

Growth and Progress

As you read, look for:

- the effect of the steamboat on Louisiana,
- how travel on the Red River was improved, and
- the migration of new settlers to Louisiana.

The period after the War of 1812 brought growth and progress to Louisiana. New Orleans developed into the largest city in the South and one of the largest cities in the United States. This port city became a vital part of the economy of its new country.

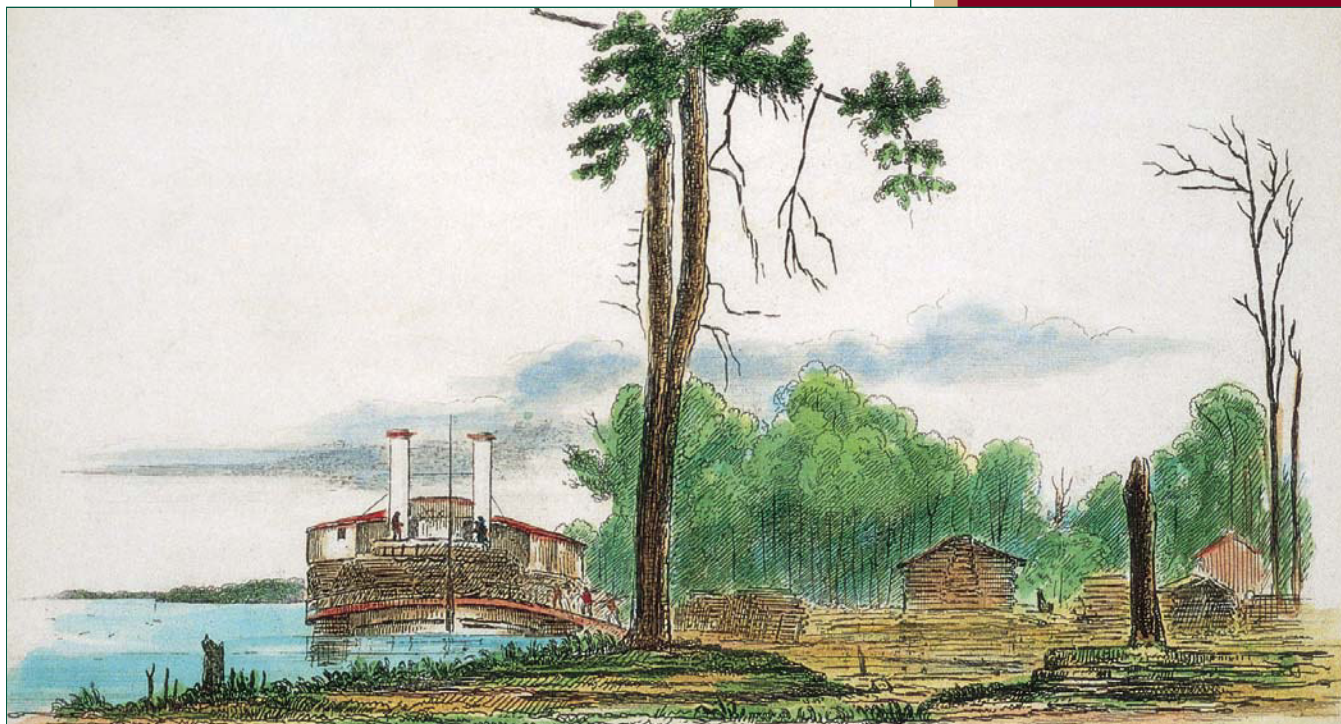
Steamboats

New Orleans had seen birchbark canoes, cypress pirogues, French and Spanish sailing ships, Kentucky flatboats, and keelboats travel the waters of the Mississippi River. A *flatboat* was basically a raft that was guided with an oar and moved by pushing poles into the river bottom. Built for about \$35, it was good for only one trip downriver. Traders who came down the river on a flatboat had to find another way to get back. *Keelboats* could be steered and could make the return trip upriver—but it took three months of back-breaking poling.

Lagniappe

The wood sidewalks in New Orleans were called *banquettes*, French for “great planks.” The boards often came from the flatboats that had come downriver. Sidewalks are often still called *banquettes* in New Orleans.

Below: Steamboats were important for transporting people and goods, and they contributed to the importance of New Orleans as a port.



Spotlight

Madisonville

The small town of Madisonville is located in St. Tammany Parish in the region known as the Florida Parishes. The French called the settlement Coquille because of the shells found along the nearby shore of Lake Pontchartrain.

