

LUMBERING AND WESTERN LOUISIANA CULTURAL LANDSCAPES

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THE multiple origins of cultural forms and patterns seen in Louisiana landscapes are well known and have been mentioned in earlier studies.¹ Lands adjacent to the lower Mississippi and neighboring streams have long been areas of convergence for cultural invasions. The introduction of new traits has continued, in some cases on a large scale, into the twentieth century.

Examination of western Louisiana cultural landscapes indicates that the single most important developmental agency has been the lumber industry. The massive and overwhelming march of the mills into the district introduced forms and patterns which are both notably persistent and widely distributed. The pre-existing cultural base could not absorb them and subsequent change has failed to obscure them. Although the significance of lumbering in Louisiana geography has long been recognized, no systematic attempt to measure its full contribution has yet been made. The passage of time renders this work more difficult. The number of people with personal experience of the industry in its most active stages decreases and the original forms and patterns become more indistinct or disappear.

This paper summarizes the results of an inquiry into the nature of landscape elements introduced into western Louisiana by lumbering during its most intensive phase. The area covered is the longleaf pine forest² (Fig. 1), sometimes called the Calcasieu Pine District.³ Variations in climate and geology occur in this region, but in its original state it presented within its bounds a constant element, the long-

leaf forest. All establishments fixed here by the lumber industry had a single purpose: the processing of longleaf pine.

Sawmill towns were centers of concentration for landscape elements associated with lumbering, and twenty of them were studied in detail. Although most of the towns have disappeared, their former residents who still live in western Louisiana in considerable numbers proved to be interested, cooperative and accurate informants. Field trips to abandoned town sites revealed in almost every case much evidence of former occupation: mill foundations, ponds, overgrown streets, and like features. Aerial photographs yielded much information and were used extensively in the preparation of maps and in conversations with informants.⁴

HISTORY OF THE INDUSTRY

The historic record of lumbering in western Louisiana comprises three principal phases: a long early period of slow development along waterways; a shorter second period of intensive activity as the railroads were built into the forests; and a third phase, the present, in which operations are geared to reduced timber stands, small mills, and motor transport.

Forest products were exported from Louisiana as early as 1726,⁵ and a large local demand led to cutting on an extensive scale. Initial industrial development occurred along the main streams, which served to supply the mills and move their products. Lake Charles became a notable sawmilling center,⁶ and great quanti-

¹ F. B. Kniffen, "Louisiana House Types," *Annals, Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 26 (1936), pp. 179-93. Also noted by J. S. Kyser in "Terrebonne Parish, Louisiana: A Subdelta of the Mississippi," *Annals, Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 41 (1951), p. 169.

² C. A. Brown, *Louisiana Trees and Shrubs* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana Forestry Commission, 1945), p. 6. The western district is one of three original longleaf forests shown by Brown. A second lay between the Red and Ouachita rivers and a third occupied part of the Florida Parishes.

³ G. B. Hartman, "The Calcasieu Pine District of Louisiana," *Ames Forester*, Vol. 10 (1922), pp. 63-73.

⁴ G. A. Stokes, "An Application of Aerial Photographs to Field Research in Cultural Geography," *Photogrammetric Engineering*, Vol. 20 (1954), pp. 802-4.

⁵ W. A. Roberts, *Lake Pontchartrain* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1946), p. 51.

⁶ S. H. Lockett, *Louisiana As It Is* (Louisiana State University: unpublished manuscript, 1873), p. 140. Lockett goes on to say: "All around Lake Charles and for several miles up both branches of the Calcasieu the sawmills are so thickly located as to give the whole country the appearance of an immense lumber yard. There are seventeen steam sawmills within a space of ten miles in diameter. These saw and ship millions of feet of the best of pine, red and white cypress lumber yearly, giving constant employment to over sixty sailing vessels. This lumber trade is at present the principal source of wealth of the parish . . ."