



The Journal of Central Louisiana History and Preservation

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION OF CENTRAL LOUISIANA

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Queries from our readers

From Ellen Dauzat: I have a 3-page Will written in French for which I need a translation. Can you assist?
A translation was prepared by Paul Price. The Will, written in lovely and legible manuscript, was dictated in 1832 by a free man of color (FMC) named James Rapplye to a West Baton Rouge Parish Judge and three witnesses. Rapplye owned slaves, and part of the will dealt with his instructions to the Executor of his Estate as to the disposition of his slaves. For interested readers, we have placed the original French document and the translation on our HA CL website under our Publication section. A short descriptive article appears at the bottom of page 5.

From Dr. Haywood Joiner: *Do you know of any histories of the Town of Boyce and the plantations formerly surrounding it?*
Local historian and author Dr. Patsy K.

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Barber published *Above the Falls and Historic Cotile* in 1994 through Bayou Boeuf Publishing of Lecompte, LA which contains over 500 pages of histories and sketches of persons and plantations in that area.



Lecompte High School Historical Marker
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(Old) Lecompte High School, A Leader In Historic Preservation

By Michael Wynne, reprinted from Cenla Focus Magazine April 2017

If you have never visited the Old Lecompte High School and toured their museum rooms, you have certainly missed a real treat. What the good people of Lecompte have done with their old high school should become a blueprint for all those individuals around the state to do with their own obsolete school buildings.

Let's start from the beginning. In 1924, the Rapides School Board built the Lecompte High School, located at 2204 St. Charles Avenue. This massive three story building, a traditionally-styled school building for its time, was built to replace the ancient small two story frame "Coliseum High School" that was located only a block away from the new high school. Although called a "high school" the new school actually housed grades 1-12 and was known as a "consolidated" school. It was consolidated as the school took in students from as far away as Turkey Creek.

It was then the only high school in all of southern Rapides Parish. On the day the new school opened in 1924, the students simply packed up their books and supplies and walked to the new towering school building to begin their learning there.

This high school served the families of southern Rapides parish well until May of 1966 when the new Rapides High School opened (now celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2017). The old Lecompte High School (LHS) building continued to serve as an elementary school till 1974 when it finally closed its doors for good. The elementary school students were transferred to the (then) newly expanded and remodeled Carter C. Raymond School. The old high school buildings' future was in doubt then as many similar buildings around the state, like the old high school building in Boyce, were torn down, often to

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sadly make way for parking lots. But the LHS building survived for a few years longer by it being used as a fire and military exercise training center. But between the deterioration of the building due to its' training usage and the rampant vandalism of this then vacant building, it was finally decided by the school board to demolish the community's old beloved edifice.

But the compassionate people of Lecompte wanted a different future for their hallowed old building. In 1980, the Lecompte people formed the "*Save The School*" Foundation. Some of the early courageous leaders of this "*Save The School*" group were Pattie and Lloyd Killen, Evelyn Carnal, Dr. Patsy Barber, Lecompte Mayor Sherman Roberts, and Ronald Roberts. These and other residents of Lecompte met with the school board and contracted to purchase the school and the land that it sat on for \$1. But that was only the beginning of the work and planning. The old neglected building needed a new roof, an elevator, new glass for the windows, restoration of the auditorium, updated restrooms, new paint, and so much more. The monumental expense fell on the Foundation, but the people of Lecompte banded together and made the impossible become the possible and the building was saved and restored.

Initially, there was much talk about what to do with this giant building. One thought was to make the building into federally subsidized senior housing. But eventually, it was decided to use the building for multiple purposes. Those purposes included serving

as the Georgie Johnson Branch Parish Library (with support from Ann Johnson), a senior center, a boys and girls recreation program, a counseling program for children and adults, as well as a grand museum for the historic city of Lecompte.

HACL is holding its Annual Meeting at Lecompte High School on Sunday, June 6th

The board members of the Foundation (including Pat Boone, Doris Brown, Mayor Baxter, Melford Jones, Robert Jones, Ron Schneider, Evelyn Soderman, and Pauline Humphries) created an outstanding "little" museum that celebrates not only the history of the old high school and of the city of Lecompte, but of the people of south Rapides parish, especially the veterans and the farmers. The museum is available for tours, but be sure to allow several hours for the tour. There is something to learn and to enjoy for everyone in their museum.