In 1810, the town was renamed Madisonville to honor President James Madison. The history of the town soon connected with the history of the United States. Shipbuilding and shipping became the basis of the town's economy.

The United States established a small naval yard at this location during the War of 1812. Some of the American troops heading to protect New Orleans from the British sailed across Lake Pontchartrain from Madisonville.

A lighthouse built in 1838 guided vessels crossing Lake Pontchartrain to the mouth of the Tchefuncte River at Madisonville. This lighthouse was rebuilt in 1868 after it was damaged during the Civil War. It is now listed on the National Register of Historic Places as the Tchefuncte River Rear Light.

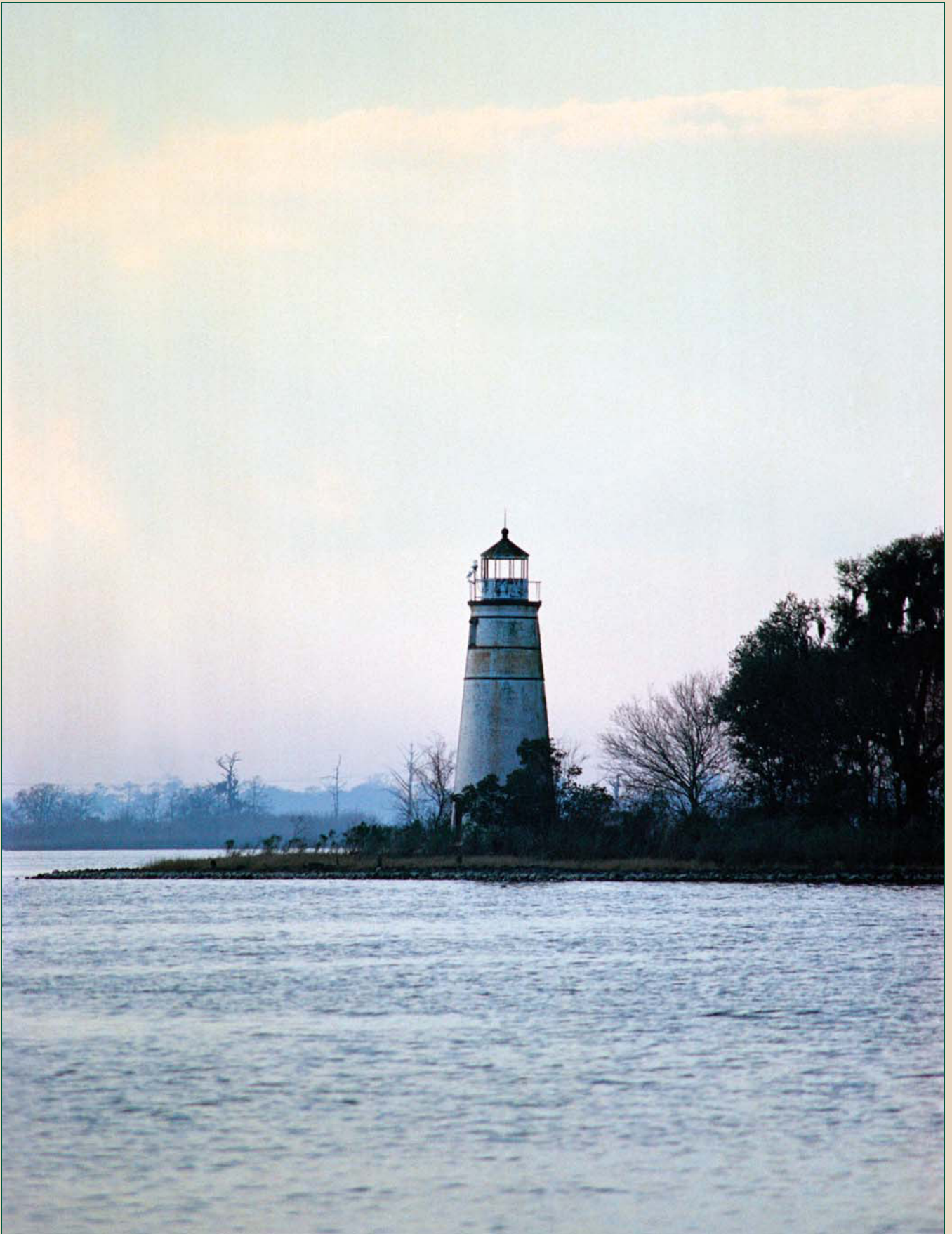
Among the vessels that crossed the lake were steamships from New Orleans. People came from the city to enjoy the fresh air and to es-



Above: Riverfront store in Madisonville. **Left:** Lake Pontchartrain Basin Maritime Museum. **Opposite page:** Tchefuncte River Rear Light.

cape the yellow fever epidemics. By the 1830s, Madisonville had a hotel for these visitors.

