

1 200 YEARS OF PROGRESS

2 IN THE LOUISIANA SUGAR INDUSTRY:

3 A BRIEF HISTORY

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6 The Louisiana territory, named for Louis the XIV, king of France, was claimed by de La Salle in
7 1682. Although sugarcane originated in New Guinea, Louisiana has long been known for its
8 importance in the world's sugar industry. Columbus, in his second voyage to the New World in 1493
9 carried sugarcane from the Canary Islands to Santo Domingo.

10 Sugarcane may have been first planted in Louisiana during the late 1600s by Iberville, the "Founder
11 of Louisiana." However, there are no records of successful cane production until 1751 when Jesuit
12 missionaries carried sugarcane plants, with help from experienced field workers, to what is now
13 downtown New Orleans where the Jesuit Church stands on Baronne Street. The cane, "Creole," was
14 sweet and excellent for chewing. However, it was very susceptible to the frosts that occurred in the
15 less than tropical area of New Orleans. The plantings survived and by the late 1750s one sugar mill
16 had already been built by Claude-Joseph Dubreuil de Villars of Esplanade Street.

17 Other planters followed his example and the industry attempted to expand. However, the
18 manufacture of sugar, which had moved from Europe and spread throughout the Americas, was
19 difficult because of the short growing season, early winter frosts and immature cane in Louisiana.
20 "Tafia," a rum-like drink, was produced from cane juice and consumed in great quantity. Enough
21 sugar was produced to satisfy the modest New Orleans market in some years.

22 The sugar was of extremely poor quality and could not be shipped back to France. This caused the
23 developing industry to falter and it was not until the end of the 18th century when several factors
24 enabled the industry to blossom. Of particular importance was the indigo crop, which had been a
25 major economic factor to the area but was lost due to wet weather and insects. A new cane variety,

26 “Otaheite” (Tahiti or Bourbon cane), was imported from Santo Domingo around 1797, and Etienne
27 de Bore provided the manpower and expertise for sugar manufacture. De Bore married the daughter
28 of the former treasurer of Louisiana, Jean-Baptiste Destrehan, and they risked their fortune in the
29 manufacture of sugar. With the expert help of a sugar maker, Antoine Morin from Santo Domingo,
30 de Bore succeeded in making sugar granulate at his wife’s family property (now Audubon Park in
31 New Orleans). De Bore was not the first to have accomplished the feat, but he was the first to do
32 it in a manner judged to be economically successful. His first crop consisted of some 100 hogsheads
33 (100,000 lbs.) of sugar which were sold for 12.5 cents per lb., along with 50 cents per gallon for
34 molasses, which netted him a profit of \$12,000. Because of this success, the commencement of the
35 U.S. sugar industry is cited as 1795. In 1803, the U.S. purchased the territory of Louisiana from the
36 French. Anglo Americans poured into
37 Louisiana and joined others in developing the sugar industry. The War of 1812 temporarily slowed
38 the development of the industry.
39 Several factors were instrumental in renewing the industry’s growth. The use of steam power in
40 milling cane, proposed earlier, was finally adopted in the early 1800s in the Louisiana sugar industry.
41 This allowed the use of more efficient horizontal mills which were larger than those used with animal
42 power. In 1825 two new varieties, which became known as Louisiana Purple and Louisiana Striped,
43 were shipped to Louisiana. Both canes were more frost resistant than Creole or Otaheite which
44 allowed the industry to quickly expand outside of the New Orleans area. Norbert Rillieux, a free man
45 of color born in New Orleans and educated in Paris, installed his invention, the first triple-effect
46 evaporator, in 1834. However, it was not until 1843-1844 that his multiple-effect evaporation
47 process was proven successful. This invention, still used today, has proven to be one of the greatest
48 contributions to the world’s sugar industry. Other inventions which proved successful at about the
49 same time were the centrifuge, condenser and polariscope.
50 The planters and processors of that time were faced with the constant risk of frost, floods, cane pests,
51 animal and insect pests, sickness among slaves, animal diseases and falling market prices. One of the

52 largest problems was the need for labor. Slavery proved to be the answer and the industry grew to
53 300,000 slaves prior to 1860. The catastrophic effects of the Civil War on the sugar industry can be
54 easily seen by comparing the 264,000 short tons of sugar produced in 1861 with the 5,971 short tons
55 produced in 1864. Sugar producing plantations decreased from 1,200 in 24 parishes in 1861 to 175
56 plantations in 16 parishes in 1864.

57 Following the Civil War, the industry slowly began to reorganize, although labor was still the major
58 problem. The industry was forced to accept change in order to survive. Mechanization, first animal,
59 then steam, electricity and gasoline, quickly spread throughout the industry. Chemical fertilizers
60 replaced manures. The Louisiana State University Experiment Station conducted research in a
61 number of areas. New varieties were imported from foreign lands. Consolidation continued with a
62 further reduction in the number of factories --- each growing in power, efficiency and size.

63 World War I raised sugar prices briefly, but they fell quickly after the war was over. New diseases
64 entered the cane belt, and along with poor weather, caused the near destruction of the cane industry.
65 Sugar production dropped to the lowest levels (47,000 tons) since the Civil War. Mosaic resistant
66 POJ varieties from Java were imported. These canes were spread across the industry which quickly
67 recovered from the onset of new diseases. It was at this time that the American Sugar Cane League,
68 Louisiana State University, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture joined forces to develop varieties
69 for the Louisiana sugar industry.

70 The Great Depression brought drastic changes in the value of the industry and ownership of farms
71 and factories. World War II brought sugar rations to the U.S., but more importantly, an extreme
72 shortage of labor. Mechanical harvesters cut the entire Louisiana crop by the late 1940s while
73 mechanical planters were soon developed. Research programs were instituted in all areas of
74 production by the various agencies involved in Louisiana. These programs must continue in an effort
75 to further increase production efficiency and to overcome the numerous issues facing the industry
76 including environmental regulations. During the 1990s, the industry's acreage has reached an all time
77 high. Perils faced by early growers

78 and processors are still affecting the industry. However, in the 200th year of production (1994) the
79 industry has set a new record for Louisiana sugar production, having recovered over 1.04 million tons
80 of sugar. This is a remarkable feat for an industry that has a very short growing season, frosts and
81 freezes too early in the harvest season, and an industry that many say shouldn't even be producing
82 sugarcane. This tremendous accomplishment and the 200 years of production occurred because of
83 the diligence of the many members of the Louisiana sugar industry — from Iberville, to de Bore to
84 Rillieux, to the modern-day scientists, growers, processors and other individuals. The year 1995 is
85 not only a time to commemorate 200 years of production, but also a time to work toward higher
86 goals, including increased efficiency in the global community in which Louisiana now operates.