, thus blocking a payment to Goodloe of $2,215. It appears that this incident stung Goodloe's pride as well as his pocketbook, for when he had the opportunity to retaliate, he did.61

Judge Albert Webb presided at the January 1843 court session, but the majority of justices present were Goodloe supporters. With their ability to outvote supporters of the status quo, Webb became a lame duck. Before the session closed, several features of Chicot's levee system—only two years old—had been stunningly altered. The tense nature of the meeting is attested to by the large turnout and the clerk's unusual step of recording yeas and nays on each vote for officers. The dissatisfaction was not entirely personal. Generally speaking, times seemed hard in 1842 for cotton planters. Ordinary and middling grades of cotton were selling for $27 to $29 a bale, and planters' incomes had fallen. Meanwhile, they were still dealing with extraordinary costs from flood damages, lost crops, and levee building. They, and their government, had to retrench. Yet, when county treasurer and candidate-for-judge Van Dalsem read his treasury report for 1842, it
showed that Chicot began the fiscal year with almost $4,000 and collected nearly $11,000 during the year, but spent so much that a balance of 69 cents remained. Not only that, several levee contracts were pending and contractors held many outstanding warrants. In other words, the court was guilty of deficit spending. According to Webb and Stuart's critics, the populace cried out for economy. On January 3, 1843, the second day of the session, Franklin Stuart "tendered his resignation, which the Court doth accept."62

This terminated Stuart's career as the county's professional levee commissioner. It seems that having made arrangements for Chicot's protection, he worked himself out of a job. Nevertheless, the county was not satisfied with simply discharging him. Justices knew that he had "let out certain levees which have not been completed." Therefore, the court ordered Stuart to "continue to superintend such levees ... without pay or emolument." The legality of such an order might be questioned, and it shows a mean-spiritedness which is rather depressing. But public works seldom proceeded smoothly, and Stuart's position as fiscal scapegoat was not Chicot's only sacrifice on the altar of lower spending. For example, Chicot had been renting its courthouse and planned to build one of its own, along with a new jail. However, in 1843 the court no longer felt it could afford the project. Justices accepted the voluntary resignation of building commissioner Silas Craig and requested the resignations of four others. Intent upon the
recovery of levee costs which the county paid on behalf of delinquents, the court also handed a list of defaulters to prosecutor Samuel Wooley. He was told to procure judgments and a sale of lands. In addition to legal fees, the court vowed to pay Wooley a 2 1/2 percent commission on whatever he recovered.63

The major change in Chicot's levee administration took place on the third day of the January meeting. In place of a salaried, county-wide levee commissioner, the court appointed three citizens to act as levee commissioners "without pay or emolument" in their own riparian townships. Previously, when Chicot's planters knew little about levees, a hired levee commissioner made sense. Over time, however, the planters gained experience and by 1843, they felt confident that gentlemen amateurs could manage the system Stuart originated. Thus, the job of levee commissioner joined the ranks of honorific committee posts which leading men were supposed to perform as a public duty. To serve without pay enhanced a man's prestige, for it showed he was independent, held the respect of his peers, did not need a salary to live, and was fully vested as a member of the community, not a hireling, agent, or overseer to be discarded when usefulness ceased. In January of 1843, the court appointed: Aaron Register, as levee commissioner in northeastern Chicot's Township of Franklin; James F. Taylor, for central Chicot, in the Townships of Oden and Old River Lake; and Romulus Payne, for southeastern Chicot,
in the Township of Louisiana. Each commissioner's authority only extended to levees in his own township. The division of labor allowed local officials to keep an eye on affairs in their own locality without the hardship of traveling far from home. With the closing of bayous and leveeing of riverfront plantations, Chicot felt its plan was essentially complete. All that remained was to keep what existed in repair.64

A sense of triumph also shines in a message approved by the Arkansas General Assembly a few weeks later. On February 2, 1843, Governor Yell signed a resolution from both houses concerning the levees of Chicot County. It said the county's 1840 levee law "has been fully tested, and proven entirely practicable" for the purpose of "reclaiming from the inundation of the Mississippi, all the lands lying in said county." Farmers on Bayous Macon and Bartholemew, as well as travelers through the Great Wilderness, might have considered the resolution to be somewhat inaccurate, for the levees only prevented flooding from the Mississippi at the riverside and on the lakes. However, the resolution was not designed to be accurate but to extract favors from Washington. The legislature and Governor Yell stated that Chicot's levees worked splendidly. "The county and citizens individually . . . have been at a great expense, and the line of said levees is yet incomplete, and a further taxation . . . would be too onerous." Therefore, the county asked Congress to
grant it the federal lands that remained in Chicot so it could sell them for levee purposes.65

Underneath the legislative bragging lay a reality that Chicot was having a hard time paying its debts. County revenues were frequently collected in Arkansas bank paper, and its value supported the sums paid to levee contractors. Yet, because of depressed cotton prices and tight credit policies from the Bank of the United States, the worth of Arkansas bank paper had steadily eroded. Evidence of the decline can be seen in financial news from the Civilian and Galveston City Gazette. This city, the leading port of the Republic of Texas, was heavily dependent on U. S. money for the conduct of business, and its people studied New Orleans money markets to tell Texans the relative value of bills versus specie and foreign currencies. With U. S. Treasury notes representing par value, specie often commanded a premium, or value above par, whereas paper money issued by state-chartered banks or internal improvement companies with banking privileges generally traded at a discount.66

Bills issued by three financial institutions command the attention of students of Chicot's levees--those of the Real Estate Bank of Arkansas, the Arkansas State Bank, and the Lake Washington and Deer Creek Railroad and Banking Company. From 1841 to 1844, their value plummeted, causing repercussions in public finance and among the levee-building community as a whole. For example, at the beginning of December in 1841, Arkansas banknotes traded at
a 28 to 32 percent discount to face value and par funds. By the end of February, 1842, the discount to par reached 50 to 60 percent. Other money lost value as well, but to varying degrees. To trade at a high discount impaired credibility and caused further declines. For instance, the Galveston Cotton Press, sponsor of Galveston's money market reports, stated on February 26th it would no longer accept bills which passed at a discount of more than 6 percent. By mid-July, 1842, Arkansas Real Estate Bank notes and Arkansas State Bank notes were trading at discounts of 70 to 75 percent! At the end of July, Arkansas Real Estate money ceased to have any reported value at all, and Arkansas State Bank notes traded for 30 to 35 cents on the dollar. The collapse of Real Estate Bank notes enhanced the worth of Arkansas Bank money to a slight degree, so that bills from the latter circulated from August of 1842 to January of 1843 with a value of 35 to 43 cents on the dollar. Unfortunately, by September of 1843 the Galveston money market did not even list the currency. Arkansas Real Estate Bank money disappeared from the list in August of 1842, and Lake Washington and Deer Creek money vanished even earlier, between February and July of 1842. With levees and internal improvements being funded with eroded or extinct currencies, it is little wonder that the county of Chicot asked Congress for relief. 67

In lieu of intervention, Goodloe's administration assumed the duty of holding Chicot together. First,
though, there were pressing matters of personal business. At the initial Goodloe court meeting, Romulus Payne, newly appointed levee commissioner of Louisiana Township, received the levee built by Goodloe which Stuart turned down. Payne approved a payment to Goodloe of $2,214 in county warrants; then, Payne immediately resigned, without having ever taken the oath of office to carry out his duties "impartially." After his resignation, Benjamin Taylor took his place; then, Ben Taylor, James Taylor, and Aaron Register took the oath. In the course of the meeting, they accepted the completion of the last contracts negotiated by Franklin Stuart. This relieved the former Commissioner from further involvement with the levees of Chicot County. The Goodloe court engaged in several other payoffs, concessions, and reprisals at this session. Leading planters such as Elisha Worthington, James Peak, Anthony Davies, and the useful, middle-class William W. Rose obtained the coveted privilege of putting gates on county roads that crossed their lands. Aaron Register received Ben Gaines's levee and approved a payment to him of $14,400. The treasury even got a boost from new fees on transient salesmen: $15 on "each hawker or pedlar by land or water," clock peddler, or nine pin alley keeper, and a $250 fee on billiard tables. Goodloe's court also revived the fantasy of paying for levees by private subscription. He found a list of subscribers dated 1840 in the county
clerk's office and told levee commissioners to make what they could of it.\textsuperscript{68}

At a special adjourned term on May 30, 1843, the Goodloe court explained its own levee policies. It said that the "previous steps" taken to implement the levee act of 1840 had "not been in strict compliance" with the law's provisions. Furthermore, those steps would make the act "inoperative and void" if persisted in. Therefore, the court ordered its levee commissioners to "speedily . . . carry into effect the intention of said act" by inspecting "levees heretofore attempted to be erected" by Stuart and Webb. Township levee commissioners were to look for flaws, defects, and misalignments that might require the building of "other and different levees." They might even uncover a need for "other and different" levee contracts. Yet, each was to restrict his investigation and recommendations to levees within his designated township(s). They had no authority to cooperate with each other, nor to consult about the levee and drainage needs of the county at large. Each commissioner answered individually to the court for his own township. Now, all pretense of regional planning was obliterated, and the job of levee commissioner had decayed from a professional task for a single, full-time employee, to one of upkeep and localistic lobbying on behalf of the leading planters. Furthermore, in October, the Goodloe court indicated its lingering disapproval of the Webb administration by nullifying Stuart's lease of the
partial school section in Township Fifteen. The court claimed that the lease had been "made without authority of law," but it failed to act against other lessees who agreed to identical conditions. Was this because Stuart had not kept his bargain, or because the other lessees were named Johnson and Gaines? On the same day as the action against Stuart, Levee Commissioner James Taylor resigned and Silas Craig took his place.69

At the end of 1843, Goodloe's court figured its year-end tax rate and closed the year with $1.24 in the county treasury, as opposed to Webb's 69 cents for 1842. However, where the Webb court spent almost $15,000 in 1842, Goodloe's only expended $9,600 in 1843. Retrenchments appeared to be succeeding. Then, in April of 1844, the Goodloe regime took further measures to stabilize finances. It tackled the refinancing of Chicot's debt.70

From 1841 to 1843, the 10 percent warrants had been issued against future revenues to pay for public and delinquent levees. In April of 1844, about $40,000 in warrants remained outstanding "to redeem which there is no money in the Treasury." The court pointed out that contractors received them at a time when Chicot accepted devalued Arkansas money for county tax payments, "which banknotes were then and are still much below par." Now, the money was worthless, and "unless said warrants can be redeemed at about one half in par funds, and funded," the county would be unable to meet obligations "without the
most ruinous sacrifice." Apparently, Chicot's warrant holders attended this sad meeting, for they agreed to restructure the county debt at fifty cents on the dollar. Warrant-holders had until January of 1845 to bring their paper to the county clerk. He would render a certificate of deposit for half the face value plus accrued interest. In addition, the restructured debt would carry a new interest rate of 6 percent rather than ten. No specific remarks in the minutes tell how the court obtained the creditors' assent. It just says the court would print a newspaper notice to advise creditors that new terms applied. Manueverings of such sophistication would have been inconceivable in Delta counties such as Arkansas, Crittenden, and Mississippi. Their residents were still trapping for furs.71

It would not have been difficult to gather the levee warrant holders of Chicot into one room to discuss the county's debt. After all, the principal warrant holders included a very small group: Benjamin P. Gaines, Col. Benjamin Taylor, Charles W. Campbell, Gen. John Clarke, Judge Archibald Goodloe, Capt. Samuel D. Walker, and Anthony Davies. All of them resided in Chicot and were deeply interested in the success of the county levee system. Indeed, as justices of the peace, county judges, and state representatives, they exemplified in its purest fashion the ideal of American democracy which holds that a law maker's conscientious service is assured because he
must face the results of laws he makes for others. These levee contractors were heavily involved with Chicot's levee system from the beginning, and ideals of "disinterestedness" or fears concerning "conflicts of interest" were light-years from their minds. Although critics might view them as a self-interested clique, within their own circle no one expected a busy entrepreneur to engage in public service on matters of no direct import to themselves. The benefits they received from improvements were viewed as part of the "pay" that made participation worthwhile. Public men traded talents of management and supervision to the public in exchange for material advantages. After all, the public paid little or nothing in terms of a salary, but rewarded public men with esteem and a more favorable business climate for the operation of their affairs. The modern mania for disinterestedness is a bureaucratic and professional ideal, appropriate perhaps for a society of disengaged, interchangeable and nomadic employees, but not one which typified a culture made up of rooted, self-employed, and voluntaristic entrepreneurs who gave of their time in order to receive. For example, in 1843, Chicot made a calculated choice not to pay a levee commissioner, and it discharged Franklin Stuart. In turning then to an ideal of interested public service, it accomplished the task in a less "professional" way, but one with which it was more familiar. By its appointment of unpaid gentlemen as levee commissioners, Chicot was reverting to its
traditional method of administration: that of giving the people who wanted work to be done, the responsibility to do it. This was the essence of government by committee.72

In the midst of these adjustments, planters grew cotton behind Chicot's levees while the Mississippi acted out the flood of 1844. Among floods of the nineteenth century, this ranks as one of the worst. John Monette's chronicle claimed that three-fourths of the plantations from the mouth of the Arkansas River down to Lake Providence, Louisiana, flooded to depths of one to six feet. By mid-May, the Arkansas rose 33 feet and was out of its banks for 700 miles above its mouth. Ten to fifteen feet of water covered its floodplain and spread overland for thirty miles below Napoleon, "forming cascades over the Mississippi lakes." Western and central Chicot County received the overflow through Bayous Macon and Bartholemew. According to the Arkansas Gazette of Sept. 4, 1844, some citizens even explored ways of building an overland levee from Pine Bluff, on the Arkansas, to Columbia, on the Mississippi, in order to seal Chicot County off from the flooding from Desha. However, the counties where the proposed levee would lie, lay outside the jurisdiction of Chicot's County Court. The actions of its levee commissioners were restricted to their own townships. Hence, an organizational apparatus to combat regional flooding from sources outside the county did not exist.73

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It would be interesting to see the township levee commissioners' reports about the flood. Unfortunately, the last extant court minutes for 1844 are those of the April term, but it seems that Chicot's riverfront proprietors were satisfied with the way their government handled the flood. The fact that Chicot's tax rate and revenue remained stable, and that its spending for 1844 stayed around the usual $10,000, suggests that no extraordinary levee rebuilding was required. And, when Judge Goodloe's term expired in 1845, the seven justices who bothered to attend easily reelected him--quite a contrast to the Webb and Stuart "lynching party" of 1843. With the completion of levees that Stuart arranged and the refinancing of Chicot's debt, the county had received a levee system that suited its needs and resources. Its small embankments on the riverside could protect the "high" grounds where most planters lived. For the time being, that was all the county could hope to do. Absolute security was unattainable, but limited security at a reasonable price seemed within their grasp.74

Newspaper accounts of the flood of 1844 leave the impression that Chicot was devastated, but however severe the flooding may have been in its interior swamps, the county's levees provided considerable security for plantations on the river and lakes. Evidence for a minor scale of damages comes from a comparison of Chicot County tax assessments. Figures show that the value of the
county's taxable property decreased by only 5 percent from 1844 to 1845, whereas the flood of 1840 caused a 41 percent decline in property values. Indeed, this fact alone proves that levees helped. Chicot's livestock did suffer to a degree in 1844. The number of cattle, vulnerable to drowning or starvation because of their swamp grazing patterns, declined 8.5 percent from 1844 to 1845. The number of mules, which, though strong animals, are somewhat susceptible to disease, dropped by 12 percent. On the other hand, the number of horses increased by 9 percent from 1844 to 1845. Perhaps this is because planters who lost mules and part of their crops could only afford to replace them with less-expensive horses. On the human side, the number of resident white men increased in the period 1844 to 1845 from 359 to 417. This demonstrates their confidence that Chicot remained a viable place to live, and the bulk of the population growth took place on the bayous. By this time, the riverfront had reached a saturation point with little room for new investors, but Chicot's bayou ridges were staying drier and safer with levee protection on the riverfront. This encouraged people to settle lands which had formerly been viewed as irreclaimable. Thus, levees even provided opportunities and benefits for the plain folk. The levees promoted urban growth as well. By 1845, Chicot County contained 87 taxable town lots, as opposed to 10 in 1840. Growing optimism about eventual safety from overflow even led to a
renewed interest on the part of land speculators. The county's 1845 tax assessments on absentee owners of unimproved lands show that many investors viewed Chicot's swamps as a place with a bright future. Some valued the property enough to pay taxes on it for a number of years. Chester Ashley, for example, still owned 21,742 acres in Chicot in 1845 (only 1,499 less than in 1840). The American Land Company's holdings increased, from 25,175 acres in 1840 to 25,415 in 1845. They had received little or no profit returns but continued to hold, expecting the eventual reclamation of the soil and the negotiation of sales which would repay their patience.75

From 1845 to 1850, the court minutes contain few references to levees. Local planters continued to act as contractors, but the size of the projects and the prices paid dropped dramatically. At the October session of 1845, for example, Levee Commissioner Silas Craig was authorized to build a levee in Sorrell's Bend for "two and a half cents per square yard in par funds or ten cents per square yard in county scrip." This public levee measured a mile and a half in length. According to Craig's report of April 1848, an assortment of planter contractors built sections of the levee. Richard M. Campbell, who made 2,227 linear feet, earned just $229 for the largest section. Craig made 1,485 feet for $140, while his relative, Judge John A. Craig, supplied 1,175 feet for $79. Sandford Faulkner and Joel J. Offutt received just $29.50 and $25, respectively,
for their sections. None would grow rich on these terms, but the levee project gave county leaders a chance to do good for the community at large.76

County court responses to commissioners' reports show how the officials supervised this local levee system after its completion. For instance, at the October 1845 session, Levee Commissioner Benjamin Taylor of Louisiana Township told the court of the need for a levee five to seven feet high on lands belonging to non-resident Lunsford Herndon. In April of 1847, Taylor announced that the Herndon levee and that of Romulus Payne, next door, had caved, causing a deep overflow. Also, a levee belonging either to Archibald Goodloe or William Dix was too close to the river and would probably cave when the water receded. Taylor recommended a setback. Accordingly, Judge John A. Craig and the court ordered that the respective owners be given proper notice and remarked, laconically, that the proprietors would "probably do some part of their duty." If not, the court could authorize the letting of contracts. However, Craig's court inserted a new coercive formula which it felt was in keeping with the original levee law of 1840. Concerning the proposed contracts, it said: "Four responsible men will guarantee to the Court that the county shall not pay a cent therefor." Contractors had to agree to receive "only . . . the recourse the County Court would have on the owners of the Land, were the levee made by the Court."
Once again, the voice of experience worked to mitigate the ill effects of short-sighted original legislation.\textsuperscript{77}

Overall, this study of the levee policies of Chicot's County Court prior to 1850 has shown that the local government exercised considerable flexibility in its application of state law. Courts led by Judges Webb, Goodloe, and Craig all based their actions on the county's 1840 levee law, but each interpreted or applied the instructions in various ways. Initially, the inexperience of the planters persuaded them to hire a "professional" levee commissioner. They granted overly generous compensation to contractors and used funded debt to pay for completions. Later, Chicot's planters learned to manage levees for themselves. The court rid itself of the salaried bureaucrat, then restructured Chicot's debt. In the last phase, the court reduced the prices it paid to contractors and turned levee building into a public service which enhanced a planter's prestige. Thus, expediency, necessity, interest, and conviction swayed Chicot's county court from one policy to another. Each administration found fault with its predecessors and thought it glimpsed a more excellent way. Yet, through it all, planters and their government never removed their eyes from the main goal--the preservation of wealth. With levees, Chicot's planters grew richer than ever before. Population soared, public health improved, and even opportunities for small-farmer and urban growth were enhanced. In the 1850s, this
county's achievement truly represented a zenith for local levee building systems. With only the resources of one independent (though, one must admit, highly leveraged) county, its people built a model of flood control which stood like a beacon in the unimproved Delta. In less than five years, its fragile and unprotected clearings on the riverside became opulent, secure plantations in the "richest, driest swamp in Arkansas."