The people of Lecompte have a lot to be proud of: their history, their people, and for preserving and finding new uses for their old high school building. Their "*Save The School*" Foundation can show anyone that preservation is always possible to do, even at great cost. But the Foundation still needs all of our help to keep going. They ask for financial donations to continue to maintain this massive complex. And they ask for more artifacts to preserve our history. The Foundation can be reached on FACEBOOK (L.H.S. Corporation) as well as by telephone (318-776-9520) or by mail (P. O. Box 236, Lecompte, 71346).



Sid and John McDaniel in front of their home on Barrister Street home in Alexandria

John and Sid McDaniel, Preservationists

By Michael Wynne, reprinted from Cenla Focus Magazine April 2017

John and Sid (short for "Sidonie") **McDaniel** of Alexandria are truly fascinating people in many regards. There is too much to tell about them in this short column, so I will highlight what I have learned from them about historic building preservation, that is, that ANYONE can become a successful building preservationist!

John was raised in Shreveport. He met Sid while both were attending L.S.U. Sid was raised in Baton Rouge, but is now actually a fourth generation Alexandrian. Her great-grandmother, grandmother, and mother all lived at one time or another in the house at 1244 Barrister Street, often known as the Scott-Thomas house, where John & Sid live today. John's work in the Office of Mental Health brought him to Alexandria in 1977

where he eventually became the District Director for an eight parish area.

Sid always loved old homes. In their first home together located on Thornton Court, they decided that they wanted to make the tattered home relivable again, but try to still maintain the character of its original construction. They felt that the "bones" (woodwork) of the house were not only still good, but were beautifully well-constructed. John had gained a lot of self-taught construction skills from his youth and his handy man skills added greatly in the homes' successful renovation. John and Sid's skills were really put to the test on restoring and renovating the large old family home on Barrister Street, the

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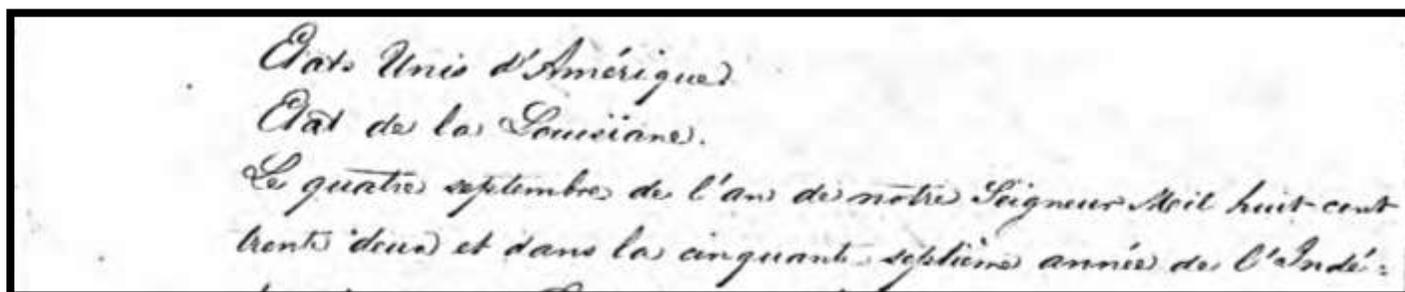
first house built in that neighborhood. The house had been the scene of 80 years of Easter egg hunts and numerous family reunions. Sid's contribution to the restoration work was providing the vision of what the restoration should turn out to look like. One of the main differences with old houses versus new houses is that the walls in the former are solid wood and the later are floated sheetrock. Kitchens and storage areas in these older homes were always too small in contrast to today's standards. The McDaniels decided then that they wanted to accentuate this worn old home by brightening it up, renovating the kitchen to serve modern usage, yet still retain its century old charm, and turn part of the attic into bedrooms for the visiting children.

When I recently toured this century-old Alexandria treasure, the home retained every bit of its history and charm, yet it was furnished with all of the modern needs of entertaining and convenience.