Impressions of Chicot at the end of the antebellum period, though tinted by memory, serve to capture something of the appearance of what the levee builders achieved. A Northern traveler recalled that:

Chicot County in ante-bellum times was the richest, fairest and most productive county in the state. Old River Lake [Lake Chicot], a beautiful sheet of water in the shape of a horse-shoe, [ran] eighteen miles in length and about a mile in width, lined on either side with plantations entirely above overflow, which . . . were like a continuous garden, all under cultivation, raising a bale of cotton to the acre, with elegant houses, negro quarters, stables, etc. [From the site of Lake Village, the new county seat,] you could see eight or ten miles down on either side of the lake, take in at a glance twenty or thirty large plantations, and in the distance the river and steamboats. It was indeed the most beautiful spot for a home I have ever seen in any country, and as rich as beautiful.78

In closing this study of Chicot's levees, one section of the 1840 levee law ought to be mentioned which has not been discussed--the matter of vandalism. Section 13 of its 1840 levee law provided that if any person "wilfully or maliciously" broke, injured, or destroyed any levee in Chicot County, he would be "guilty of trespass and
misdemeanor." Conviction carried a fine of not less than a hundred or more than a thousand dollars, and a jail term of not less than six months. Not only that, but "all persons injured by such trespass shall have their action at law for all damages sustained by them." In view of what happened to Chicot's levees and plantations in the early 1860s, one can only recall the toppled sign at "Twelve Oaks" which Scarlett O'Hara glimpsed on her way to "Tara": "Violators of the peace on this plantation will be prosecuted to the furthest extent of the law." By examining the Chicot County levee law of 1840 and its implementation, we have seen that the ability to enforce an act was far more important than the fact of the act's passage. A county's ability to call levees into being through organization, coercion, and community activism brought a degree of success and riches which, in a few years, would seem only too fleeting. Independent county levee lines based on slave labor were not the ultimate solution to flooding on the Mississippi. 79

ENDNOTES


2 Arkansas Gazette, 6 Jan. 1841; Table of Contents, Acts Passed at the Third Session of the General Assembly of the State of Arkansas (Little Rock: George H. Burnett, 1840), 1-3, 16. Bills permitting the incorporation of companies to build roads, schools, factories, resorts, and mines spilled from the state house. The Second Session of the General Assembly, at the end of 1838, approved many other charters: a state penitentiary, the Washington County Beet Sugar Manufactory, the Arkansas White Sulphur Spring Co., the Helena and Rockroe Turnpike, the Batesville
and St. Francis Turnpike, the St. Francis and Little Rock Turnpike, the Phillips and Monroe County Turnpike, the St. Francis and Mississippi Turnpike, the Napoleon and Little Rock Railroad, the Black and White River Iron Co., and the Chicot Academy. See Acts Passed at the Second Session of the General Assembly of the State of Arkansas (Little Rock: Edward Cole, 1839).

3Arkansas Gazette, 6 Jan. 1841; "An act to authorize and enforce the construction of levees along the bank of the Mississippi river in the county of Chicot, and for other purposes," 18 Dec. 1840, Acts Passed at the Third Session of the General Assembly of the State of Arkansas, 25-28. The ranking of Chicot as Arkansas's richest county is derived from a table compiled by the Arkansas State Auditor's Office, 1 Oct. 1840, "Exhibiting each species of property taxed in the several counties in this State, for the year 1839, and the separate valuation of each species of property . . . ," published in Arkansas State Gazette, 18 Nov. 1840.

4The author's impressions of socio-economic conditions in the Arkansas Delta as a whole have been formed by extensive studies in the 1830 and 1840 censuses, as well as in the 1850 and 1860 censuses of free and slave population and agricultural production, for the counties of Chicot, Desha, Phillips, Crittenden, Mississippi, St. Francis, Monroe, Poinsett, and Arkansas.

5Sixth Census of the United States, 1840, Arkansas.

6Ibid., Counties of Chicot and Phillips.

7Ibid.; "Phillips County," in Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Eastern Arkansas (Chicago: Goodspeed Publishing Co., 1890), 742-45. According to this source, "the extreme southern part of the county, the lowlands, were not settled until much later than the uplands." Sugar Tree Ridge rose ten to fifteen feet higher than the swamp. Crowley's Ridge ran north to south through the counties of Greene, Craighead, Poinsett, Cross, St. Francis, Lee, and Phillips. The Goodspeed author claimed fresh ridge land would yield up to 600 pounds of cotton an acre, while newly reclaimed swamp-land produced up to 1,000 pounds. For the origins of Crowley's Ridge, consult Thomas Foti, "The River's Gifts and Curses," in Jeannie Whayne and Willard B. Gatewood, eds., The Arkansas Delta: Land of Paradox (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1993), 32-34.

8Sixth Census of the United States, 1840, Arkansas: Counties of Monroe, Poinsett, St. Francis, and Desha. Settlement in Monroe lagged from the inability to control floods or ship crops. Though founded in 1829, few planters moved there until the 1850s. So many Union soldiers
contracted fever and chills here that they named attacks
"the Clarendon shake" for Monroe's county seat on White
River. Its isolation was profound. In 1850, a German
traveler and fur trader went as high as Clarendon in an
overflow. The first house he came to on White River was a
hundred miles from the mouth, and overflows on either side
extended, he said, at least ten miles each direction. See
"Monroe County" in Biographical and Historical Memoirs of
Eastern Arkansas, 509-12; Bobby Roberts, "Desolation
Itself": The Impact of the Civil War," in Whayne and
Gatewood, 78; and John Q. Wolf, ed. and trans., "Journal of
Charles Heinrich, 1849-1856." Arkansas Historical Quarterly
24 (Autumn 1965): 244-45.

Descriptions of a plain-folks ethos in Desha County
come from Mrs. B. R. McGowan, "News Release for the Desha
County Historical Society," in J. N. Heiskell Historical
Collection, Special Collections, Ottenheimer Library,
University of Arkansas at Little Rock. McGowan described
early homes in Red Fork Township as "log houses, covered
with cypress boards, now called shingles, with dirt and
straw mixed and placed between the logs, with a dirt
chimney." There were two rooms separated by a dog-trot and
a gallery in front. A lean-to kitchen appeared at the rear
when a lady obtained an iron stove to replace cooking in
the fireplace. People enjoyed inexpensive amusements:
hunting and fishing, barbecues, horse racing and shooting
matches, quilting bees, fish fries, dances, paying calls,
and visiting new babies. Over time, planters on the
Arkansas River added private levees and drainage ditches to
their properties, but not all at once as Chicot did. A
levee builder named George W. Bodkins enjoyed a long career
in Desha. According to McGowan, he began contracting when
wheel barrows were the only mechanized tool, then mules and
scrapers were introduced, and finally wheeled scrapers.

9Sixth Census of the United States, 1840, Arkansas:
County of Arkansas. Farmers and planters grew cotton on
the alluvial banks of the Arkansas, Bayou Meto, and White
River, making one to one and a half bales per acre. Grand
Prairie ran through the western side and produced half to
three-quarters of a bale per acre. Settlers usually grazed
cows on the prairie. "Arkansas County," in Biographical
See also W. H. Halliburton, A Topographical Description and
History of Arkansas County, Arkansas, From 1541 to 1875

10Sixth Census of the United States, 1840, Arkansas:
County of Mississippi. In their early married life, the
Bowens lived an entire year on wild game without bread.
See "Mississippi County," in Biographical and Historical
Memoirs of Northeast Arkansas (Chicago: Goodspeed
Publishing Co., 1890), 446, 451-55, 462, 466-67, 470-72,
According to the Goodspeed author, p. 460, Mississippi County received a twenty-mile section of federally built levee in 1887 which protected its best farmland. This was the central section, from Bear Bayou to Craighead Point. In 1890, the county was thinking of carrying the levee to its northern border. A few years hence, they thought it might be extended to the county's southern end. Then, "Mississippi [County] will be thoroughly protected from the river floods, and may expect to see the opening of an era of prosperity to which it is justly entitled." Post-bellum drainage in the county is examined in Elliot Sartain, comp., _It Didn't Just Happen_, compiled by Elliott Sartain (Osceola?: Grassy Lake and Tyronza Drainage District No. 9?, n. d. [1976?]).


_W. D. Ferguson sent his bill for a courthouse and jail at Greenock in accordance with an act of the state legislature to locate a seat of justice for Crittenden County, 21 Oct. 1825. He reported completion to the county court, Oct. Term 1832, in Crittenden County Court Record, Vol. B, 37. Microfilm copy of Crittenden Court Records, Arkansas History Commission, Little Rock, Ark. Levee appropriation and tax rate were set on 12 Oct. 1830, in Crittenden County Court Record, Vol. B. William's brother Horatio sat on the county court. At the April Term, 1837, the court bought furniture and ordered Main St. to be cleared from the Public Square to Lake Grandee. The town of [Francis] Marion contained streets called Washington, Jefferson, [William H.] Crawford, and Cypress--whose names evoke the mental and physical landscape. At the January Term 1838, the court paid $20 to clear Main St. and set $125 aside to open the square. Taxes for 1838 and 1839 are found in Crittenden Court Records, Vol. B, 137.

_Estimates of Military Road costs are from Lieut. Alexander H. Bowman to the Chief Engineer, 7 Nov. 1835_, in Clarence E. Carter, ed., _Territorial Papers of the United States, vol. 21, Arkansas Territory, 1829-1836_ (Washington, D. C., 1954), 1095. Bowman stated that the contractor for
the first four-mile section of levee road quit after trying to build it in July of 1836 with 300 men. Floods delayed them, and three-fourths came down with swamp diseases. A second contractor substituted oxen and scrapers for manned wheel-barrows; he also defaulted, and the government sued for $4,000 in damages. George W. Cullum, to Alexander Bowman, 28 Aug. 1835, Territorial Papers, vol. 21, 1076.

Bishop Morris of the Methodist Church traveled the road in late October, 1836, in a "dry" season, and it took two days to go from Memphis on the forty-two miles of swamp road to the St. Francis. Bishop Morris, "Incidents of Travel," Ladies Repository, March 1847, qtd. in Walter Moffatt, "Transportation in Arkansas, 1819-1840," Arkansas Historical Quarterly 15 (Autumn 1956): 189-90. Mail service often languished due to floods. In 1823, Little Rock received no mail from the East for nearly five months. The Military Road alleviated this, but in 1832 mail was interrupted more than a month. In 1836, Albert Pike suggested it be sent either by balloon or snagboat. Arkansas Gazette, 5 Feb. 1820, 14 Mar. 1832, and Arkansas Advocate, 12 Feb. 1836.

14 Crittenden County Court appointments of road overseers and road hands for January 1843 included numerous sections of the Military Road in its assignments. Crittenden Court Records, Vol. B, 232-33. At the April Term, the court increased the county tax rate from 1/6th of a percent to 1/4th of a percent on April 12th, but on April 13th, rescinded the increase. Vol. B, 242. More waffling occurred in the April Term of 1844. Peter G. Rives said he had built levees to close Fletcher and Virginia Bayous at his own expense, but asked the county to receive them as public works. The court agreed on April 8th, then reneged on April 11th. The wetness of the area may be judged from names included in a road direction from 1844: it ran from the Military Road through Alligator Settlement to Cypress Lake meeting house. Vol. B, 272-73, 278. Sheriff's delinquent tax list for 1844 is in Vol. B, 280-83, 313-16. Orders to buy wheelbarrows, July Term 1844, Vol. B, 291. The court requested contracts for bridge repairs on the Military Road. If bids received were insufficiently low, commissioners were to wait until lower ones appeared. If none surfaced within thirty days, commissioners were to put off the granting of contracts until the next court, but work had to be done "in a good and substantial manner." Vol. B., 292. Daniel Robertson, commissioned to buy wheelbarrows, was discharged at the April Term 1845. Vol. B, 340. Arkansas banknotes in the treasury were so worthless that treasurer George Fogleman could not even get rid of them. October Term 1845, Vol. B, 362. See also Sixth Census of the United States, 1840, and Seventh Census of the United States, 1850, Arkansas: County of Crittenden.

"An act to authorize and enforce the construction of levees along the bank of the Mississippi River in the county of Chicot, and for other purposes," 18 Dec. 1840, Acts Passed at the Third Session of the General Assembly of the State of Arkansas (Little Rock: George H. Burnett, 1840), 25-28. Subsequently referred to as 1840 levee law.

"Sharing clauses" appear in Sections 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 of the 1840 levee law. Dissent between House and Senate versions of the levee law is mentioned in "Legislative News," 9 Dec. 1840, Arkansas Gazette, 23 Dec. 1840. Appointment of commissioners to close Old River Lake Bayou, is found in minutes of October Term 1840, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 8. Microfilm copy of Chicot County Court Record, Arkansas History Commission, Little Rock, Ark.

Consult relevant sections of 1840 levee law.

Sixth Census of the United States, 1840; 2 Cor. 3:6. Section 11 of 1840 levee law states that "all sixteenth sections reserved for the use of schools, situate on the bank of the Mississippi river, in said county of Chicot, shall be leveed by the order of the county court of said county, at the expense of the citizens residing in the township to which said section belongs, or of the county, as the court shall deem just and equitable." In practice, the court decided to lay the expense on the county as a whole, not just on land-owners of each township, but it met the need by leasing the land to private persons who would build the levee. The county sacrificed income which would otherwise come to schools. As to bayous, Section 12 of the 1840 levee law stated "that all large creeks and bayous running out from the Mississippi river, and overflowing large portions of the said county of Chicot, shall be stopped at the expense of said county."

Section 2, 1840 levee law. Chicot Court Record, Book D, shows payments from the County Treasury to Levee Commissioner Franklin Stuart: $400 in Arkansas bank paper, July 1841 (p. 73); $350 in Arkansas bank paper, Oct. 1841 (80); $500 in Chicot County 10 percent warrants, April 1842, for services as commissioner from Oct. 1841 to April 1842 (108); again, $500, Oct. Term 1842, for services as commissioner from 5 April 1842 to 5 Oct. 1842 (118).

County officials in Arkansas were paid in ways that now seem quaint, but their duties generated an income which sprang from their efforts. A county judge received a small fee for each day he actually presided at court, but larger fees for his administration of probates. County clerks and
sheriffs were paid like cotton factors, earning a commis-
sion to transact business on the county's behalf. Clerks
kept books and minutes for the county court, received
claims and disbursed public funds, and acted as a recorder
of public business. They signed warrants and issued court
orders, also charged fees for deeds and licenses. They
even charged the county a commission. For example, at the
January Term of 1842, Chicot's County Treasurer William Van
Dalsem rendered a report. He had $2,578.99 of county funds
on hand at the date of the last settlement, April 1841, and
received $5,831.12 on the county's behalf in the meantime.
In that period he paid out $4,294.18 in lawful expenditures
and was paid $116.62 "for his lawful commissions," leaving
a balance of $3,999.32 in county funds in Jan. 1842.
January Term 1842, Book D, 90.

The sheriff assessed properties for state and county
taxes and collected them, besides detaining criminals,
serving notices and subpoenas, and acting as the county
court's police agent. At the July Term 1841, Chicot paid
Wilford Garner $59 for services rendered; he served 38
levee notices at $1 each, 14 road and patrol notices, and
attended the April Term of the County and Probate Courts.
July Term 1841, Book D, 70. On 8 Nov. 1841, at a meeting
settling county revenues for 1841, the County paid Sheriff
Garner $278.07 as 4 percent commission on the amount of
assessed property in the county (probably for making the
assessment list). Garner also got $500.03 as an 8 percent
commission on the $6,250.43 of taxes he actually collected.
Garner collected all the taxes due except for 52 cents in
delinquent state taxes and $27.03 in delinquent county
taxes. Most of the shortage came from 26 adult white males
who failed to pay a $1 county poll tax (including John
DeHart). Chicot Court Record, Book D, 86-87.

21Section 2, 1840 levee law.

22Postponement is mentioned in minutes of Feb. Term
1841, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 15-26.

23People on the frontier, even in a rich county like
Chicot, did interact on a personal basis, especially men,
because they traveled more and performed public duties.
For example, the Oden Township slave patrol of Oct. 1840,
shows social mixing. Dr. Albert W. Webb was the captain
over privates William Taylor, Thos. H. Rives, William J.
Neal, Mitchell T. Duke, Aaron Register, Franklin Stuart,
and Robert B. Rowe. The patrol represented a cross-section
of Oden Township society: urban Columbians, planters, and
overseers. By the end of the term, Dr. Webb had stepped
aside for Rives, an overseer, to be captain. Chicot Court
Record, Book D, 2, 9. Leona Sumner Brasher, a teacher and
craftsman's daughter from Lake Chicot, then wife of a Bayou
Mason farm boy who became a doctor, mentioned Webb in her
memoir as a practicing physician who came to Columbia in 1835, but removed to Little Rock in 1844. "Chicot County, Arkansas: Pioneer and Present Times," [1915], p. 4, Special Collections Division, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville. According to 1840 Chicot County tax assessments, Webb was the only landowner with furniture in excess of $400. William McDowell Pettit, a planter on Lake Chicot, owned the county's only pleasure carriage (valued at $250), and Thomas Ware was the only landowner taxed for an inventory of merchandise ($6,000 worth, probably at a store in Columbia). Microfilm of Chicot County tax assessment, 1840, Arkansas History Commission, Little Rock, Ark. For a perspective on tax yields by categories, see Auditor's Report, Arkansas State Gazette, 18 Nov. 1840. The diverse clientele at John Brown's Little Rock hotel in 1850 also shows the fluid level of personal contacts in Western society. Besides the Webbs, guests included: Arkansas's Secretary of State, the State Auditor, the Clerk of the Superior Court, Pulaski County's sheriff, a well-to-do clothier from New York, a merchant, a doctor, a saddler, ten poor clerks, and two stagecoach drivers, besides the barkeeper. Brown was an Irishman, and the absence of white servants indicates that the cook, maids, and waiters were slaves. See Seventh Census of the United States, 1850, Arkansas: County of Pulaski.


The motion to draft a levee memorial came from John A. Craig, so the county court named him to the committee to produce it. Thereby, county leaders conformed to the ancient custom of rewarding people who make suggestions
with the task of carrying them out. Adjourned Term, Feb.
1841, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 27. Memorials typically
came from state legislatures, and Arkansas, having been a
territorial ward until 1836, was unusually proficient in
documents of this type. Like resolutions, they were voted
on in the Assembly to say what people in Arkansas thought
the policies of Congress should be in regard to their
state. The 1840 Assembly drafted memorials on a variety of
topics which it viewed as national responsibilities. For
example, it asked Congress to fund navigation improvements
on Washita River. By doing this, Congress could promote
trade, reclaim overflowed land, increase the value of
public lands, and supplement the national security. "A
trifling sum" would accomplish the task; $25,000 from the
national treasury. The Assembly also asked for Congres­
sional spending for the removal of the Red River raft as a
matter of "public policy," "national defence," and "common
justice," so settlers would not "be doomed forever to a
state of want and indigence." The Assembly desired that
$20,000 be spent for a military road from Red River to Ft.
Smith and $150,000 to finish the Memphis to Little Rock
Road, but also another appropriation for a north-south
military road from Helena to the mouth of Cache River
(Clarendon). It also asked Congress to reduce the price of
unsold public lands. $1.25 per acre was not, Arkansas
thought, "in strict conformity with the genius of our
political system." Unsold lands should drop 25 cents every
five years, until at thirty years they would be ceded to
the state where they lay. Another request pertained to
ports of entry, which Arkansas wanted for the sake of
federal steamboat inspections. Assembly memorials show
what Arkansans viewed as the proper role of the federal
government, and it couched requests in constitutional
terms. What makes the Chicot memorial unique is that a
county felt able to petition on the same basis as the
legislature. Acts Passed at the Third Session of the
General Assembly of the State of Arkansas, 103-12. For
data on the Chicot memorial committee members, see Brasher,
5; Chicot County tax assessments, 1840; and Chicot Court
Record, Book D.

27 Oct. Term 1840, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 8;
Adjourned Term, Feb. 1841, Chicot Court Record, Book D. 29.
According to Leona Brasher, Major Pettit was born in Ky. in
1799. "He owned a most elegant home on the south end of
Lake Chicot, surrounded by a large park of fine trees." The
family cultivated an interest in genteel wildlife, and
its park was notable as a nature preserve, home to "deer,
rabbits, squirrels, and many different birds." Brasher, 6.
The 1840 tax assessment shows the possession of 48 taxable
slaves and 1,787 acres. By 1850, he owned 109 slaves and
reported 450 bales grown the previous year. Seventh Census
of the United States, 1850, Arkansas: County of Chicot.
On Irishmen in drainage and flood control, see Walter Sillers, Sr., "Flood Control in Bolivar County, 1838-1924," Journal of Mississippi History 9 (Jan. 1947), 9-12; Sam Worthington, "Ante-Bellum Slave-Holding Aristocracy of Washington County," in William D. McCain and Charlotte Capers, eds., Memoirs of Henry Tillinghast Ireys: Papers of the Washington County Historical Society, 1910-1915 (Jackson: Mississippi Department of Archives and History and Mississippi Historical Society, 1954), 358; and Tyrone Power, Impressions of America: during the Years 1833, 1834, and 1835 (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea, & Blanchard, 1836), II, 149-53. Also, Robert W. Harrison and Walter M. Kollmorgen, "Land Reclamation in Arkansas under the Swamp Land Grant of 1850," Arkansas Historical Quarterly 6 (Winter 1947): 369-418. Levee contractors and levee crews, as well as railroad builders (the same class of workers), can be found in Eighth Census of the U. S., 1860, Arkansas. For example, Patrick Moran of County Mayo, Ireland, was a 37 year old "Levy Contractor" at the McCaffrey boarding-house in Napoleon, Ark., seat of Desha County. Patrick Gilderoy of County Cavan, Ireland, ran a boarding-house in Napoleon where nineteen "common laborers" resided, as well as a barkeeper and dray driver. They were generally aged 24 to 40. Other Napoleon hshlds. included: "Levy" Contractor Patrick H. Ruddy of Ireland, age 28; Charles Ford of Ireland, "foreman on Levy," age 28; and Levy Contractors Michael and P. J. Blessing of Ireland, age 37 and 24, respectively. In Chicot County, there were 45 laborers, mostly Irish, in two hshlds. in Railroad Township at Gaines's Landing. Considerable levee activity was also going forward in Pulaski County, on the Arkansas south of Little Rock, during the 1860 census. Levee contractor Edward Cassia, Irish, age 33, lived with a household of sixteen levee hands aged 21 to 40. All but two were Irish. Levee Contractor Peter Mockler of Ireland, age 25, lived in the same township with 23 levee hands and one levee cook. Four men doing "leveeing" lived in other households, plus a group of nine ditchers, primarily Irish, and a very large household of about a hundred Irish railroad builders.

Eighth Census of the United States, 1860, Arkansas: Counties of Desha, Chicot, and Pulaski. Arkansas Gazette, 26 Nov. 1859, spoke of hundreds of men in levee building in Desha County. The files of this Little Rock newspaper from 1850 to 1860 contain many articles and editorials about the development of the swamps and public levee issues.

Rayner (a state senator from North Carolina) openly claimed black children. Rayner's mulatto son became a populist politician in late nineteenth-century Texas.


31 Oct. Term 1840, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 2; Adjourned Term, Feb. 1841, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 30; Sixth Census of the United States, 1840, Arkansas: County of Chicot; Chicot County Tax Assessment, 1840. Levee order to Silas Craig, Wm. Taylor, and James F. Taylor, commrs. of School Sect. in Township 15, R1W, Levee 8, order 1; Levee orders to Silas Craig: Levee 8, order 2; Levee 10, order 2; Levee 11, order 1, April Term, 1841, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 51, 52, 56, 57. County Court pays Craig as witness, Oct. Term 1845, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 218.

32 The Court ordered Stuart to study "the whole Coast of the County" to find "all places that in his opinion may require levying, for the protection of the whole County or any portion thereof from inundation from the Mississippi and Arkansas River." Adjourned Term, 1 March 1841, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 31. Session minutes from April Term 1841, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 33-67.

33 Hampton and Jones did not arrive until the five-day meeting had already begun and left before it concluded. April Term 1841, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 33, 37. Personal data about justices was compiled from Chicot County tax assessment, 1840; Sixth Census of the United States, 1840; Seventh Census of the United States, 1850; and Chicot Court Record, Book D.

34 Chicot Court Record, Book D, 39-40; Levee orders, April Term 1841, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 40-65; Payment to Garner, July Term 1841, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 70.

35 See, for example, Levee 1, order 1, to residents Shaw and Bowles, and Levee 1, order 2, to non-residents Frederick Notrebe and William Cummins, April Term 1841, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 40-41.

36 Contracts for non-residents included: Manlius Thompson, William Dix, Chester Ashley, Peter Hanger, John Fulton, Thomas McKee, William Christy, Cummins & Notrebe, and estates of George Vashon and Isham Talbot. See April
Term 1842, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 104-5; Nov. Term 1842, Book D, 124; and April Term 1844, Book D, 177; Chicot County tax assessment, 1840.

37Fifth Census of the United States, 1830, Louisiana: Parish of Concordia; Sixth Census of the United States, 1840, Louisiana: Parish of Concordia; Arkansas Gazette, 16 Feb. 1856; Surget (Francis) Estate Inventory, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Special Collections, Hill Library, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge.

38Dimensions extracted from Levee orders, April Term 1841, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 40-66. Compare to Sect. 2, "An Act relative to Roads and Levees," Acts Passed at the First Session of the Ninth Legislature of the State of Louisiana (New Orleans: John Gibson, 1829), 76-78. The Louisiana law was passed to upgrade levee dimensions in the wake of the landmark flood of 1828.

39Levee orders, April Term 1841, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 40-66; Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Southern Arkansas, 1065; Horace Walworth Levee Order, April Term 1841, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 49. Grand Lake Bayou spread a great distance at high water seasons. In fall and winter, it was simply a bayou, but in spring swelled to the dimensions of a lake. Planters on its banks, such as James Peake and Romulus Payne, lost crops and planting time when "lake" water covered the land. The bayou's banks, formed by previous overflows, provided transport to the river, so the bayou was not needed for that. Thus, planters desired to close it at its mouth. For life on a Grand Lake plantation, consult the diary of Mrs. Miriam Brannin Hilliard, 20 Oct. 1849-19 June 1850. Her husband, Isaac Hilliard, owned 131 slaves on Grand Lake in 1850 in partnership with his brother-in-law George Polk, the brother of Bishop Leonidas Polk and cousin of President James K. Polk. Hilliard was a partner in the New Orleans factorage firm of Hilliard, Summers, and Co., and Miriam's home was Kentucky. They were representative members of the "jet-set" gentry who commuted from enterprise to enterprise as business demanded. The Hilliards did not stay in Chicot very often, but made a sizeable investment there, paid taxes, and kept an overseer on the place. In 1853, she died at age 26, weakened by sojourns in Chicot's swamps. Hilliard (Mrs. Isaac H.) Diary, 1849-1850, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, LSU. For additional information on the Hilliards, Polks, and Brannins in Chicot County, see the Polk (George) Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. Most of these are letters from 1840 and 1841 about the family's plantation on the Mississippi.

40Chicot rented the courthouse from the Commercial Bank of Rodney, Mississippi, Oct. Term 1840, Chicot Court
Record, Book D, 3. Jail accoutrements, April Term 1841, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 35. Stray pen and Statutes, Oct. Term 1842, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 118. Liquor licenses, Special Levee Meeting, 14 Nov. 1842, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 129-30; Oct. Term 1843, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 158. Reference to Levee, or Front, Street in Doran's liquor license application, April Term 1844, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 182. Horace Ford, "Horace J. Ford's Book, Present from Horace F. Walworth," 20 Dec. 1848, Arkansas Territorial Restoration, Little Rock. Planters of 1850 near Columbia: Benjamin P. Gaines, age 46, 62 slaves at "Homestead," under overseer John Vincent, age 31; Joel J. Offutt, 32, 36 slaves, under Edward White, age 33; Sandford C. Paulkner, 46, 34 slaves, under L. B. Cook, age 25; John A. Craig, 44, with 62 slaves, under James Bullock, age 25; Dr. Joseph Holston, 16 slaves at "LaTrobe;" the Craig & Todd partnership, 42 slaves at "Yellow Bayou;" under Tobias Wade, age 29; Silas Craig, 55, 74 slaves at "Bellevue;" Henry H. Collins, 38, 3 slaves at "Island 82;" Claiborne W. Saunders, age 58, 63 slaves at "Patria;" John R. Llewellyn, 46, 22 slaves; John P. Walworth of New York, 135 slaves, under Benjamin F. Dobyns, age 31; James B. Miles, 27, 75 slaves at "Leland;" and Horace F. Walworth, age 50, with 230 slaves at "Point Chicot." Seventh Census of the United States, 1850, Arkansas: County of Chicot. For histories and plantation names, see Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Southern Arkansas, 1064-65. Leona Brasher said:

to reach Masona during the months of rain, through dense woods and large cane brakes by a bridle path over swampy roads [was intolerable]; the court officers and people at large entered a protest, and begged that a location [be chosen] on higher land, not so difficult to reach, and in more open country.

Thus, a committee chose a site on the west bank of Lake Chicot which became Lake Village. Here, there was no danger of caving, nor would the levee-builders be burdened with the transacting of public business amidst bayou farmers. Lake Village was built on the property of Mrs. Brasher's father, John Sumner. Brasher, 2.

41Levee orders, April Term 1841, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 40-66. Chicot County tax assessment, 1840.

42See note 36.

43List of levee order recipients from Chicot Court Record, Book D, 40-66, compared to list of riverfront planters in Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Southern Arkansas, 1064-65, and planters listed in Chicot's 1840 census and 1840 tax assessment. Sevier's trip was noted in
Arkansas Gazette, 12 Aug. 1840. On May 12, 1840, the captain of the Independence saw about 500 levee hands at Bachelor's Bend and approximately the same number at Lakeport Bend. Bachelor's Bend is where Greenville, Miss., now stands, and Lakeport Bend, below Point Chicot, was the site of the Johnson plantations. See "The Waters Above," New Orleans Commercial Bulletin, 15 May 1840. It is unclear whether people in the bends already had levees or were throwing them up at the last minute. However, the captain's remark shows some kind of flood control was attempted at Lakeport Bend in 1840, and the levee orders show that the Johnsons did not have to be told to build levees in April of 1841.

William Cummins tried to get Judge Ben Johnson impeached in 1832 during the Jackson administration. Cummins, Absalom Fowler, and Orson Howell accused Johnson of bias in court decisions, of drinking at the bench, of making contradictory decisions, of threatening to slice a man's throat, and tempting a judge to play faro. Jackson dismissed the charges as frivolous. The following year, Robert Ward Johnson, the Judge's eldest son (age 19), caned Cummins in the streets of Little Rock for refusing to duel. He also attacked Absalom Fowler after posting handbills that called him a coward. Robert considered Howell too low a person to duel with and planned to horsewhip him, but Howell died before the assault. Robert went to Congress in 1846 as a Southern Rights advocate. In 1859, he had to be restrained from dueling with fellow Congressman Thomas Hindman, the "Family's" main Democratic rival. See Lonnie J. White, Politics on the Southwestern Frontier: Arkansas Territory, 1819-1836 (Memphis: Memphis State University Press, 1964), 145; and DeBlack, 147-48.

44At the April session, the court ordered closure of Whiskey and Otter Bayous, and the bayou between lands of Patton and Clarke, plus repairs to Grand Lake Bayou levee. April Term 1841, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 66-67.

45For the "levees and outlets" hydraulic engineering debate, see George Steve Pabis, "Restraining the Muddy Waters: Engineers and Mississippi River Flood Control, 1846-1881" (Ph.D. diss.: University of Illinois at Chicago, 1996); ibid., "Delaying the Deluge: The Engineering Debate over Flood Control on the Lower Mississippi River, 1846-1861," Journal of Southern History 64 (Aug. 1998): 421-54.


47April Term 1841, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 67.

48July Term 1841, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 71-74.
Oct. Term 1841, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 80-81.

Ibid., 82-83. Levee orders with erroneous legal descriptions went to Isaac Adair, Jacob O'Bannon, and Dr. Gilly M. Lewis. Special meeting to act on Sheriff Garner's delinquent tax list, 8 Nov. 1841, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 86; Jan. Term 1842, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 97.