I was personally amazed at the unique kitchen adaptations that incorporated all

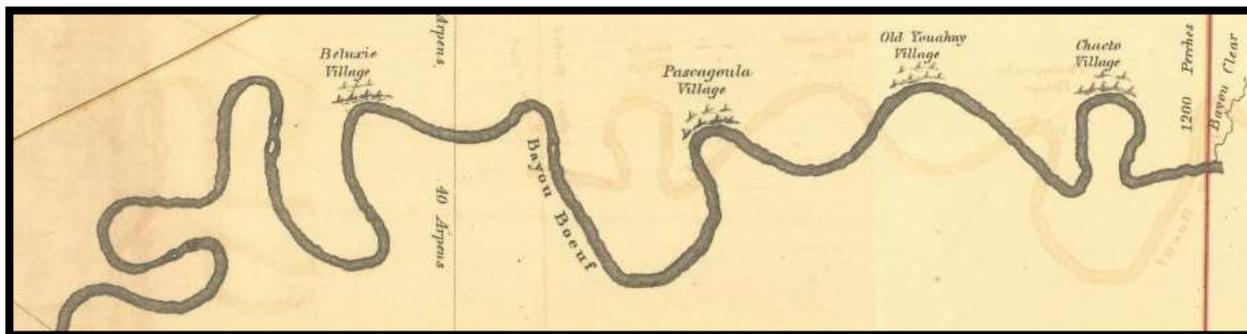
that was needed for even a small restaurant, but was still very "homey" and attractive. Sid said of the goal of the renovations of the house, "It is all about family". This theme can be the theme of any home restoration, including your own.

During both of the home restorations, as well as of a craftsman-style house that they had bought on Barrister Street and restored and now use as a rent house, John and Sid said they greatly benefited from the valuable restoration tax credits. They used commercial (for the rent house) and residential (for their own home) preservation tax credits which require that the house had to be 50 years old or older and located in a historic district, like the Garden District. "It made the restoration cost so much more bearable", John said. "We feel very passionate about preservation. There are still so many homes in Alexandria that can and need to be saved." The McDaniels are great role models for what can be done for historic home renovation at a reasonable cost.



Sharp-eyed readers will notice that the above heading and sentence fragment is a French language document written in very legible handwriting. It is part of a two and one-half page Will dictated in the year 1832 by a free man of color (FMC) to the West

Baton Rouge Parish Judge and three witnesses. View the original pages in French, the English translation and the story of Ellen Dauzat's query on the HACL Website Publications page: <https://www.thehacl.org/publications>



From *“A Plan of a Tract of Land on Bayou Boeuf”* surveyed by Samuel Levi Wells II in 1803

How the Indians Lost Their Lands

By Paul Price

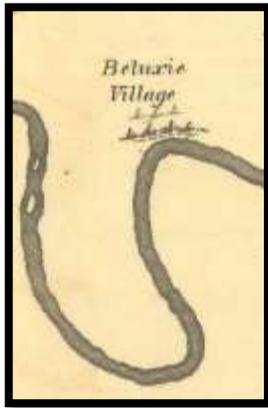
There is a persistent legend in central Louisiana related to Alexander Fulton, the founder of the Town of Alexandria and how he “cheated” the local Indians by forcing them to sell their lands to him. Here is what actually happened.

William Miller and Alexander Fulton were among many small grain farm owners living in southwestern Pennsylvania in the early 1790s. Meanwhile, the fledgling United States had amassed huge debts in its fight for independence, and President George Washington’s newly-appointed Secretary of the Treasury, Alexander Hamilton was determined to pay off those debts. When Congress passed a tax on whiskey production, however, some whiskey still-owning farmers refused to pay. The small farmers in four counties of southwestern Pennsylvania began organizing a Whiskey Rebellion; some federal tax collectors were harassed and became targets of violence. The new federal government issued arrest warrants for the ringleaders, citing treason.

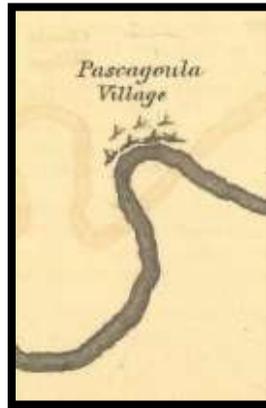
When Miller and Fulton learned they were sought for treason, a crime punishable by hanging, they both immediately fled Pennsylvania and traveled south to the Spanish-owned Territory of Orleans.

The fleeing pair also had experience in merchandising, so after their escape to the south, they eventually formed a partnership as traders at the rapids on Red River. With their experience in distilling, they perceived a ready market among the native Indian tribes for intoxicating liquor, which they produced in the form of a cheaply-made variety of rum. In general, at that time and place there was a scarcity of coins and currency, so transactions frequently were made with exchanges of goods; in the case of the Indians, their deer hides and bear oil were the chief goods of interest.