Oct. Term 1840, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 8; Adjourned Term, Feb. 1841, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 29; April Term 1841, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 35-36, 39; Special meeting, 8 Nov. 1841, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 87; April Term 1844, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 179-81. The bridge crossed Bayou Mason at the ferry on the road from the river, at McDermott's plantation, to the ferry on Bayou Bartholemew. Commissioners were Wm. T. Ferguson, Ben P. Gaines, and Hiram Bryant. They granted the job to John Smith of Bayou Bartholemew: county to pay $1,500 in Arkansas Banknotes—$750 in advance and $750 when bridge was framed and raised; subscribers to raise $1,000 in par funds. April Term 1842, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 103. At April Term of 1844 where Worthington complained he still had not received subscriptions owed him on the bayou levee-dam, Smith also entered a claim because of defaulters. Insolvencies, relocations, or refusals to pay had robbed him of just claims held as contractor for the Bayou Mason Bridge. April Term 1844, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 181. Residents liked bridges because they eliminated the need to pay ferry charges, but apparently did not want to pay for bridges either. See also Michael Dougan, "The Doctrine of Creative Destruction: Ferry and Bridge Law in Arkansas," Arkansas Historical Quarterly 39 (Summer 1980): 136-58.

Sections 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 in the 1840 levee law deal with sharing costs for levees on private land. Sections 1, 2, 11, and 12 treat the court's authority to spend county revenues for levee-dams and levees on school sections. See note 51 for Smith bridge. At April Term 1842, citizens of Bayou Mason Township petitioned for $1,000 in county funds to bridge Bayou Mason at Sillers's Ferry, on the county road from Grand Lake to Bayou Mason hills. The court appropriated $1,200 for the job, making a total of $2,700 in bridge appropriations with public funds. April Term, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 106-7; July Term 1842, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 112-13. The vote for $1,000 to clear Bayou Bartholemew is recorded in minutes of July Term 1842, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 113.

The court told Franklin Stuart to contract levees at Boggy Bayou, the Cross Bayous, and other active waterways. It shrank not from the expense. Indeed, the 1840 levee law told the court to make closures which its commissioner's report designated as a necessity. Sections 2, 3, and 12 said levee dams were "required by law to be made by the
County and at its own proper charge." Special Session, 8 Nov. 1841, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 86-88. Authority to shut Otter Bayou came at the Jan. Term 1842, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 98. Warrants were authorized, 9 Nov. 1841, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 88. Authority for a warrant system and funded levee debt had to be construed implicitly rather than explicitly from the 1840 levee law. In Sect. 1, the county court was "fully authorized and empowered to order and enforce the construction of levees, and the stopping of creeks and bayous;" Sect. 3, "the county court . . . may, in such time as shall be deemed expedient, and in such manner as shall be deemed necessary, order the construction of all such levees, and the stopping of all such creeks and bayous . . . ;" and Sect. 12, "all large creeks and bayous running out of the Mississippi river, and overflowing large portions of the said county of Chicot, shall be stopped at the expense of said county, at such time and in such manner, as, in the opinion of the county court, will best protect the land and property of the citizens." Chicot's planters and lawyers were versed in subtleties and quite capable of making the most of vague and sweeping clauses. Debates about the constitutionality of a national bank must have rung in their ears, but in Chicot the most prominent levee advocates were Jacksonian Democrats. The Constitution did not tie their hands as it did Congress. Note "Resolution" passed on Dec. 5, 1844, by Arkansas's legislature on the unconstitutionality of national banks. Acts, Memorials and Resolutions Passed at the Fifth Session of the General Assembly of the State of Arkansas (Little Rock: Borland and Farley, 1845), 158-59.

Guidelines to Stuart, Jan. Term 1842, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 98-99. Levee Commissioner's reports at the April Term of 1842 describe typical contracts. For example, in conformity with an order to let levees whose owners had not commenced work by the first of Dec. 1841, Stuart made a contract for lands of Manlius V. Thompson, concluding it with Archibald W. Goodloe at the rate of 48 cents per solid yard. In April of 1842, said levee was received. Thompson's levee was probably the biggest on private land in the county. It measured 233 rods: 30 rods stood 4 feet in height with a 16 foot base and surface of 4 feet; 95 rods rose 5 feet in height with a 20 foot base and surface of 5 feet. "Said levee contained in all 8,217 solid yards and cost $3,944.16." The terminology lacked technical precision. Levee engineers prefer the term "crown" to "surface" for a levee's top; by "solid yards," the writer presumably meant cubic yards. April Term 1842, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 104. Data for Table 8.3 was derived from Chicot Court Records, Book D: Jan. Term 1842, 99; April Term 1842, 104; Special meeting, 14 Nov. 1842, 123-24; Jan. Term 1843, 132, 141; April Term 1843, 146, 148; Jan. Term 1844, 171, 177, 181; April Term 1844, 176.
Chicot County tax assessment, 1840; Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Southern Arkansas, 1064-65. According to p. 1077, Llewellyn served after the War as "a member of the levee board of this county, which, to people here, seems one of the most important positions a man can hold." Miriam Hilliard learned of Col. Taylor's drowning on 14 March 1850. Hilliard (Mrs. Isaac H.) Diary, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, LSU. Some masters in Chicot did allow slaves to earn money. Fanny Johnson, a slave of William Woodfolk's near Grand Lake, said her master let them harvest pecans and cut firewood to sell to steamboats. This provided spending money for hats, gloves, and other items from boat stores that visited riverfront plantations. See George P. Rawick, ed., The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography, Vol. 9, Arkansas Narratives, Part 3 and 4 (Westport, Ct.: Greenwood Publishing Co., 1941), IV, 87.

April Term 1842, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 107-8. Chicot County tax assessment, 1842, (microfilm copy) at Arkansas History Commission, Little Rock. List of taxables and tax rates for state revenues (also used to determine county taxables) is found in "An Act providing for the levying and collecting of the Revenue of this State," Acts Passed at a Special Session of the General Assembly of the State of Arkansas [6 Nov. 1837-5 Mar. 1838] in accordance with a proclamation of the Governor, dated July 18, 1837 (Little Rock: Woodruff and Pew, 1838), 1-22.

One aspect which undoubtedly stuck in the backcountry's "craw" was that the contractors were being paid from county tax revenues rather than by prosecution of delinquents. Under Webb, the court paid contractors in county warrants and left the county the obligation to collect from delinquents. The county clerk issued warrants to contractors of delinquent levees whose work Commissioner Stuart had approved and "received." The Commissioner reported the cost of the levee work on the contractor's behalf. This was being free with the county's money, and not strictly in line with the procedure for getting money from delinquents as described in the 1840 levee law. The need for levees, and the shortage of contractors to bid them, impelled Chicot's court and Commissioner to commit the county to more than it originally expected. Backcountry settlers probably complained about this, but the circumstances made protest futile until the levees' completion. For terms, see April Term 1842, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 105-8.

Peter Hanger, Levee 11, order 3, and Levee 12, order 1, April Term 1841, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 58-59. Authorization to contract Hanger's land, 14 Nov. 1842 meeting, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 123-24. Notice of partial completion of levee on lands formerly owned by
Peter Hanger, April Term 1844, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 177. Levees on Hanger's low and swampy land near Patton & Clark Bayou involved more than Stuart originally expected. As late as 1844, the contractor still had not been able to finish it, and the original ordered dimension of 3 feet high swelled in size. One section completed in 1844 measured 7 feet high with an 8 foot crown and 32 1/2 foot base; another piece measured 4 feet high with a 5 foot crown and 20 foot base; another measured 5 1/2 feet high with a 6 foot crown and 27 foot base. For this body of levee--161 rods--or, a line half a mile long, Clark was paid $3,935.40 in county warrants. Book D, 177. Garner's tax sales announcements came at the Jan. Term 1843, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 138. Hanger lost 562 acres for non-payment of $6 in state taxes and $24 in county taxes for 1842. Hugh White failed to pay $37.50 in taxes on 600 acres. Thomas Ward owed $1.50 in taxes on 80 acres. The William Weir Estate owed $2.25 on 120 acres, and Benjamin Hughes, a large landowner, owed $83.72 on 2,811 acres. Defaulting pioneers at Point Chicot, like White, may have owned property which was about to fall in the river, for Villemont did cave. Hughes was not the last speculator to find that deeply overflowed tracts were not reclaimable simply by leveeing the river. Jan. Term 1843, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 138. Payment to Stuart and request for $5,000--April Term 1842, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 107. Reduction of grant to $1,000--July Term 1842, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 113. Financial and household data on Gaster and Hanger comes from 1840 census and 1840 Chicot County tax assessment. Gaster to clear Bayou Bartholemew, 14 Nov. 1842, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 124. Gaster settled about 1 1/2 miles below the present-day Baxter community in 1832. His daughter was said to be the first white child born in the vicinity. Gaster never thought Chicot's leaders paid enough attention to the west of the county. In 1846, he advocated a separation in a new county called Drew. Hiram Bryant served as one of Drew County's original justices of the peace, and John P. Fisher occupied its first grand jury. Its county court met at Rough and Ready. The Mexican War was on the founders' minds, and its backwoodsmen named the seat for the Whig candidate for president. This is symbolic, since Drew's secession from Chicot occurred, in part at least, over dissatisfaction with public works that Democrats were carrying out. See James W. Leslie, Land of Cypress and Pine: More Southeast Arkansas History (Little Rock: Rose Publishing Co., 1976), 47-50; "An act to establish the county of Drew," Acts and Resolutions Passed, and Amendments to the Constitution Adopted, at the Sixth Session of the General Assembly of the State of Arkansas (Little Rock: B. J. Borden, 1846), 16; Rebecca De Armond, Old Times Not Forgotten: A History of Drew County (Wilmar, Ark.: the author, n.d.); and Rebecca De Armond-Huskey, Beyond Bartholemew: The Portland

Webb was not renominated. Worthington nominated county treasurer Wm. Van Dalsem, who received votes of Justices Worthington, James M. Stuart, Joel J. Offutt, William R. Ellis, and Samuel Townsend. Hiram Bryant, a bayou-based contractor from west Chicot, nominated levee contractor and planter Archibald W. Goodloe as judge. He received votes of Bryant, William Taylor, Isaac Adair, John P. Fisher, Thomas B. Ferrell, Alexander Brown, and Stephen Gaster. Gaster was election chairman. 2 Jan. 1843, Jan. Term 1843, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 126.

Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Southern Arkansas, 1062-65.

April Term 1842, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 104; Jan. Term 1843, 141; April Term 1843, 146; Jan. Term 1844, 171. Goodloe contract for Vashon heirs was granted for $973.44, but the actual cost ran up to $1,791.68. See Jan. Term 1842, 104, and Jan. Term 1844, 171.


In 1890, a Chicot County chronicler said the community saw service on a levee board as "one of the most important positions a man can hold." Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Southern Arkansas, 1077. For prominence given to men involved with levees, see also William Alexander Percy, Lanterns on the Levee: Recollections of a Planter's Son (1941; reprint, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973). The job was sometimes given to less-established men who wanted to earn respect and approval. According to the tax list of 1840, Aaron Register did not own land in Chicot. The census of that year shows him as the head of a household of 117 slaves, 85 of whom worked in agriculture. Register was, in fact, overseeing at Chicot's biggest absentee-owned plantation, and he probably had the duty of building the levee ordered from his employer in 1841. For Chicot to name Register as a levee commissioner
in 1843 reflected well on his performance and paid tribute to his employer's importance. A native of North Carolina, Register was about 35 years old at the time.

Romulus Payne, a Johnson relative, owned "Eureka" on Grand Lake. He was 32 years old in 1843 and was subject to levee orders in 1841. The 1840 census shows him owning 38 slaves, of whom 29 engaged in agriculture. Tax assessments list Romulus Payne with 29 taxable slaves and 895 acres of land. Prother Payne, his relative, owned another 3,490 acres, apparently in reserve. Though relatively wealthy, Romulus owed his position to family money. He would have to shine on his own account through public service to gain true respect. By 1850, Romulus Payne had 47 slaves.

James F. Taylor was ordered to build a levee in 1841. Listed in the census as owning only one slave in 1840, the tax assessment shows him as a partner of William Taylor's, who owned 41 slaves in the census (31 in agriculture). In 1840, James F. and William Taylor were taxed on 25 slaves and 680 acres. Various Chicot Taylors (Col. Benjamin and John M., plus Robert) owned another 2,500 acres by themselves and 1,090 in partnership with Craigs and Peakes. Most had to be leveed, and Col. Ben Taylor was a levee contractor. By 1843 they had gathered considerable levee experience, and James was being introduced to the public in a more responsible capacity.

Levee protection could bring prosperity as well as esteem, and Aaron Register serves as an example of levee-and-swamp mobility. By 1850, he owned a plantation of his own in Chicot County, with 47 slaves and an overseer. Then, his relocation to a community where people did not think of him as a former overseer came about in the 1850s. Register's daughter Sarah married Richard Beck of Miss. whose father was an Irishman planting in Tensas Parish, La. The Registers moved to Tensas. By 1860, Thomas Beck, Richard's father, owned a plantation there called "Oakwood" in partnership with Richard's brother, Sam. "Oakwood" was valued at $105,000 in 1860, and there were 78 slaves. Register lived next door at "Forrest Vale" with his wife Clara, 14 years his junior, (overseers often married late), and children. Sarah Register Beck, age 22, lived next to Aaron, and her husband was her father's partner at "Forrest Vale." Their land was worth $79,300 in 1860, and they held 81 slaves. Not bad for the son of an Irishman and an ex-overseer. Of course, the new property was on low buckshot soil beside an interior bayou and could not be protected as well as the frontlands on the Mississippi. The Registers gambled that levees and drainage would make a bayou plantation profitable. It did, until the War wrecked the levee system and they lost their slaves. Then, "Forrest Vale" reverted to swamp. Consult censuses of 1840, 1850,
and 1860 for Chicot County, and Tensas Parish, Louisiana, as well as the tax assessment of 1840 for Chicot County.


67According to the Daily Galvestonian, 6 Dec. 1841, there were four currency formats trading at a premium to par in New Orleans money markets:

specie, 2 to 3 percent premium;
exchange notes on English institutions, 11 to 13 1/2 percent premium;
U. S. Treasury notes, 2 1/2 to 3 percent premium;
American gold, 3 to 4 percent premium.

However, under the heading "Uncurrent Money," the Galveston newspaper listed the following trading in New Orleans at a discount. In descending order, according to the depth of discount to par funds:

Virginia and South Carolina [State Bank] bills, par to 3 percent discount;
Kentucky, Indiana, and Ohio [State Bank] bills, 3 to 5 percent discount;
[Bank of] Manchester [Mississippi] post Notes, 5 percent discount;
Illinois [State Bank] bills, 3 1/2 to 6 percent discount;
Alabama State Bank bills, 5 to 6 percent discount;
Tennessee Banks' bills, 6 to 7 percent discount;
[Commercial Bank of] Rodney post notes, 12 1/2 to 15 percent discount;
Port Gibson post notes, 15 to 20 percent discount;
Planters' Bank of Natchez post notes, 18 to 22 percent discount;
Agricultural [Bank of Mississippi] post notes, 20 to 23 percent discount;
Arkansas [Bank notes], 28 to 32 percent discount;
U. S. Bank notes, 30 to 35 percent discount;
Grand Gulf [Railroad] bills, 30 to 35 percent discount;
Clinton & Port Hudson [Railroad] bills, 30 to 35 percent discount;
Lake Washington [& Deer Creek Railroad and Banking Co.] bills, 40 to 50 percent discount.

Every issue carried updated exchange rates, much like daily quotes in the modern Wall Street Journal. Faced with a plethora of money formats, one can see why state-approved and privately issued currencies drove business people mad. Values were uncertain and tedious to calculate. Basically, paper money had no constant value. See Galveston Daily Advertiser, 26 Feb. 1842; and Civilian and Galveston Gazette, 24 July 1842, 30 July 1842, 31 Aug. 1842, 28 Jan. 1843; "New Orleans Money Market News of 29 Sept.," 7 Oct. 1843; 17 April 1844. For the Union Bank of Mississippi and repudiation controversies, see Bradley G. Bond, Political Culture in the Nineteenth-Century South: Mississippi, 1830-1900 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995), 81-89.

April Term 1843, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 146-49, 152. The subscription of 1840 was for leveeing low tracts and waterways which flooded plantations. Lands were in Sorrell's Bend and Yellow Bend in north Chicot County. They probably suffered from caving banks and were unattractive. Levees on such properties would either have to be set back, which would entail large levees on lower land, or ran the risk of falling into the river and needing rebuilding. Planters near the bends included: John P. Walworth, Richard Campbell, Wm. H. Gaines, J. B. Campbell, Charles W. Campbell, and Gen. John Clarke. Waterways to be closed were Sulphur Fork and Opossum Fork, etc. The court told Aaron Register and James F. Taylor to look at places "proposed to be levied, lying in . . . their respective townships," to see "what quantity of levees will be
necessary to protect the lands affected," as well as size and cost "in par funds." The court also said to see what could be collected from the subscription. Apparently the county disliked leveeing these tracts as a public work, but a wealthy and influential neighborhood desired the project. Therefore, the court offered its commissioners to make recommendations and facilitate a plan which would then be done with private funds. Chicot Court Record, Book D, 152.

As to gates, they greatly reduced the amount of fencing a planter had to do. Otherwise, parallel fences lined the roadside to keep cattle, horses, sheep, etc., from straying into the fields. Christopher Morris found evidence of the concern for fences and gates in Warren County, Miss. See Becoming Southern: The Evolution of a Way of Life, Warren County and Vicksburg, Mississippi, 1770-1860 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 140; and Warren County Board of Police Minutes, 1838, 354; 1842, 218; 1843, 501; 1844, 618; 1864, 31.