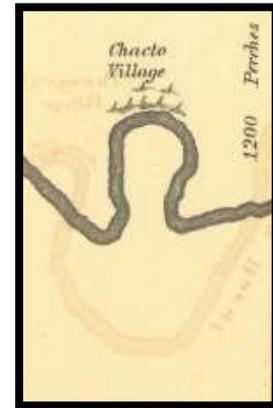
The above drawing is from a survey of lands along Bayou Boeuf prepared and signed by Samuel Levi Wells II, who was engaged for that purpose by Miller and Fulton. The drawing notes the location of four Indian villages along the bayou, from left to right: Beluxie Village, Pascagoula Village, Old Youahny Village, and Chacto Village. During the period from the 1760s until the early 1800s, these were the places occupied by those tribal groups with the exception of the Youahny people. This writer has been unable to find any mention of the Youahny people in the historical record. **(continued on page 7)**



Beluxie Village



Pascagoula Village



Chacto Village

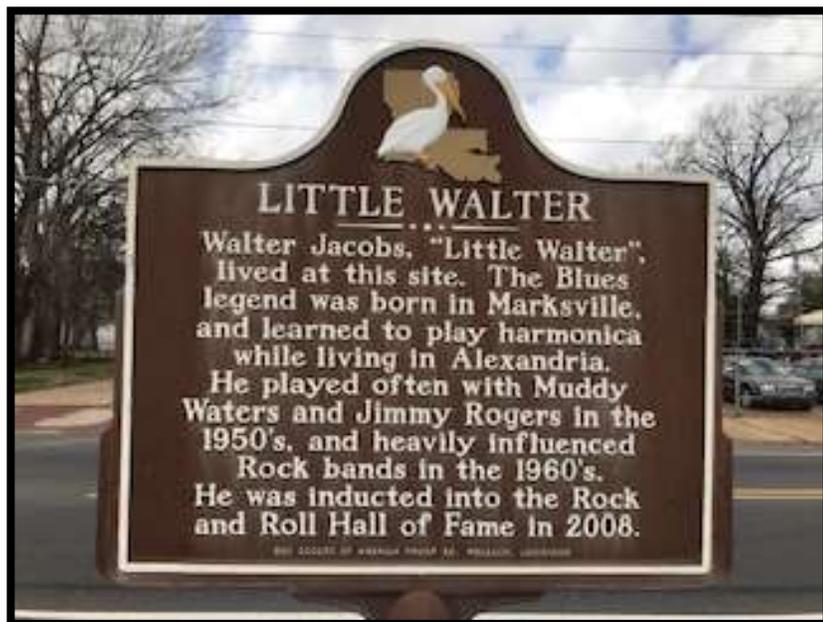
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The Beluxie (Biloxi), Pascagoula and Chacto (Choctaw) tribes apparently had an extensive trading relationship with the Miller and Fulton trading partnership, so much so that they were extended credit whenever they received goods for which they had no sufficient valuables to offer in exchange. Careful records of those credit transactions were kept by the trading firm. At the same time it would be fair to say that the Indians lacked a full understanding of commerce with the white settlers, and for that reason, the Spanish government imposed very strict requirements to be followed whenever Indian groups proposed to convey their lands to white settlers.

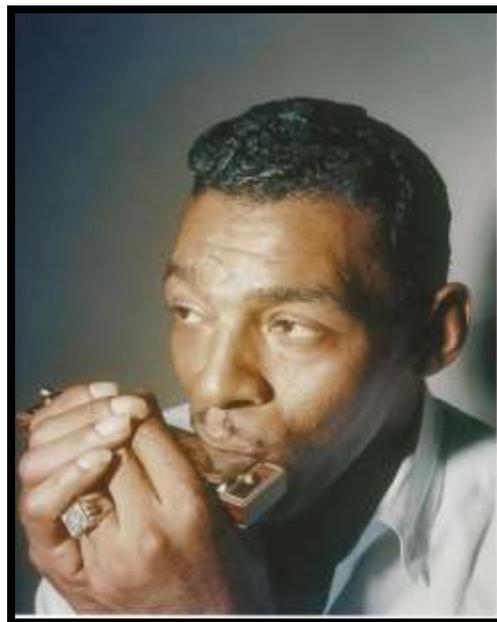
Over time, the three Indian tribes living along Bayou Boeuf had collectively amassed such sizeable debts from those credit transactions with Miller and Fulton, that the proprietors suggested that the Indians could extinguish their debts if they were willing to offer their land along Bayou Boeuf in exchange. It is likely with deep regret and reluctance that the tribal leaders finally agreed to the exchange. But by the end of 1812, following all the requirements of the Spanish government, including the

written deposition and confirmation of the local Indian agent, Valentin Layssard, the conveyance of the Indian lands was approved. For many years following, the Indians lamented their decision and complained bitterly, but the documentation was very clear and complete, and to most, the issue became a settled matter.