69 Special Adjourned Term, 30 May 1843, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 155; Oct. Term 1843, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 159-60.

70 The county treasurer in 1844 was 24-yr.-old Joshua Craig of Ky., nephew of John A. Craig, age 38, who became county judge in 1846. The family lived above Columbia on a riverfront plantation. In 1840, John Craig had 21 taxable slaves and 8,503 acres of land; in 1850, 62 slaves and real estate worth $22,000. Of the uncle and nephew, Leona Brasher wrote of "their large plantations and elegant homes on the banks of the Mississippi." Joshua Craig served five terms as county treasurer from 1844 to 1854 and eventually acquired "Leland" on Point Chicot, whose possession had been disputed by Ben Miles, Horace Walworth, and the heirs of Don Carlos de Villelont. Thus, of useful and prudent Joshua Craig, one might remark, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." Matthew 5:5. In 1860, Joshua owned 1,700 improved acres, 1,268 unimproved acres, and personal property (mostly slaves) worth $91,000. His crop reported in 1860 amounted to 1,500 bales of cotton and 8,000 bushels of corn. Yet, riches could not preserve his family. In 1864, his wife died in Cairo, Ill., trying to get her brother out of a Northern prison. April Term 1844, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 179; Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Southern Arkansas, 1062-64; Brasher, 5; 1840 tax assessment, Chicot Co.; Seventh Census of the United States, 1850, Arkansas: County of Chicot; Eighth Census of the United States, 1860, Arkansas: County of Chicot.

71 April Term 1844, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 183. Redeemed warrants were publicly destroyed. For example, minutes from the April Term of 1842 state that: "This day 5 fifty dollar warrants, No. 26, 27, 28, 29, & 30, payable
to S. D. Walker and dated Jan'y 27, were burned in the presence of the Court." Book D, 104.

Subsequent whereabouts of Franklin Stuart are not known. However, in the 1850 census of Red River County, Texas, one finds a Franklin Stewart from Arkansas, age 18, who may be his son. He was studying at McKenzie College in Clarksville, a school founded by Rev. John Witherspoon Pettigrew McKenzie of North Carolina. The Methodists sent McKenzie to the Choctaws in Indian Territory in 1836, but reassigned him to the Clarksville circuit in 1839. There, he opened a school in 1841 with 16 pupils. It grew to become an important institution of higher learning. Tuition ranged from $110 for preparatory courses to $130 for collegiate grades. This included teaching, plus nine months of food, lodging, fuel, and laundry. It was never a financial success, but "no boy or girl, however poor, was ever turned away." In 1850, there were about 47 students living in a dormitory household with the McKenzies. It is said that his interest in the minds and character of often-penniless young people left a positive legacy on hundreds of students. McKenzie's ideal of selflessness derived from a source (Christianity) which was not particularly strong in the honor culture of Delta planter society. By 1850, for example, Columbia, Arkansas, still had no church. See Seventh Census of the United States, 1850, Texas: County of Red River; "McKenzie College," in Red River Recollections (Clarksville, Tex.: Red River County Historical Society, 1986), 11-12. Other Stewarts who may be descendants of Franklin, Sr. operated stores in Arkadelphia, Ark. One of them in 1860 had a son Elias Nelson Conway Stuart, aged 6 months, named for the governor of Arkansas who had worked tirelessly in the 1850s to try to get a state levee system built with funds from the Swamp Land Act. Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Southern Arkansas, 174; Eighth Census of the United States, 1860, Arkansas: County of Clark; "The Administrations of Roane and Elias N. Conway, 1848-60," in David Y. Thomas, ed., Arkansas and Its People: A History, 1541-1930 (New York: American Historical Society, 1930), I, 104-12; and Fay Hempstead, Historical Review of Arkansas: Its Commerce, Industry, and Modern Affairs (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Co., 1911), I, 189-202.

29 June 1844, 6 July 1844, 13 July 1844; Caddo Gazette, 1 May 1844; Memphis Enquirer, 20 June 1844; Van Buren Intelligencer, 8 June 1844; Vickburg Daily Whig, 1 July 1844. Cities above and below Chicot County reported extreme high floods on the Mississippi. At Memphis on June 20th, water reached the bluff and was level with the pavement on Front Street. This, of course, meant severe flooding in Crittenden County, Ark., across the river in the floodplain. In Vicksburg, water almost rose into brick stores at the landing. The Vicksburg Daily Whig, as quoted in the Baton Rouge Gazette, 29 June 1844, reported that:

The levee in the bend above Vicksburg is expected to break every moment. Most of the plantations between that town and the mouth of the Arkansas are overflowed. The damage will be incalculable. The loss on the cotton crop, says the Whig, cannot be less than 40,000 bales, and if the river shall rise six inches more, and continue up three weeks longer, very few crops on the river will be saved.

The Arkansas Gazette of 15 May 1844, complained of floods on the Arkansas and White Rivers, as well as the Washita, Sabine, and Red, which had "done immense damage to property along their whole extent." Planters on the Arkansas lost crops and stock worth between $80,000 and $100,000, and "high water came when the cotton was just up." Then, it stood so long on the fields that the season was too far gone to plant. Even if time remained, fences were swept away, and by the time they could be fixed (to keep game and livestock from eating crops), it was too late to plant. Fences, levees, weather, and seasons were interconnected, and, because of the flood, "the just expectations of the farmers and planters" had been "greatly disappointed."

74Charles W. Campbell nominated Goodloe. James P. Steedly nominated John A. Craig. Steedly and William W. Rose voted for Craig. The others—Campbell, Aaron Register, William W. Gaines, Ben G. Lathrop, and John A. Craig himself—voted for Goodloe. Craig then succeeded Goodloe in 1846. Jan. Term 1845, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 185; Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Southern Arkansas, 1062. The annual treasury settlement took place at the April Term 1845, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 207. Joshua Craig was county treasurer, John A. Craig served as assistant justice, and in October the court paid Silas Craig $37 to testify as a witness in The State v. Franklin Stuart. Oct. Term 1845, Book D, 218.

75Chicot County Tax Assessments, 1840, 1841, 1842, 1843, 1844, and 1845.

76Sorrell's Bend, Oct. Term 1845, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 219. Silas Craig, levee commissioner, reported
acceptance of levees, April Term 1848, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 305.

77Herndon contract, Oct. Term 1845, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 220. Benjamin Taylor's levee commissioner report and court restriction on reimbursements, April Term 1847, Chicot Court Record, Book D, 273. Of course, levee building did not eliminate backwater and seepage. Just as in South Louisiana, overflows might occur even when levees held. Ditching and drainage, though not public works, could not be divorced from flood control. Evidence comes from a plantation diary kept by Horace J. Ford, a 32-year-old, Ohio-born overseer who worked for Horace Walworth at Point Chicot. On Jan. 15, 1849, he reported hands getting timber out of the swamp, chopping trees to clear new land, and "some hands ditching." On Feb. 2, 1849, he went to Columbia on the road beside the levee and rode for a mile in water six inches to four feet deep. On Mar. 6, 1849, he rose early and rode below the plantation to stake out a ditch to drain a slough. These were routines that every levee-building proprietor, overseer, or plantation worker had to endure. During high water, levees had to be guarded and maintained. During low water, levees were built and repaired, and ditches constructed. "Horace J. Ford's Book, present from Horace F. Walworth," Arkansas Territorial Restoration, Little Rock. See also: "Plantation Diary," 1850, Pointe Coupee Parish, La., Boyd (John) Diary; "Plantation Diary," 1852-59, Iberville Parish, La., Hudson (Franklin) Diary; and "Deer Range Plantation Journal," 1852-63, Plaquemine Parish, La., in White (Maunsell, Jr.) Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; "Plantation Diary," 5 Mar. 1852-28 Jan. 1854, Tensas Parish, La., in Blanche (Alexander) Papers, and "Shady Grove Plantation Diaries," 1849, 1851, Iberville Parish, La., in Erwin (Isaac) Diary, 1848-53, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge; "Plantation Diary," 1858, St. James Parish, La., in Ferchaud (Jean Baptiste) Diary, Special Collections, Howard Library, Tulane University, New Orleans; "Newstead Plantation Journal," 1858-59, Washington Co., Miss., in Metcalfe (Frederick Augustus) Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson; and "Plantation Diary," 15 May 1844-16 July 1847, Tensas Parish, La., in Preston (Zenos) Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.


79Sect. 13, 1840 levee law; Set Decoration, "Twelve Oaks," Gone With the Wind (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1939).
CONCLUSION

At the end of a study on the levee's origins, one might conclude that levee building was simply about money. Certainly, the careers of levee-building capitalists such as Jean Charles de Pradel, Joseph Erwin, and the planters of Chicot County, Arkansas, demonstrated a keen appetite for money. For them, levees were indispensable tools in a quest for riches. On the other hand, one also has to account for the motives of poor levee builders like the colonists of the German and Acadian Coasts. They, and many of their descendants, were not motivated primarily by a desire for wealth, but by a need for land on which to grow crops to feed their families. One is led, therefore, to qualify the conclusion that levees were just about money. It would be more accurate to say that the installation of levees on the Mississippi was about property, improvement, and community.

Before the Europeans' arrival, Native Americans inhabited the swamps on the Mississippi without building levees. Their culture did not conceive of land as personal property, and their habits as "hunting farmers" encouraged them to adapt to the environment's natural rhythms by making seasonal migrations between swamps and hills. When migrations were opposed by military force, as in the case
of the Quapaw, hemmed in by the hostile Chickasaw and Osage, Native Americans of the swamp sometimes raised mounds to escape overflows, or built sheds on stilts. To subsist, they ate native plants or animals and grew food on alluvial ridges. With the arrival of European traders, they also participated in global markets by hunting game and processing hides for export. As hunters, they were not opposed to money-making or the accumulation of property, but their earthly goods were portable. As farmers, the Native swampers did not try to stop the floods, nor aspire to the ownership of permanent landed improvements. Some Europeans, such as the trappers on the Middle and Upper Mississippi, or hunters and grazers in the bayous and coastal marshes, adopted similar lifestyles. Wetlands activists and environmentalists now praise their mode of living as evidence of man's ability to co-exist with Nature without disturbing the habitat. However, environmental historians such as William Cronon have shown that the concept of a "virgin landscape" is a myth. Whether man intentionally changed the land or not, there were consequences that attended his manner of land use. In the hunters' economy, several negatives appeared. For example, hunters relied on an untrammeled access to huge tracts of wilderness whose resources they did little (in a deliberate way) to restore or replenish. Their "natural" environment could not support a sizeable population because of its limited arable land and meager economic opportunities.
Cash incomes were based on diminishing numbers of wild animals hunted to near-extinction. As resources depleted, the hunter lifestyle could not be sustained. It was also untenable for purposes of defense. Hunters lived in small trading villages or widely dispersed households which could not organize into durable political units. They built no levees and could not develop the land without them. Instead, their interests focused on surface resources.

Therefore, the critical factor in the origins of levee building was the conversion of swamps on the Mississippi from wilderness to real estate. In other words, a human community could only expand and preserve itself in this environment when land came to be seen as having intrinsic value, rather than merely as a stage for processions of wildlife, or a campsite for portable villages. This innovation of thinking, wherein swamps became property, was a European contribution that sprang as a corollary from the plans of French, Spanish, and British imperialists to control the Mississippi for reasons of geopolitical strategy. The securing of the river against one's European rivals entailed the settlement of colonists on its banks, because governments could not afford to send an army there and keep it provisioned. To encourage immigration, kings granted land to colonists, and officials arranged the settlers on the river banks as a farming militia to promote defense. An easily summoned group of riparian colonists
who were loyal to the interests of the sponsoring monarch could deter other nations from seizing the river.

How could a European king secure the loyalty of his colonists? The same way he attracted the fealty of nobles in his own land: by the conditional granting of land. On the Mississippi, where colonists discovered an absolute need for levees, kings answered the need by requiring all proprietors to build embankments. Kings, their subjects, and the slaves composed a community of interests among inter-related persons who faced a common challenge in a distinct place. For them, levees were a pragmatic answer to a particular problem, and farmers who wanted to occupy this environment were willing to accept the conditions of tenure as a means to acquire the land. The tying of land titles to levee building insured the completion of flood control works, because the farming colonists' aspirations depended on the guaranteed possession of land and improvements. Peasants on the Mississippi, like the Germans, cherished their ability to become landowners in the New World, and younger sons of the French nobility, who came as military officers, relished the chance to develop estates like their older brothers'. When confirmed by the completion of Crown requirements, grants entitled levee builders to own the land, to resell it for a profit, or even to bequeath it. Each arpent of granted and leved swamp thus became part of an estate, subject to laws of probate and taxation. The security of every piece of
property became a grave concern, both to the Crown and to the family who developed it, because the whole group could only succeed if every levee builder did his part. A regimentation descended on this community which would have been intolerable to the hunter mentality.

Clearly, riparian grantees differed from hunters in their social and economic values. They also had markedly different responses to the landscape, because grantees valued the soil but did not highly prize the superstructure of flora, fauna, and native peoples with which it came equipped. Unlike hunters, the riparian farmers depended on located improvements, on commercial field crops which had to be guarded from overflows, and on domestic livestock, such as pigs, cows, and chickens, which must be protected from floods and predators. To create a habitat for farming, programs of environmental domestication and selective extermination were necessary. Nor could farmers tolerate the continued destruction of improvements that occurred during floods. Therefore, the burning of canebrakes, felling of cypress trees, and placing of bounties on wolf scalps, as well as the forced relocation of Native Americans, the construction of levees, and the eviction of non-levee-building whites were all basic reforms to rid their frontier of obstructions. To farmers, the overflows, wildlife, and squatters were simply encumbrances to be swept away in the interest of efficiency. Above all, levees were the indispensable
security device. Landowners used them to reduce risk and damages, to guard improvements and enhance income. Swamp life without levees (as land developers understood life) was simply impossible. Therefore, levee technology and the levee building mentality were basic ingredients in the realization of a new, "reformed" landscape.

Though originally installed for the immediate good of the landowners who built them, levees eventually provided economic opportunities for others. For example, the exclusion of overflows helped to reclaim entire regions of bottomland, some of which lay far from the Mississippi. The building of levees also contributed to boating safety, by diminishing the number of fallen trees in the river bed and by causing a stabilization of the banks and channel. People throughout the drainage basin, cash crop exporters, and their customers in foreign lands, profited from the installation of levees as an aid to navigation. Moreover, they enjoyed the leveed mass-production of agricultural goods such as cotton, sugar, tobacco, and indigo, which had formerly been luxuries but now became the common staples of a transatlantic consumer society.

A German traveler, medical botanist George Engelmann, who journeyed in the Arkansas Delta in 1837, describes change on the frontier and reveals the progressive ideals of the age which built the levees. Engelmann, and others like him, though not insensitive to the loss of the old landscape, viewed the trade-off as ultimately worthwhile.
Here every old settler can say: 'I still remember how the bison grazed where now my fenced-in field is; here, by the spring, which splashes by my house, I used to shoot elk; there, on the creek that runs below my house, I used to set my beaver traps; and bears used to spend the winter in that cave that is now my root cellar.' [Now] the bones of the bison bleach in the valley; a spoon carved out of its horn is still being used . . . the antlers of the elk age on the fence; only the remains of the beaver dam are still evident, and the bear has withdrawn . . . It is actually sad to see how the dry prose of block houses and fences and grain fields have penetrated the romantic wilderness, and forever disturbs the main features of the original landscape. However, the earth is for man, and it is finally better that the Anglo-Americans and occasionally also the German lives in Arkansas and eats cornbread and pork, and cultivates cotton for the Europeans.1

For farm pioneers, the levee builders' issues of property and productivity strongly resembled progress and happiness. To bring these about, Nature had to submit to the farmers' "improvements," domestication, and redevelopment.

Besides property and improvement, the element of community was the other crucial ingredient in the completion of levees on the Mississippi. Since levees could only be built where a sufficient number of proprietors had both the will and the means to install them as a group, it would do no good for one man to levee a tract while an adjacent site stood open. Although levee building was an individual responsibility, it also became a public work and community affair, because people in levee-building communities lived on contiguous grants under common supervision. They persisted in the swamp through compulsion, vigilance, ambition, and (perhaps) inertia. Slavery was a fact of life for them, but disciplinary authority extended all
through the society. Even the freedom of white proprietors was heavily qualified.

In short, levee-builders inhabited a peculiar frontier. Levee builders who wanted their property had no choice but to submit to continuous oversight for the sake of a survival which was at once economic, social, and physical. Mature levee-building communities were also very tightly knit. To a person unaccustomed to close scrutiny, it might quickly become unbearable. One only has to contemplate the spatial layout to see how little secrecy or privacy a levee builder could enjoy. For instance, white people's dwellings all lined up in a row on the riverfront, except for the overseers', and theirs were sited for a strategic view of rows of slave cabins. Linear street arrangements allowed them to keep an eye on things that transpired on the riverfront and among the workers, while the absence of trees created open vistas where everyone's meetings and doings were easily seen. In densely populated leveed areas, supervision and investigation were endemic. Therefore, news traveled fast: members of one household could pass information to the next by shouting to the next porch. Gossip interchanged more quietly, but with more deadly effect, in evening strolls on the levee. Since the road ran next to, or on top of, the levee, by everyone's front door, housewives and field workers could note each passerby. If someone walked over the levee to pass unnoticed, it was a sure sign of mischief afoot which
raised suspicions. Furthermore, if a landowner neglected his levee duties (or other aspects of his life), everyone knew of it. Officials with the duty to carry out inspections might descend on him to demand expensive repairs, to requisition field hands for compulsory service, or even to dispossess one who was unable to keep the fields dry. Since due dates were a matter of public record, the arbitrariness of local administration was somewhat mitigated. However, levee-building communities were not a place for the non-conformist or the secretive. They were, on the other hand, ideal for a "public man" who did not mind owning slaves, could afford to buy them, could obtain competent managers, and had the pluck to withstand the vagaries of commercial agriculture, in context with the ever-present risk of destruction from the Mississippi. For them, leveed land was a commodity that offered prospects of security and advancement, but only where communities of landowners held the physical and mental resources that allowed them to transform the swamp. Ironically, demands of the environment transformed the people as well. Over time, Deltans and levee builders became a society as distinctive as the land they inhabited.

But it did take time. As Christopher Morris noted in Becoming Southern: The Evolution of a Way of Life, and as Anthony Wallace's Rockdale: The Growth of an American Village in the Early Industrial Revolution, and other family and community history studies have shown, settlers
came to a frontier with a set of cultural behaviors and attitudes, some of which persisted and some of which changed into something else—a new mindset. They did not immediately develop or assume traits of a new culture, but the influence of peers, interests, and environment tended to remold them, so that children and grandchildren of one household could turn out radically different from each other, depending largely on where they moved, how they worked, and who they emulated.\(^2\)

A definitive example of ongoing cultural adaptation in the Delta can be gleaned from the letters of Dr. Jesse and Mrs. Harriet Everett of Phillips County, Arkansas. Dr. Everett hailed from New Hampshire and Harriet from Castleton, Vermont. Their only child was a son, Delos, born in New York in 1829. Harriet viewed she and Jesse as invalids and thought warmer weather would improve their health. For a time they lived in the American Bottoms at Evansville, Illinois, but by mid-1844 had settled in Helena, Arkansas, on the Mississippi. Here, their rock-ribbed Yankee values soon began to erode.\(^3\)

On August 24, 1844, Harriet wrote a letter to her brother in Vermont, mostly to upbraid him for slowness in settling their father's estate, but also to encourage the family to move to the swamp. "Our coming farther South has done everything for the Doctor," she said. "After spitting quarts of blood, and no one that saw him supposed he could live," he was now almost recovered. She herself was
enjoying better health than since leaving Castleton, "but my health is poor enough." That was one reason she wanted her inheritance. Another was the inclination Delos had, though only fifteen, to become a planter.\(^4\)

Harriet's pride in Delos shines through her letter. In singing his praise, she also glorified the opportunities open to swamp planters in the Arkansas Delta. "Should James once see this part of the country," she said, "he would never return to Vermont to till the ground." In terms decidedly crass, she extemporised on the advantages:

I thought folks made their money easy in Evansville (and they do when compared with Vermont), but there is more difference still in Arkansas. They clear from forty to fifty dollars to the acre, and not work half as hard as you do. It is perfectly astonishing to see how easy the Planters make their money. A Planter that has three or four niggers [sic], need not do anything himself, but if he has ten he can spend his summers traveling. It is all together the best business followed. The Doctor intends hiring a plantation [in] another year, with three or four niggers [sic], and let Delos see what he can do for himself. He is very large for his age, and as capable of superintending a plantation as one half the men, and more too, for he is all ambition. He never would think of a profession, but has always been determined that he would have a plantation. When a child is so set upon any kind of business, there is no use to try to turn them, and we are all pleased with it.\(^5\)

Veteran swampers would have howled with laughter at the idea of taking vacations on the proceeds of a ten-slave cotton crop, but Harriet wanted to flaunt her new home to a resented brother, even if she had to exaggerate.

Amid one's admiration for the achievements of levee builders as a strikingly successful community, one should
also pause to contemplate the means used to develop the land. Without consenting to Harriet's assertion that white slave proprietors did no work, it must be admitted that blacks performed hard service on alluvial plantations. Under the superintendence of masters and overseers, the labor of slaves typically cleared the riparian land and protected it from overflow. Swampland development was a team effort, but slaves received little more than a subsistence. Overseers got a salary and an uncertain tenure, with no retirement plan, and masters assumed all the financial risks along with the chance of rewards. Membership in the community did not result in an equal distribution of rewards, but they were also not living in a world of safety nets. In fact, many faced a real prospect of failure. The need for levees and the attendant dangers of plantation development were matters of life and death, ruin and reward. Human rights were not entirely disregarded, but people did not feel entitled to much more than they could take and secure for themselves. In somber moments, they looked away from the swamps to Heaven for a better hope, which was what sustained most of them, masters and slaves alike.

A few months later, in December of 1844, Dr. Everett wrote Harriet's brother a more credible, but still highly colored, account of the Delta and its prospects:

We are living in a cotton growing country where there is very little cold weather . . . our gardens are filled with roses and other tender flowers. Our cattle and horses require no
feeding in winter, and a better stock country
I have never seen. One of our neighbors owns
a thousand head of cattle & some two hundred
horses. It is customary to collect the horses
& cattle once a year and mark & Brand them &
perhaps the owner will not see them again till
the next year except he occasionally salts them.
Our hogs are raised and fattened in the woods on
acorns & berries, and we always have a market at
hand, as the river here is never frozen. This
is a great advantage over the northern states,
[emphasis his] & New Orleans is an excellent market.

Corn is raised here with the plow alone. No
hoeing is necessary & we get about fifty bushels
per acre as a medium crop. An acre of cotton well
saved is worth about 30 dollars at the present
reduced prices. Corn is now selling at 50 cents
a bushel, beef at 2 to 3 cts. per lb., & pork at
2 1/2 cts. Land on the river is worth $10 per
acre and in the interior from $1.25 to $5.00 per
acre. Common laborers get about the same as in
Vermont, but goods of every description are very
high. I like the mild and sunny climate of the
South and would not exchange it for your frozen
region on any account. We get a living here with
very little exertion--two days work in a week will
afford a man a better living here than seven days
in Vermont. And I would advise any man who has
no home . . . to come to the West, where it is in
the power of every one that wishes to, [to] make
himself an independent farmer in one of the most
fertile countries on the face of the earth. 6

Was Everett's optimism about swamp resources derived
from experience or Democratic dogma? At the very least, he
spoke with hyperbole. Practical men like Joseph Erwin, who
warned a poor son-in-law off the riverfront, and displaced
pioneers, like the dead DeHarts of Chicot County, knew that
leveed swamps were still largely a frontier for the rich,
in spite of what "independent farmers" claimed should be
the American norm. When Everett purchased land, he bought
in the alluvial interior, in central Phillips County, on a
creek west of the St. Francis and Mississippi Rivers. He
did not join the levee-building community, because he knew he lacked the necessary resources.

Another letter from the Everett household originated with Harriet's sister, Lucy Drake, convalescing in Helena during the winter of 1844-45. To relatives in Vermont, Lucy confided that in spite of Delos's agrarian ambitions, the Everetts still lived primarily in town. The Doctor had a drug store, in addition to his practice, but often rode to the country to see patients. One day, Lucy accompanied him and was delighted with the cotton fields. "The best society is those that live on plantations," she said, "and their families live in the most extravagant [sic] style." Somewhat intimidated by their status, wealth, and fashion, she remarked that "I must look rather plain . . . but this is not my abiding place, so I do not mind it." Helena itself offered few amenities. It contained the county courthouse, about ten stores, some tradesmen's shops and taverns, but no church or school house: "very essential buildings, I should think." "The preaching is Methodist," she said, "but very few attend church." When the meeting house blew down in months previous, no one bothered to replace it. Still, in a town well-stocked with lawyers, substantial opportunities existed for political networking. Lucy said, "One lady we visited was the daughter of Amos Kendall--purely democratic, I assure you." Kendall, a journalist from Massachusetts, had moved to Kentucky to publish a newspaper. When President Jackson appointed him
as U. S. Treasury auditor and Postmaster General, contemporaries considered Kendall to be the leading member of Jackson's "Kitchen Cabinet." At the time Lucy met his daughter, he was working with painter Samuel F. B. Morse in the management of Morse's telegraphic patents. Nor was Lucy unconnected herself. En route to Helena, she stopped to see cousin George Buell who claimed that since Polk's election, he and his friends would undoubtedly "have their share of influence at headquarters." He said Dr. Everett should use his name to apply for a government job. In short, Lucy thought the family was "in comfortable circumstances and enjoying life" in a damp but lively "land of plenty." Swampers were tied to movements in the national mainstream, and they engaged in lucrative activities. However, Lucy cautioned her stay-at-home New England kin, "I don't think you would like so many negroes any better than I do." A later letter, written to the brother in 1858, shows he emigrated from Vermont to Ohio, while the Everetts and Lucy Drake continued in the South. Their family was pulling apart, just like the nation, and those associated with the region of slavery developed a distinctive sectional identity.

Census records from Phillips County show the ongoing conversion of the Everetts into swamp planters and cultural Southerners. Apparently, Everett used his medical profits to buy land and labor, with Delos as his "manager," for in 1850 they had 120 acres—85 improved and 35 unimproved—
producing 1,000 bushels of corn and 26 bales of cotton. The Everett's owned two slaves, but it must have tried Harriet's pretensions to operate on so modest a scale. Other proprietors in the county in 1850 included people like: Gideon Pillow, with 87 slaves; Jerome Pillow, 74 slaves; John B. Rogers, 70 slaves; and near relatives of President Polk, such as Thomas M. Polk, with 74 slaves; T. G. Polk, 55 slaves; and Allen Polk, 34 slaves. Naturally, their crops were larger than the Everett's, with John B. Rogers, for example, growing 300 bales and Thomas M. Polk producing 220 bales. Chicot families like the Johnsons and Gaineses held second plantations in Phillips, and forty proprietors owned twenty or more slaves, which threw the Everett's property into insignificance. Still, the Everett's were making progress toward the planter class. Their cotton output was large for the land and slaves owned, which indicates Delos worked himself and the hands pretty hard. As Harriet noted in her letter, the will to advance was an important factor in making it happen.\(^8\)

Unlike the Everett's, Phillips County contained many farmers on Crowley's Ridge who did not even aim at alluvial riches. Mount Etna Tackitt, for example, a yeoman farmer probably named for the steamboat on which he was born, owned a farm valued at $1,000 in 1850, but produced no cotton at all. Tackitt grew 900 bushels of corn, owned 330 acres (only 10 were improved), three horses, four milk cows, ten oxen, and forty pigs. William Ivey, a yeoman
among many, had 9 improved acres and 2 unimproved, with six
cattle, thirty pigs, 300 bushels of corn, and fifty bushels
of sweet potatoes. Tackitt and Ivey probably felt content
with their holdings, but they were not trying to join the
gentry. By 1860, Dr. Everett's property produced 47 bales
--nowhere near the large planters', but a sizeable increase
over earlier productions. He now lived in the country at
LaGrange Post Office; however, heirs who donated his papers
to the Ottenheimer Library at the University of Arkansas at
Little Rock described it as LaGrange Plantation. The
family's cultural transformation was complete, even if it
took time, work, and pretense to achieve.9

The goal at which the Everetts aimed was that of unity
with the levee-building planter community. They were
clearly upstarts, but Jesse, Harriet, and Delos were hardly
the first of that category of settler to find their way to
the banks of the Mississippi. Social climbers of all
varieties had used levees to raise their status in the
years since 1720. By the antebellum period, after more
than a century of flood control and land reclamation
efforts, high status for levee-building swamp planters had
been achieved. "Cypress Grove" might be a name on a sign
hanging over a planter's gate, but the trees themselves had
been cleared, the fields ditched and drained, and native
wildlife banished to places beyond the reach of the plow
and the steamboat. The technological and financial success
of the levee-building community loomed over the surrounding
landscape like a beacon, attracting others who aspired to wealth in a dangerous but vulnerable environment. Yet, in only a few years, emancipation threatened to derange the whole system. Without slaves, how would crops or levees be supplied?

ENDNOTES

1Englemann's notes were written 21 March 1837 at Wm. Stacy's, near the site of Searcy, Ark., after touring the Delta. Jerome and Harriet H. Jansma, eds., "Engelmann Revisits Arkansas, the New State," Arkansas Historical Quarterly 51 (Winter 1992): 351-52.


4Ibid.

5Ibid.

6Dr. Jesse Everett, Helena, Ark., to Burnum D. Sandford, Castleton, Vt., 1 Dec. 1844, Sandford-Everett Family File.

7Lucy [Sandford] Drake, Helena, Ark., to My Dear Brother and Sister [Mr. and Mrs. Burnum D. Sandford], Castleton, Vt., 22 Dec. 1844 and 18 Jan. 1845; Lucy [Drake], "La Grange," [near Helena, Ark.], to My Dear Brother, [Burnum D. Sandford, Newark, Ohio], 8 Mar. 1858, Sandford-Everett Family File.


9Ibid.
AFTERWORD

Having taken the story of levee building on the Mississippi from its origins to the early 1840s in preceding chapters, it remains to summarize the narrative of what came after. In many ways, the high water of 1844 was a turning point in the history of Mississippi River flood control. As a general flood with widespread effects, it impacted diverse neighborhoods and stimulated a feeling of common interests among the several states on the river. Three separate rises took place in 1844, with flooding on the Middle and Upper Mississippi, Missouri, and Ohio Rivers, as well as in the lowlands of the Yazoo, White, St. Francis, Arkansas, Ouachita, Tensas, and Red Rivers. Land near these waterways, as well as on Bayous Mason and Boeuf, Deer Creek, and other inhabited interior streams, plunged under water. Even in Missouri and Illinois, there was severe flooding. For example, overflows and caving banks devastated Kaskaskia, while American Bottoms, a hundred-mile stretch east of St. Louis, between Alton and Chester, Illinois, flooded very deeply. At Chester, the river rose so high that the steamer Belle Air washed over the Mississippi’s banks, crashed into a grist mill, collided with several businesses, tore the third story off a building, and knocked the jail down before it regained the
channel! Lower Louisiana escaped most of the damage seen elsewhere because its levees were generally in good repair, and the Atchafalaya carried much of the high water toward the Gulf. Nevertheless, losses caused by crevasses at Bonnet Carre and other trouble spots showed that vigilance was still obligatory. For instance, in August of 1844, as soon as the Mayor of New Orleans heard of a new Bonnet Carre crevasse at Madame Arnaud's, he sent "boats, pile drivers, utensils, and hands" from the city's First Municipality to try to stop it. Unfortunately, the breach widened, levees tumbled, and the Mayor's helpers withdrew. The break was judged unstoppable, with water rushing toward Lake Pontchartrain and scouring a diversionary outlet ninety feet wide, eight feet deep, before the river fell.\(^1\)

To enhance preparedness, South Louisianians kept abreast of water news in 1844 in newspaper reports from throughout the floodplain. In the Baton Rouge Gazette, for example, notices appeared from St. Louis, Cairo, Memphis, Vicksburg, Van Buren, Little Rock, Natchez, and Alexandria, to name but a few. Updates on flood heights allowed levee builders to sandbag the embankments to greater heights if necessary, while the publication of losses from flooding encouraged more strenuous exertions. For instance, the Arkansas Gazette of May 15th was quoted in Baton Rouge on the 25th as saying that the lost livestock, crops, and improvements on the Arkansas River totaled about $80,000 to $100,000, while the Red River Republican at Alexandria
claimed that planters on the Red had lost up to $1.5 million. By June 29th, the Memphis Enquirer (of June 20th) was mentioning water on the pavement of Front Street, on ground that towered over Crittenden County, Arkansas. The Vicksburg Whig also noted water at street level, barely below the floors of buildings near the landing; this, in another city on the bluffs. What must swamp planters on the opposite side, in Carroll, Madison, and Tensas Parishes, be enduring? And the Whig said that "the levee in the bend above Vicksburg is expected to break every moment." The same paper ventured on July 1st to calculate total losses on the Mississippi and its tributaries. It said at least 225,000 bales of cotton were ruined in the fields, with losses in Mississippi, Arkansas, and Louisiana reaching $12 million. "The damage in Missouri and Illinois must [also] be immense."²

What made the losses in 1844 most annoying to Westerners in the Valley was the patronizing attitude that political leaders from other parts of the country exemplified in regard to Mississippi River improvements. Eastern Congressmen, "old republicans," and strict constructionists insisted it was unconstitutional to spend money to improve the Mississippi for anything but navigation, and they very reluctantly parted with national money for that. The South, at this point in time, was hardly a political monolith. Southerners on the Eastern seaboard opposed appropriations for the Southwest as dogmatically as
representatives from New England. In return, policy makers from the Mississippi Valley resented southerners and poured scorn on their self-interested scruples. Consider, for instance, an editorial in the Baton Rouge Gazette, Oct. 19th, 1844, reprinted from the New York Commercial Advertiser, which lambasted Virginia gentlemen for being unprogressive and out-of-date:

The Virginians are the very Chinese of America, regarding all the world besides, as 'outside barbarians.' Virginia is behind the age, a state without progress. The planters, being isolated in their ancient halls, like so many terrapins, seldom move unless in the spring, when they stretch forth their necks to see if the mint is beginning to sprout, and thrice a week besides, when Sambo brings along the Richmond Enquirer, to refresh their minds about the Greeks and Romans, and lecture about State rights and political economy, after the manner of Fe-fo-fum and Confucius. [They] have no conception of a... more intricate piece of machinery than a wheelbarrow, [dreaming] all the livelong day of John Taylor of Caroline, and all night of the ancient glories of Virginia--of Pocohontas, Sir Wm. Berkley, and Bacon's Rebellion. Nothing of late date, of course.3

One might attribute the presence of these testy comments in a Louisiana paper to the Virginians' opposition to tariffs which could aid its modernizing, agro-industrial sugar planters. However, the anger expressed was merely symptomatic of a growing impatience in the West for the easterners' indifference to resource development. Their arguments against internal improvements seemed more like matters of jealous rivalry than of principle.