However, as to the land surveyor, Samuel Levi Wells II, there is actually more to this story. On January 25, 1805, Miller and Fulton formally agreed to Wells' application "to become interested in the above named (Indian) lands as a partner jointly with said Miller and Fulton for a certain proportion of the said land." Their signed agreement provided for Wells to receive an undivided five-ninths of the property, the entirety of which comprised 1,730 acres. Wells managed to raise a large family, including four sons, each of which also made a name for themselves: (1) **Samuel Levi Wells III**, a principal in the infamous Sandbar Duel, (2) **Montfort Wells**, co-owner of the famous racehorse *Lecomte*, (3) **Thomas Jefferson Wells**, breeder and co-owner of the racehorse *Lecomte*, and (4) **James Madison Wells** who became Governor of Louisiana.



Little Walter Historical Marker on Lee Street



Little Walter

Little Walter

By Michael Wvne and Paul Price

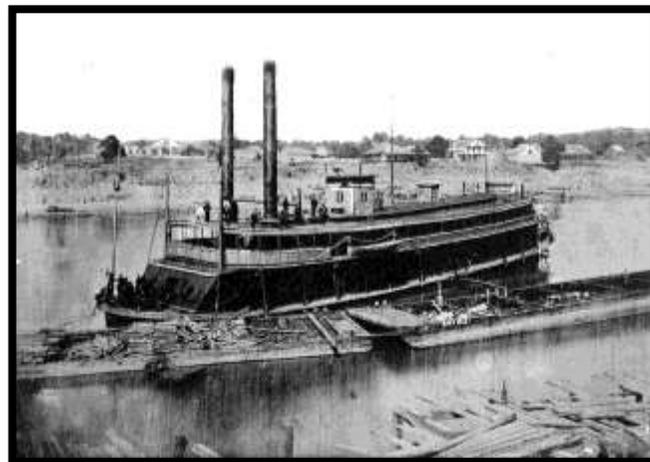
Marion Walter Jacobs was born into meager circumstances in Marksville, Louisiana around 1926. His parents were both African American: his father was Adam Jacobs (1896-1941) and his mother was Beatrice Leveige (1902-1950). As a youngster, he spent considerable time on the small farm of his maternal grandparents, Louis and Cornelia Tassin Leveige. But while school held little interest for him, a chance childhood Christmas gift would change his life forever: an inexpensive harmonica from the Sears & Roebuck catalogue. Many children have owned harmonicas, but Walter was fascinated with the instrument, and he developed his blues harp technique by listening to musicians on the radio. He also had distant family members in Alexandria and would often travel between the two cities on a borrowed bicycle.

Around 1943, he left home and began

traveling, working at odd jobs and playing with other musicians whenever he got the chance. Inevitably he made his way to Chicago, which had become home to many African American musicians from the South, including Muddy Waters. Walter joined Waters' band and was a regular performer with them from 1948 to 1952. During this time he adopted the moniker *Little Walter*, possibly due to his exceptionally thin waist size. When his instrumental "Juke" became a No. 1 hit on Billboard Magazine's R&B charts, Walter formed his own band. In 1955, he recorded another No. 1 hit with his song entitled "My Babe." Unfortunately he had become an alcoholic and had a very short temper. During a fight which erupted outside a Chicago nightclub, Walter sustained injuries which led to his death on February 15, 1968. He was later buried in St. Mary's Cemetery in Evergreen Park, IL just outside Chicago.