Accumulating resentments about public policy and public works at the national level were highlighted in 1844
because of the flood. Overflows significantly affected five states, none of which had the power, independently, to prevent the flooding. Congress would not involve itself, and the Constitution forbade combinations among the states, so they had no way to cooperate to achieve better flood controls. Multi-state, regional land reclamation through nationally funded levee building was inconceivable to most Americans at that time, and even the funding of river-bed improvements in the Mississippi was hotly contested. An editorial from the Baton Rouge Gazette, Feb. 10th, 1844, (from the Louisville Journal) encapsulated the frustration in a note on the "Improvement of the Western Rivers," which complained of the General Government's favoritism in appropriations. The writer said it was humiliating to supplicate Congress for "a miserable pittance" to carry out navigation improvements: "to have these appeals sometimes scorned, and at best to have insignificant sums reluctantly doled out." New Orleans, the port for the West, handled one-third of the nation's exports, but the South and West were lucky to get $200,000 for river improvements, out of a budget of $27 million.4

It is almost impossible not to smile at the scale of government operations at that time. Nevertheless, to that generation the sums were important and so were their concerns about fiscal principles and precedents. Moreover, the spending decisions were being made at a volatile time in American history, when sectionalism and opinions about
the spread of slavery were beginning to divide the constituencies of both national parties. In 1844, the same year as the flood, Democrat James K. Polk bested Whig candidate Henry Clay in the race for president. However, Polk only enjoyed a lead of about 38,000 popular votes over Clay. A third-party, anti-slavery candidate, James G. Birney, drew 62,000 votes that might have gone to Clay if the slavery issue had not ignited. Whigs had traditionally been the sponsors of internal improvements. Unfortunately, controversies about the impending annexation of Texas tore the Whig Party in pieces, because "conscience Whigs" decried the use of American sovereignty to endorse slavery in a land where Mexicans had banned it. The moral outrage of "conscience" Whigs was all the more bitter because they viewed Mexicans as moral inferiors. The admission of Texas as a slave state could not be reconciled to their virtuous self-image, and under Tyler and Polk the national government seemed enslaved, to the interests of expansionist planters. Soon, an idea took root that there was a Slave Power Conspiracy manipulating national politics to expand the power of slaveowners in the Southwest and the nation as a whole. For believers in the Conspiracy, proposals to build levees in the Mississippi Valley with national funds were simply further proof that planters were trying to foist the responsibility for slavery onto the whole country. Few people understood the regional control requirements of the Mississippi floodplain, but everyone
knew that its swamps, when reclaimed, would probably become leveed plantations. Therefore, when the issue was discussed, Free Labor advocates joined with "conscience" Whigs to oppose both the extension of slavery and national levee motions alike.

Irregardless of the mounting criticisms made against slaveowners, the United States annexed Texas in 1845. This event, in a roundabout way, had a bearing on the building of levees. John C. Calhoun, President Tyler's Secretary of State, had conducted many of the Texas negotiations and completed the treaty that went to the U. S. Senate for ratification. In a letter to a leading British politician, Calhoun stated that the annexation was needed in order to thwart British abolitionists who hoped to persuade the Texas Republic to outlaw slavery in return for help against Mexico. The publication of the letter caused a national scandal in anti-slavery circles, for it seemed that the Tyler administration cared more about the expansion of slavery than the interests of the United States. In the event of annexation, war seemed unavoidable. Therefore, Whigs in the Senate repudiated Tyler and opposed the treaty. Then, when the Democrats' James K. Polk won the presidency by campaigning in favor of annexation, Tyler revived his own annexation plan as a joint-resolution of Congress. Since a resolution only required a simple majority instead of a two-thirds majority, annexation passed in this manner (without a treaty) and the realm open
to slavery was expanded. Anti-slavery and Free Labor forces fumed and plotted reprisals.

The architect of the original plan, John C. Calhoun, did not fit easily into the presidential politics of that day, for he was not at home in either party. His philosophical journey from nationalist to sectionalist has been widely discussed in historical literature. Above all, Calhoun's personal problems with Andrew Jackson and his concern for the protection of minority rights within a democratic republic led him into frequently strange and inconsistent alliances with strict constructionists. However, he always retained a strong interest in national internal improvements. With one foot in the southern Democratic camp on the basis of the defense of slavery, and another in the Whig camp on the basis of improvements and economic development, Calhoun was a natural choice for the post of presiding luminary at a Southern commercial convention that met in Memphis in 1845.

Southern commercial conventions were a kind of grass-roots political/economic movement that started in Augusta, Georgia, after the Panic of 1837. They served as a forum for representative men to discuss the South's place and future in the national economy. Meetings held from 1837 to 1839 mostly dealt with direct trade relationships with European powers who bought Southern exports. Delegates hoped to convince other Southerners of a need to achieve economic independence from Northern middlemen. The meeting
in 1845, on the other hand, was less sectional in tone. It was stimulated by the flood damages of 1844 and by a growing sense of common interests among southern and western states who wanted military security and internal improvements.

The immediate origins of the Memphis Convention of 1845 sprang from a public meeting concerning the upkeep of the Military Road from Memphis to Little Rock that ran through swamps in the Arkansas Delta. At that gathering, a committee was appointed to petition in favor of the road's preservation. One committee member, sensing a greater need, recommended the calling of a convention to discuss and propose internal improvements for the whole Southwest. As the idea took hold, it included the entire Mississippi Valley. Calhoun's services were secured as convention president, and a large turnout attended sessions at Memphis in November of 1845 to make recommendations. Nearly six hundred delegates came, representing seventeen states and both political parties. The range of topics showed that levee builders and other land developers in attendance were thinking in broad terms about infrastructure. They judged it appropriate that the General Government be asked to supply many of the improvements.\(^5\)

Eleven main topics were proposed for discussion. Delegates viewed eight as matters that could legitimately be undertaken by Congress or other federal bodies. These included: military roads through the Southwest's public
lands, a national armory for the West, a steam-powered marine fleet on the western waters, a national ship canal to link the Mississippi to the Great Lakes, improved mail routes on western rivers, the improvement of the Ohio, the improvement of the Mississippi and its tributaries, and the reclaiming of submerged lands on the banks of western rivers. Most of the proposals revolved around navigation improvements, but the last favored an agenda of federally sponsored levee building. U. S. Army engineers had already expressed a belief in the 1820s that levees were an aid to navigation and, therefore, fundable under the authority of the Constitution. The Memphis Convention lobbied to bring the need for a national system of leveed land reclamation before Congress.6

John C. Calhoun, as head of the Memphis Convention, caused a sensation when he declared the Mississippi to be an "inland sea." This statement meant he thought it deserved the kind of appropriations that Congress routinely approved for harbor improvements and fortifications on the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts, and the Great Lakes. Calhoun said the Founders meant for the General Government to do things which neither the states nor individuals could accomplish on their own, so he placed improvements to the Mississippi within that category. Great applause greeted his remarks at the convention. In calling for improvements on the Mississippi, Calhoun had elevated the interests of westerners on a par with those of the easterners who had
monopolized the Treasury's outflow for decades. Yet, such a statement of constitutional interpretation would have been thought strange prior to 1844. Controversies about Texas and slavery had revealed the self-interestedness of much of what formerly passed as constitutional dogma. Many believed that national party politics was a matter of principles, and even accepted the superior claims of the oceanside over the riparians as being carved in constitutional stone. Strict construction had been the virtual gospel of western and southern politics in matters of internal improvement. Now, many realized that their sectional rivals, who lacked such scruples, had been promoting their own advancement through infrastructure that put the South and West at a technological and commercial disadvantage. Similarly, prior to 1844 most riparians had been satisfied with county and parish levees built by private persons or local governments. Now, in the wake of a terrible and extensive flood, those arrangements seemed insufficient. Politicians at the convention were saying that levees, snag removal, and other Mississippi River improvements ought to be works of Congress. Why? Partly because they wanted to exploit public feelings in a year of flood crisis, and partly because they wanted votes in the coming elections. Still, there were substantive criticisms which could be made of the neglect that Congress had exercised toward the Mississippi Valley. The General Government was, after all, the proprietor of the public
domain; it did have jurisdiction over trade and commerce; and, it was obligated to provide for the general defense. Legislative memorials from Louisiana, Mississippi, and Arkansas had been saying this for years, but they lacked the publicity that attended Calhoun's remarks. Compared to what many Americans felt about public spending, Calhoun's declaration at the Convention was a "loose construction" manifesto. Was he merely a tool for the Slave Power, trying to infiltrate the national budget through an expansion of public works to help planters? Or, was he seeking a nomination for the presidency on a platform of pork barrel for the West? However one interprets Calhoun's role in the matter, delegates at Memphis adored his arguments and drafted eighteen resolutions to set before Congress. Resolution Twelve draws the particular interest of students of levee history, for its authors in the committee "On Leveeing and Reclaiming the Public Lowlands on the . . . Large Western Rivers" proclaimed that public lands on the Mississippi and its tributaries, though now worthless for farming, could and ought to be reclaimed with levees. On the basis of the committee's report, the Convention advised a national grant of overflowed lands to the states, or a direct appropriation for leveed land reclamation by the General Government.⁷

The man who chaired the levee committee was a Nashville lawyer named David Craighead, whose quandry as a strict-construction Democrat writing in favor of federally
financed internal improvements placed him in an awkward position shared, not only by Calhoun, but by many alluvial cotton planters, like the Johnsons, Seviers, and other "Family" members. The party system simply did not fit their interests, because it pitted citizens who wanted improvements against each other on other issues that crippled their ability to cooperate. For example, Craighead lived in Nashville, but owned extensive acreage on the riverside in the undeveloped and non-levee-building county of Mississippi, in northeast Arkansas. His overseer grew cotton on the highest ground, but Craighead knew the county's resources could be put to better use if the low land could be reclaimed. As a large absentee in a county with few slaves, many yeomen, and almost no resident planters, Craighead was naturally interested in getting levees built by public, rather than private, means. Yet, a memoir says he was "an intimate friend of Andrew Jackson and James K. Polk, always a Democrat . . . and an advocate of free trade." The political baggage that went with such a description made it hard to find allies for national internal improvements. Traditionally, Whigs were the party in favor of infrastructure spending, but time and again, in the world of swamp planters, it was the Democrats who were levee advocates. They also pressed for railroads, banks, manufacturing, and other structures of improvement--items the vast majority of Democrats voted against. Why not join with Whigs in the pursuit of improvements they wanted?
Because the bulk of the white populace was Democratic, and issues like free trade made their allies on improvement spending into political enemies. For instance, cotton planters opposed tariffs because they exported to foreign markets which might be closed if the United States raised barriers to goods produced abroad. Consumers among the working classes also liked free trade because it led to cheaper prices. Both these groups became Democrats. On the other hand, planters who became Whigs usually produced things like sugar and hemp for domestic markets, articles foreigners could supply more cheaply. They needed tariff protection, as did American manufacturers who suffered from high costs of production. Both of these groups became Whigs. No wonder promoters of a national levee system and other western improvements had a hard time marshalling their forces, especially when northern Whigs and Democrats started to object to the expansion of slavery.²

How did the resolutions of the Memphis Convention fare in the halls of Congress? A Mr. Holmes of South Carolina tried to present them to the House of Representatives in February of 1846, but the House refused to admit the resolutions for discussion. Instead, Calhoun, as the U. S. Senator from South Carolina, introduced them to the Senate and had them referred to his own select committee. For several weeks, he tinkered with a report to convince the Senate to see the improvement of the Mississippi as a duty and power of the national government. He used the inland
sea principle, comparing the Mississippi's usefulness for defense and its national utility in commerce to that of the ports on the Atlantic. Along the way, Calhoun pruned many Memphis Convention's resolutions from his committee report as not being national in scope, but he still argued that publicly owned swamp land should be reclaimed. If the General Government had no power to perform the work, Calhoun's committee recommended that it divest the lands as soon as possible to entities or persons who would.9

To Calhoun, the proposals in his report were eminently logical and within the guidelines of correct states-rights doctrine. State legislatures on the Mississippi added further support to the Memphis Convention proposals and to Calhoun's committee report by means of new memorials to Congress. For example, the Arkansas legislature sent a memorial in 1845 asking for federal help in building levees on the Mississippi and Arkansas Rivers. It bluntly asked for national levees simply for swamp land reclamation. The Mississippi legislature drafted two memorials in 1846, asking for grants of overflowed public lands within its borders to aid their state in swamp reclamation. Even Missouri, a strict-construction state, sent a memorial on the problem of inundated lands in Missouri and Arkansas, asking for help in the year 1847. Unfortunately for the prospect of a dispassionate reception, Calhoun's Texas annexation efforts had culminated in 1846 in a declaration of war against Mexico by the Polk administration. Now,
critics of Calhoun and other expansionists, especially the anti-slavery "conscience Whigs" and northern Democrats on the verge of becoming Free-Soilers, were more convinced than ever of the reality of a Slave Power plot. In their account of events, pro-slavery conspirators had seduced the United States into waging a war of aggression against a peaceable neighbor merely to steal its territory, extend western cotton fields, and pad the representation of slave states in Congress. Congressional opponents of the Mexican War were hardly disposed to reward Calhoun with a vote in favor of his proposals to spend federal money on the improved navigation of the Mississippi, much less to build national levees in order to reclaim even more land for plantations. Therefore, when Calhoun's committee report went to the Senate in 1846, accompanied by a bill to authorize a board of engineers to study the Mississippi for navigation improvements, senators killed the bill. In the end, as they say, "all politics is local." And, although Calhoun's proposals seemed modest compared to what the West wanted in 1845, in the circumstance of a sectionally divisive war even this morsel was denied to improvers of the "inland sea." The West's solidarity from the flood of 1844 also receded, almost as soon as the waters.  

A subsequent commercial convention, held at Chicago in 1847, filled a new cornucopia with internal improvements desired by "the West," but by this time the West was a different thing. Perhaps one should say it had become two
things: the Northwest and Southwest. For example, many delegates at the Chicago meeting repudiated the Memphis recommendations as impractical, faulty, and even injurious to the true needs of the West, by which they meant those of the Northwest and Great Lakes. Representatives of two Southern states attended, but had little impact on the resolutions. Chicago Convention proposals carried input and endorsements from such "national" leaders as Daniel Webster, Lewis Cass, Thomas Hart Benton, Henry Clay, and Martin Van Buren. Calhoun was asked to come, but he resentfully answered that people already knew his opinions on the needs of the West. What good did it do to restate them, since anti-slavery sections of the country were determined to oppose whatever southerners wanted? A section that relied on slavery for labor was now seen as deviant and conspiratorial; its political representatives, as agents of corruption. Levee builders and would-be plantation developers still believed that Mississippi River improvements and swampland reclamation were in the national interest, just as a stronger export economy would be if their cotton production increased. However, in view of the criticism leveled at their efforts to acquire additional slave territory in the Mexican War, levee builders no longer felt that they were part of the political mainstream. Their interests were "sectional," while those of the (North) West and North were "national."
Soon, northern and western congressmen pushed a bill through both Houses of Congress which appropriated large sums for harbor improvements on the Great Lakes and for dredging Northern rivers. Polk, a Tennessean, vetoed the bill. This infuriated northerners, and he compounded the ill feelings when he let Britain have half of Oregon, which northwesterners considered to be their slice of the expansionist pie. Contrary to congressional expectations, however, the outcome of the Mexican War pleased voters all over the country. Huge acquisitions of territory doubled the size of the country, and Whigs, determined to deny the Democrats the fruits of military victory, elected a Southern, slave-owning Mexican War hero, General Zachary Taylor, to the presidency. Taylor had never voted and had no discernable political affiliations, but he owned a plantation on the Mississippi, and it was in his administration that the General Government finally took action, in 1849, on its so-called national responsibility to reclaim the swamps.

Levee historian Robert Wilmot Harrison, the author of Alluvial Empire, divided the history of swampland development on the Mississippi into three basic periods: "the colonial period, from the first settlements to 1849; the period of State-managed reclamation, from 1849 to 1879 when the Mississippi River Commission was created; and the modern period from 1879 to the present." He viewed these stages as representing progressions of responsibility in
flood control projects, "from local riparian holders to State authority and later to Federal control and management." Thus, for Harrison, the enactment of the Swamp Land Act of March 2, 1849, by the United States Congress, with the approval of President Taylor, culminated the first phase of levee building on the Mississippi. It completed the era of the levees' origins and signaled the onset of a new system of flood control at state expense.  