U.S. Navy vessels stranded above the rapids in Alexandria, April 1864



USS Forest Rose assisting construction of Bailey's Dam, May 1864

Bailey's Dam and the Great Fire of 1864

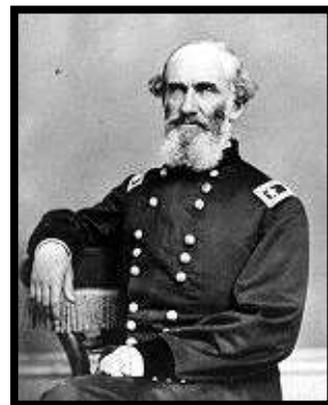
By Michael Wynne and Paul Price

One hundred fifty-seven years ago this month, the U.S. federal government sent its army and navy into central Louisiana to carry out their ill-fated *Red River Campaign*. When they left the area, the entire countryside was in ruins and the Town of Alexandria was set afire. This is how it happened.

When President Lincoln's General-in-Chief Henry W. Halleck ordered U. S. Maj. Gen. N. P. Banks to commence the *Red River Campaign* against northwest Louisiana in the spring of 1864, he had high hopes that Banks would achieve his objectives, and would thereby halt the conduit of essential supplies to the Confederates through Texas. Instead, the operation turned out to be, in the words of U.S. Brig. Gen. W. T. Sherman, "one damn blunder from beginning to end." General Banks' army was assisted in this massive campaign by Rear Adm. David D. Porter, commanding the U.S. Navy's Mississippi Squadron from Vicksburg, including 10 heavily armed gunboats.

After the Union army's disastrous defeats at Mansfield on April 8th and at Pleasant Hill April 9th, it fled toward Natchitoches and thence toward Alexandria.

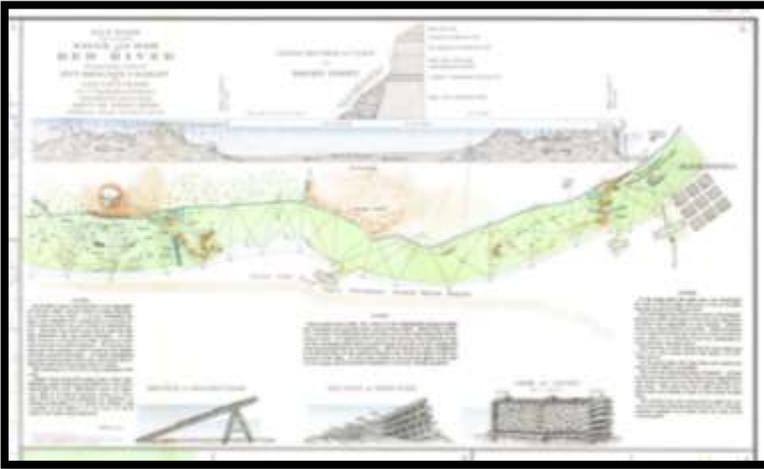
U.S. Brig. Gen. A.J. Smith was furious at the outcome and blamed Banks, the commanding officer. Smith went privately to Maj. Gen. William B. Franklin and proposed that they arrest Banks and



Brig. Gen. A. J. Smith

have him court-martialed. Franklin immediately rebuffed Smith by telling him "that's mutiny." Since mutiny was a hanging offence, Smith desisted, but was not content to keep silent about his discontent. His views trickled down to his staff, and Smith's men burned everything in sight as they retreated, all the while trying to avoid Confederate attacks.

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Bailey's Engineer drawings of the two dams constructed on Red River in April-May 1864



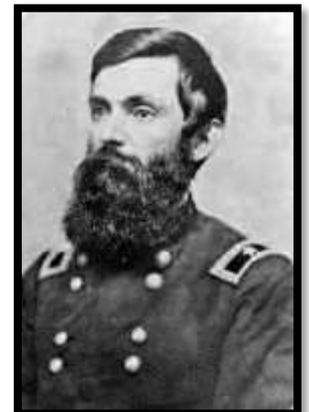
Remnants of Bailey's lower dam photographed in September 1984

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Meanwhile Porter's vessels began moving downstream from Grand Ecore, facing an unpredictable enemy: the Red River. Water levels in the river were steadily dropping, and the dangers from hidden sandbars and submerged tree stumps constantly hampered their progress.

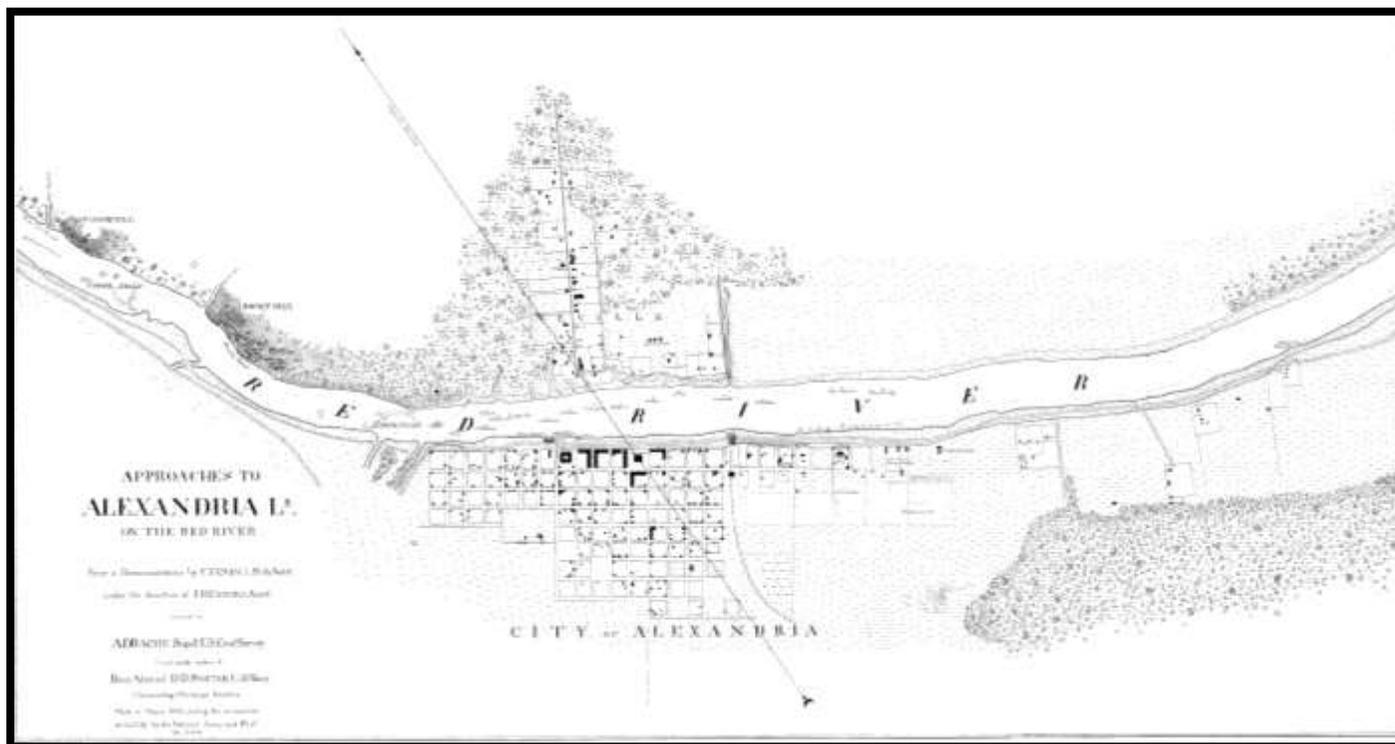
After finally reaching Alexandria on April 29th, Porter discovered that water levels at the two sets of falls or rapids there were not sufficient for his heaviest and most powerful boats to cross: his huge gunboats were stranded above the falls. Porter faced the most perplexing decision of his career. Unless the river rose, he would have no choice but to order the destruction of the gunboats to keep them from the Confederates. The scale of this debacle would certainly ruin his future with the U.S. Navy. But by a miraculous coincidence, the army's 4th Wisconsin Cavalry commander was Lt. Col. Joseph Bailey who had considerable experience both as a civil engineer and as a principal in

the Wisconsin logging industry before joining the army. Bailey proposed a series of dams at both falls to raise the river water levels upstream to allow the gunboats to pass downriver. At first, his idea was considered farfetched, but with Porter's insistence, work on the dams soon began in earnest. The army was pressed into service to cut timber and to demolish wooden and brick buildings in the area. Then they brought everything to the river's edge where the materials were placed on barges and moved into place as Bailey directed. On May 10th, all of the stranded vessels managed to slip through the rapids, finally free to return to Vicksburg. Suddenly, it was time to muster the army and load the transport boats to leave Alexandria.