In big-picture terms, it appears that Harrison's interpretation was correct. The national Swamp Land Act of 1849 and its companion act of September 28, 1850, did introduce new levels of funding, administration, and professionalization into the building of levees on the Mississippi. State levee systems managed by engineers came into existence, and after the Civil War, they were the leading agents of flood control on the Mississippi. However, these arrangements did not displace the older system of proprietary levees and local supervision. In fact, in many localities, monies expended by Swamp Land Act bureaucracies seem to have been almost peripheral to the work of levee upkeep. Planters, police juries, boards of police, and county courts continued to fight floods as they always had, largely without outside aid. Everywhere, levees built with the proceeds of land sales from the Swamp Land Acts were designed to supplement the former system, not to replace it. Parish, county, and state levee laws, and the attendant supervisory bureaucracies, remained in
effect after the passage of Swamp Land Acts, nor, at any
time prior to 1928, did the national government assume the
complete responsibility for routine flood control or levee
construction on the Mississippi.\textsuperscript{13}

Even the creation of the Mississippi River Commission
in 1879, while it introduced a new layer of coordination
and assistance, did not result in a wholesale
discontinuance of local responsibilities. The national
government still expected people on the river to help
themselves. Likewise, all through the 1840s and 1850s,
local and state flood control projects continued to
proliferate on the Mississippi, independent of Swamp Land
Act endowments. Studies of legislative documents show that
hardly any compilation of the published Acts of Louisiana,
Arkansas, and Mississippi from 1840 to 1860 failed to carry
new levee laws for selected parishes, cities, and counties.
Lobbying by special interests in these communities prompted
the state legislatures to allow local governments to try
many things for self-protection on a case-by-case basis.
For example, there were state laws to let them: hire levee
engineers, erect levee tax districts, assist private land
owners with levee duties, compensate owners of land
condemned as irreclaimable, close or open waterways for
drainage, and erect perimeter levees to guard backland or
bayou improvements. Levee laws and flood controls were
also enacted for parishes and counties many miles from the
riverside, in order to promote non-riparian reclamation.
States even permitted the creation of multi-county/multi-parish levee districts for more rational flood control—if voters in those areas approved. Landowners still had the primary responsibility for building levees at the fronts of their own properties, but in progressive regions, levee taxes to be paid in money or labor were also assessed. Where they existed, levee taxes fell on all proprietors within the leveed parishes and counties on the basis of their land and slave property assessments. Taxes spread the costs of upkeep throughout the county, parish, or city where the levees lay. Lest one decide, on this basis, that proprietors away from the river were being unjustly dunned for the support of planters on the front, it would be well to note that assessors graduated the "value" of real estate to achieve equitable proportions of levee costs. For example, unimproved swamps in the interior carried low assessments because they had little value. Yet, huge acreages of this kind of land accumulated large tax bills, and could not be amassed with impunity. Moderate taxation discouraged hoarding, but not to the degree that buyers could not be found. Meanwhile, improved agricultural land was classed on the basis of resale value and its distance from the river. The most productive land paid the highest taxes. In essence, then, graduated assessments gave relief by taxing speculators, bayou farmers, and riparians alike, according to benefits received. At last, through modifications in fiscal administration, a workable cost-sharing
system was devised to relieve front proprietors of the sole burden of maintenance and new construction. Incidentally, the use of such laws was well under way before the Swamp Land Acts were passed. The Swamp Land Acts were not trailblazers in fiscal reform. Reforms came from the riparians themselves.

Overall, a student of levee laws enacted for, and administered by, the parish, county, city, and state bureaucracies of the 1840s and 1850s would find much to admire in the locals' achievements. Some of the most active men of the alluvial planting districts were lending their services, largely without pay, to improve, refine, and rationalize the levee and flood control systems. Even without the aid of Congress, they were quite capable of modernization and reform. One should not, therefore, dispense too much credit to the national government for the progress achieved in levee construction in the 1840s and 1850s. What did stimulate the progress of levee reforms? High cotton prices made cotton land valuable, and people longed to become swamp proprietors. Therefore, although the Swamp Land Acts were a turning point of sorts as an economic response, they hardly marked the outbreak of a technological, political, or bureaucratic levee revolution. Nor did they indicate in the slightest degree that the country as a whole was willing in 1849 and 1850 to pay for and build the levees.
Most policy-makers at the national level, members of Congress and their constituents, continued to believe that flood control was a local improvement and thoroughly unconstitutional as a work of the General Government. Why then did they approve the Swamp Land Acts? In large part, it was because voters made a clear distinction between the role of the General Government and the states. Everyone accepted the fact that state-sponsored improvements were not confined by the national Constitution. Unless state laws conflicted with federal law, states could do what they wanted in the promotion of public works. Therefore, if Congress simply transferred its title to the Mississippi River swamps to the states where the land lay, members of Congress would not have to continue to be criticized for doing nothing to improve the land. Whatever unholy use was made of the swamps after the construction of state levees, such as the growing of cotton with slave labor, would then only result in divine wrath being issued towards the people of Louisiana, Arkansas, and Mississippi, rather than on the virtuous masses elsewhere, who were merely spinning cotton with child labor and sewing it in sweatshops. This, after all, was the era of the great American Compromises, in which large-minded politicians tried to escape a sectional war by granting concessions to people they despised, so the unjust could experience eternal judgment on their own merits, in separate state jurisdictions. Thank God no swampland lay in a territory! Congress would have
experienced a quandry indeed, and Bleeding Kansas might have been Bleeding Swamp instead.

Thus, in 1849, the General Government finally agreed to honor the constant drumming of requests for grants of public land by passing a Swamp Land Act which (with various amendments) gave President Taylor's home state of Louisiana the right to sell unowned "swamp and overflowed" land for purposes of reclamation. Congress pure-mindedly stipulated that it would not accept one penny of the expense entailed by the grant. The state of Louisiana would have to pay the surveyors, land-agents, and other functionaries who readied it for the market. Proceeds would go to a special fund to build state levees with hired labor. These structures would not take the place of plantation levees supervised at the parish level. Nor would they obviate the state's ability to appropriate funds and execute improvements on its own. Instead, the grant was simply viewed as an aid to help to build supplementary structures to upgrade existing embankments or to furnish new ones at unusually troublesome places where private or local means had failed to provide protection. Repairs to the Grand Levee of Pointe Coupee ranked high on the list of priorities, but the money was mostly spent for drainage rather than levees. Since the state government directed the use of the fund, it soon became a public trough that every representative wanted to dine on. Much of the money was frittered away.14
Louisiana become the first recipient of Congressional largesse through a Swamp Land Act, but the reasons for this were based less on its needs than on political considerations. The grant to Louisiana came about partly because of its political connections to President Taylor; partly because of the zeal of its congressmen; partly because of the long-standing loyalty of sugar planters and New Orleans business men to the Whig Party; partly because Whiggish New England mill owners liked the quality of Mississippi River cotton; partly because a well-publicized crevasse flooded New Orleans in 1849 and furnished lurid illustrations for national journals; and partly because Louisiana had already done so much to supply works of flood control on its own. By 1850, parts of Louisiana had been leveed for 130 years, and the state contained perhaps 1,400 miles of levees on the Mississippi and other waterways. A Pennsylvania congressman who consulted U. S. Land Office Records reported that in the twenty years from 1829 to 1849, citizens of Louisiana had single-handedly reduced the amount of swampland in their state from 5.5 million to 2.5 million acres by means of levees and drainage projects. Their enterprise obviously merited a reward, and Congress approved the grant. Oddly, Louisiana eventually received 9.5 million acres of "swamp and overflowed" land through the Swamp Land Act. The classification of what was swamp and what was not had always been difficult, but apparently when the land was free it was easier to see floodwater.15
For all his merits, Zachary Taylor turned out to be a very annoying president where slaveowners were concerned. Many who voted for him in 1848 did so because they assumed he would favor the cause of the South in extending slavery and creating new slave-state senators. This turned out not to be the case. Though a Southerner by birth, as well as an absentee plantation owner, Taylor's mindset was "military nationalist," and he disdained to be the tool of any section. He also rejected the sectional expedient that would make the desert Southwest into slave states merely for purposes of political representation. In his way of thinking, the absence of cotton fields indicated a probable absence of slaves; therefore, those territories ought to be free states. Little did Taylor envision the marvels of irrigation which would someday turn California into the nation's largest cotton grower. No, he opposed the spread of slavery in western territories and became in practice, if not in conscience, a Free Soiler. Perhaps his administration's offer of internal plantation expansion into the arable swamps, rather than external expansion into new desert territories, was designed as a consolation prize to that section (the South) which was about to lose its parity in the Senate forever. At any rate, Taylor died on July 9, 1850, perhaps of poisoning, and his successor, Millard Fillmore, signed a second Swamp Land Act into law just eleven days after signing the Compromise of 1850.
Fillmore did not follow Taylor's confrontational methods in dealing with national crises over slavery. Though originally a farm boy from western New York and of New England parentage, Fillmore had no antipathy to Southern interests. He favored material improvement, economic alliances, and the exclusion of moral absolutes from politics as the best ways to secure peace. Fillmore was viewed, therefore, not as a "conscience" Whig, but as a "cotton" Whig and even a "doughface," aligned with northern industrial and commercial interests who owed much of their prosperity to the servicing of Southern clients and the processing of Southern staples. Hence, it was not strange for Fillmore to accept a conciliatory program toward other states of the Mississippi Valley when they wanted swamp grants like Louisiana's. But the second Swamp Land Act had a different character. People in Mississippi and Arkansas, much less those of Missouri and Illinois, had done nothing like the amount of levee work that people in Louisiana performed over the years. Many parts of their deltas were completely uninhabited, or harbored a population of non-levee-building squatters. If it had been up to the counties of those regions to furnish levees entirely from local resources, the riverfronts might be unleveed from that day to this. For them, the principal merit of the second Swamp Land Act was that reclamation could proceed independently of the local community.
Formerly, the steady accumulation of resident proprietors and plantation hands, moving to floodplains in response to markets, had been a prerequisite for the expansion of levees. When agricultural profits fell, the demand for new swampland also abated. Supply and demand thus regulated the amount of land that would be brought into cultivation, and prudent speculators declined to levee their unneeded vacant lands unless required to. Now, with the passage of the second Swamp Land Act, a Congressional grant was helping to subsidize levee construction whether there were local resources or not, whether there was even a need for more cotton or not. Arkansas, where President Polk's family was planting, as well as the Johnson Family, got a great deal of swampland. Missouri and Illinois were rewarded for their loyalty to the new nationalism. And Mississippi, with perhaps the largest Delta and most strident expansionist views, received less land because of its pariah status among the national compromisers.

Nevertheless, in whatsoever state they lay, swampland speculators rejoiced at the government's new bounty. What could be better than buying unimproved swampland and having the state reclaim it for them through public levees? The passage of the new law prompted a land boom on the Middle Mississippi. Signed into effect on September 28, 1850, the second Swamp Land Act eventually bestowed 7.7 million acres of "swamp and overflowed" land on Arkansas, 3.3 million acres on Mississippi, 3.4 million acres on Missouri, and
1.5 million acres on Illinois. Each could liquidate the swampland by selling it, then apply the proceeds to levee or drainage projects for uninhabited, poor, or thinly populated areas that did not have the means to build them on their own. If one wants to think of Swamp Land Acts as a turning point in flood control history, this aspect of the legislation did represent a break with the past. Land development through national largesse allowed for one step in the reclamation process to be skipped—that of dense settlement by planters prior to the erection of levees. Now, with state funds from sales of public land, a governor or legislature could hire an engineer to contract with a levee contractor to take an itinerant crew of non-resident immigrants to quickly raise continuous levees on uninhabited land. Which land would be targeted? That might depend on who had bought it, for it was hoped that soon after the construction of levees it would be resold to actual settlers for an immense profit. More than anything else, the Swamp Land Acts (particularly the second one) were about land speculation at the government's expense. With steady high cotton prices in the 1850s, no bull market on Wall Street ever dreamed of more instantaneous riches than some swampland speculators imagined in connection with state-sponsored levee building.\textsuperscript{16}

In a limited but real sense, there had been a shift in thinking, because the Swamp Land Acts of 1849 and 1850 marked an extension of the levee building community away
from locality, to the state and even to the nation as a whole. From that point on, the levee building community gradually expanded beyond the immediate riverfront to include all those who contributed to the reclamation of the floodplain, and even to those who merely elected the politicians who made grants of public land to the states. Later, in modern times since 1879, and especially since 1928, the task of levee building has become almost completely national. Emancipation and the ruin of Southern plantation incomes during and after the Civil War destroyed the profitability which had justified the investment of private funds in levee building. Then, after sensational postbellum floods struck the helpless remnant of the old plantation-based, levee-building community, the nation as a whole decided, through Congressional representatives, that flood control on the Mississippi was a matter of national importance, after all. In answer to mass-media coverage of disasters, along with pleadings and lobbyings (many from railroad and timber companies, insurance companies, and banks which held worthless mortgages), Congress assigned the national army to take charge of the levees, and it paid for the work through national revenues. Key turning points in the assumption of national responsibility were the founding of the Mississippi River Commission in 1879, the Ransdell-Humphreys Flood Act of 1917, and the Flood Act of 1928. Each brought a larger increment of federal involvement and diminished the role of the riparians.
themselves in their own protection. As a result, levees are now a work for professionalism incarnate, and the "levee building community" seems to be both everyone and no one. Few people other than paid employees of government agencies now care about levees or feel responsible for their maintenance. Local levee boards own rights-of-way to lands on which the levees sit, but have no duty to build the earthworks. The present levee line is simply a part of the national infrastructure that national taxes support, like the interstate highways and the postal service. Only in special crises like the flood of 1993 do people stop to contemplate the absolute value of the protection that levees afford.

Even now, with all the changes on the riverside since the founding of New Orleans and the initial development of the plantations, levees on the Mississippi are still about property and improvement, still about land development and reclamation. Even more importantly, levees are still about community; but the "community" is so different now than what it was at the time of their origins as to be almost unrecognizable. Since the passage of the Swamp Land Acts and the demise of purely local levee systems, the levee-building community not only expanded in number and extent, it expanded politically, socially, and demographically as well. It now even includes descendants of the hunters and the ex-slaves when they pay their United States taxes. Planters and imperialists have vanished from the modern
riverside, but their legacy as land developers remains.

Without the land, there would be no levees. Without the levees, there would be "no land." Without courageous entrepreneurs and workers, there would be neither one.

ENDNOTES


2Baton Rouge Gazette, 11 May 1844, 18 May 1844, 25 May 1844, 1 June 1844, 8 June 1844, 15 June 1844, 22 June 1844, 29 June 1844, 6 July 1844, 13 July 1844. An alarming crevasse occurred in West Baton Rouge Parish about the 10th of June, when the levee at the plantation of Hereford and Dupuy caved in. After about four days' labor, workers closed the worst of the break. The Gazette reported that 300 hands were building a new levee to take the other's place. Several adjacent plantations flooded.


4Baton Rouge Gazette, 10 Feb. 1844.

5Herbert Wender, Southern Commercial Conventions, 1837-1859 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1930), 49-55.

6Ibid., 50-51, 60.

7Wender, 56-64. For an enthusiastic recollection of the glories of the Memphis Convention, and a tender tribute to Calhoun, by a youth who met him as a delegate from Grand Gulf, Mississippi, see Horace Smith Fulkerson, Random Recollections of Early Days in Mississippi (Vicksburg: Vicksburg Printing and Publishing, 1885; Baton Rouge: Otto Claitor, 1937), 59-65. For the idea that Calhoun was using the Convention as a platform for his presidential ambitions, see Gerald M. Capers, John C. Calhoun: Opportunist (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1960), 225-31.

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9Wender, 64-66.

10Ibid., 65-68; Acts, Memorials and Resolutions Passed at the Fifth Session of the General Assembly of the State of Arkansas (Little Rock: Borland & Farley, 1845), 151-57; Laws of the State of Mississippi, Passed at a Regular Biennial Session of the Legislature (Jackson: C. M. Price & G. R. Fall, 1846), 572-73, 575-77.


13Ibid., 68-103.

14The definitive study of Louisiana's administration of the first Swamp Land Act is Robert W. Harrison, Swampland Reclamation in Louisiana, 1849-1879 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University and Bureau of Agricultural Economics, 1951).

15Harrison, Alluvial Empire, 69-70.

16Ibid., 68-85. For workings of the second Swamp Land Act, consult contemporary newspapers and official papers of the states, but especially works of Robert W. Harrison, who has written exhaustively on the topic in: Alluvial Empire; "Land Reclamation in Arkansas under the Swamp Land Grant of 1850," Arkansas Historical Quarterly 6 (Winter 1947): 369-418; Levee Districts and Levee Building in Mississippi: A Study of State and Local Efforts to Control Mississippi River Floods (Stoneville, Miss.: Delta Council and Mississippi Agricultural Experiment Station, 1951); and Swampland Reclamation in Louisiana, 1849-1879. For another slice of the riverfront, see Margaret B. Bogue, "The Swamp Land Act and Wet Land Utilization in Illinois, 1850-1890," Agricultural History 25 (1951): 169-80.
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**THESSES AND DISSERTATIONS**


VITA

Jeffrey Alan Owens was born in Sulphur Springs, Texas, on July 20, 1960, and resides in Longview, Texas. He received a bachelor of fine arts degree in interior design from North Texas State University in 1983 and a master of arts degree in history from the University of Texas at Tyler in 1990. From 1990 to 1999, he studied at Louisiana State University, where he expects to receive the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in May of 1999. His major field is American History, with a specialization in the nineteenth-century United States. From 1990 to 1994, Owens worked at Louisiana State University as a teaching assistant. He obtained the Graduate School Dissertation Fellowship in 1994. From 1995 to 1996, he taught Louisiana History and United States History at Louisiana State University. His publications have appeared in Louisiana History, Agricultural History, and the Georgia Historical Quarterly. One article will be reprinted in The Louisiana Purchase Bicentennial Series in Louisiana History. Owens has presented papers to the Society for Historians of the Early American Republic, Historic Natchez Conference, Louisiana Historical Association, Arkansas Historical Association, and East Texas Historical Association.
DOCTORAL EXAMINATION AND DISSERTATION REPORT

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Major Field: History

Title of Dissertation: Holding Back the Waters: Land Development and the Origins of Levees on the Mississippi, 1720-1845

Approved:

Paul F. Parkett
Major Professor and Chairman

Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

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Date of Examination:

March 18, 1999