Lt. Col Joseph Bailey

(continued on page 11)



***Approaches to Alexandria, LA* drawn in April 1864 at the direction of Rear Adm. David D. Porter**

(continued from page 10)

While extraordinary efforts were exerted by some of the army to construct Bailey's dams, the rest of the army was idle. Each day the idle ones grew more and more frustrated by the delays and by what they considered poor



Rear Adm. David D. Porter

leadership. As they began to leave the area, they spoke openly of their plans to burn Alexandria. Disturbed citizens reported to General Banks what the soldiers were saying, but he assured them that he would leave a protective force behind to

make certain that his orders *not* to burn the town were followed.

Banks' orders were ignored, assuming they were ever actually issued, and on the morning of Friday, May 13, 1864 as the last Union troops left Alexandria, uniformed soldiers carried turpentine and burning torches to all parts of the town, setting the wooden buildings ablaze. The most flagrant of these evil acts was that which befell the Rapides Courthouse which sat in the middle of an entire square, separated by a wide grassy lawn from buildings nearby. Uniformed Federal soldiers carried burning torches into the courthouse interior and set fire to it. The courthouse building and every record within it were destroyed.

After the war ended, Louisiana Governor Henry W. Allen compiled sworn statements and published them in a document entitled,

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Official Report Relative to the Conduct of Federal Troops in Western Louisiana During the Invasions of 1863 and 1864. A short excerpt from the section dealing with the burning of Alexandria reads "J. Madison Wells, the Lieutenant Governor of Louisiana, elected with (Michael) Hahn, by General Black's orders was not spared. He had been a Union man from the beginning. He had a splendid residence in Alexandria, well and richly furnished, at which his own and his son's family resided. His son (Thomas M. Wells) was absent in New Orleans, attending the Constitutional Convention, of which he was a member, and in which he voted for abolition and all the ultra measures. But that did not secure his family the protection of the Government. All was burned. Thousands of people, men, women and children, were, in a few short hours, driven from comfortable homes into the street. Their shelter, their provisions, their beds, were all consumed. In their extremity, which our own culpability had brought about, the Commanding General (Banks) turned his back upon them. The General, perhaps, did not laugh at their calamity, nor mock when their fear came, but doubtless regarded it as the dawn of a political millennium. The march of the army from Alexandria to Fort De Russy was lighted up with the flames of burning dwellings. Thus has General Banks become the "Liberator of Louisiana."

Meanwhile the U.S. Congress convened a joint investigation of the conduct of the war. One of the subjects of their investigation was the Red River Campaign,

and Maj. Gen. N. P. Banks was called to testify. No one asked Banks a direct question concerning the burning of Alexandria, but he volunteered his personal version of the events during his testimony,



Maj. Gen. N. P. Banks

a version which did not comport well with all the known facts. Congress issued its findings in a series of documents called Report of the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War. Banks was not disciplined for his failures, so after the calamity of the Red River Campaign, he returned to politics in his native Massachusetts where he ran for a congressional seat. He served from 1865-1879 as a member of Congress, then afterwards he was appointed as a United States marshal for Massachusetts by President Rutherford B. Hayes. In 1888 his health began to fail, and he died in 1894.

ATTENTION READERS

Please consider becoming a member of the
Historical Association of Central Louisiana.

The Historical Association of Central Louisiana is a partnership of members who share a common interest in preserving our local history for future generations.

Mission: HACL strives to advance the preservation, appreciation, and understanding of things of historical value in the central Louisiana community.

Visit our website for details on becoming a member:
theHACL.org

Sources:

- Undated photograph at top of page 1 shows the Old Alexandria City Hall and the Hotel Bentley
1. **(Old) Lecompte High School** – Interview of Michael Wynne with Ron Schneider 2017
 2. **John and Sid McDaniel** - Interview of Michael Wynne with John and Sid McDaniel 2017
 3. **How The Indians Lost Their Lands** – American State Papers, Public Lands, Volume II, pp.655-661
 4. **Little Walter** – *Blues With A Feeling*, by Tony Glover, Scott Dirks and Ward Gaines, published June 28, 2002 by Routledge
 5. **Bailey's Dam and the Great Fire of 1864** – *One Damn Blunder From Beginning To End* by Gary D. Joiner, published 2003 by Scholarly Resources, Inc.

The Red River Campaign and Its Toll, by Henry O. Robertson, published 2016 by McFarland and Company, Inc.

Atlas to Accompany the Official Records of the War of the Rebellion, Plate No. 53