A big economic boost came to the area when a large shipyard operated during World War I. More than two thousand people worked at the facility. The location of that shipyard is now the Lake Pontchartrain Basin Maritime Museum. Madisonville's history on the water is also celebrated with the annual Wooden Boat Festival.





Above: Some steamboats were rough and uncomfortable, while others were luxurious and had elaborate woodwork and decorations. This 1861 painting of the salon of the *Princess* by Marie Adrien Persac is the earliest known interior view of a Mississippi River steamboat.

On January 10, 1812, a history-changing vessel landed at the city's docks. Nicholas Roosevelt had come from Pittsburgh with his steamboat, the *New Orleans*. The trip down the river had taken 259 hours.

With its speed and ease, the steamboat changed Louisiana. Built to carry both cargo and passengers, the steamboat used steam power to travel up and down the rivers. Roosevelt's steamboat cost a thousand times more than a flatboat. But the value of his investment was soon clear. The steamboat earned a \$20,000 profit for Roosevelt before it sank.

Soon, dozens of steamboats lined the river landings. By 1821, the port of New Orleans registered more than seventy-five steamboats. All the goods of the new country's economy filled the boats. Piles of pelts, stacks of lumber, barrels of corn whiskey, bales of cotton, and hogsheads (barrels) of sugar covered the docks at New Orleans.

Steamboats became the most popular way to travel. At their peak, the floating palaces offered their passengers elegant cabins, banquet rooms, ladies' sitting rooms, gambling parlors, and promenade decks. The smaller steamboats were not nearly as fine; often, they were crowded and dirty.

But steamboat travel was also risky. Obstacles in the river, such as a sunken log, could damage and sink the boat. The changeable river channels made navi-

gation very difficult. Sometimes steamboats ran aground when the water level of the river was low. The most feared disaster involved overheated steam boilers that exploded.

Famous Americans like Mark Twain signed their names on the pages of Louisiana's steamboat days. One tall, lanky boy from Indiana jumped to shore from his flatboat. He decided to return home the easier way, going upriver on a new steamboat. The fascinating port of New Orleans amazed the eighteen-year-old Abraham Lincoln, but he was shocked by the slave markets he saw.

Clearing the Red River Raft

Steamboats traveled on several Louisiana rivers. But boats on the Red River could only get as far as Natchitoches. A huge tangle of logs and brush stopped boats from proceeding any further. The debris had become so thick that cottonwood trees actually grew in the logjam! The logjam, or "the Great Raft" as it was called, clogged the river northward for about two hundred miles. This logjam may have been developing for centuries by the time it was cleared.

The Great Raft blocked not only the river but progress itself. Captain Henry Miller Shreve agreed to help clear the river. First, he designed a snagboat to pull the logs from the river. Then, in 1833, he began work with a crew of over one hundred men and three boats. He worked for years trying to open the

Below: Captain Henry Miller Shreve worked for years to clear the 160-mile-long "raft" on the Red River. The snagboat on the right is removing the snagged logs.



river. Funding for the project came from the United States government. Often, the project ran out of money, and the river became blocked again. It was not until 1873 that the Red River was totally opened.

The map of northwest Louisiana is a tribute to Shreve's efforts. The city of Shreveport was named to honor him. It was at this site that a trading post was established after Shreve cleared the Red River. That trading post developed into the city that bears his name.

Louisiana's Pioneers

When Louisiana became an American territory, people came down the Mississippi from the "western country," Tennessee and Kentucky. They also crossed overland from the Mississippi Territory and from Georgia. First, they settled in the Florida Parishes and in South Louisiana. The prairie areas around Opelousas and the old Attakapa region of St. Martinville attracted American cattle farmers.

Later, the newcomers began to move into North Louisiana. The area around the old Spanish fort on the Ouachita River was one of the first areas of settlement. Abraham Morehouse brought pioneers from Kentucky into this region as early as 1804. People also crossed the river at Natchez to live near Vidalia. This settlement was named for Jose Vidal, an early Spanish official.

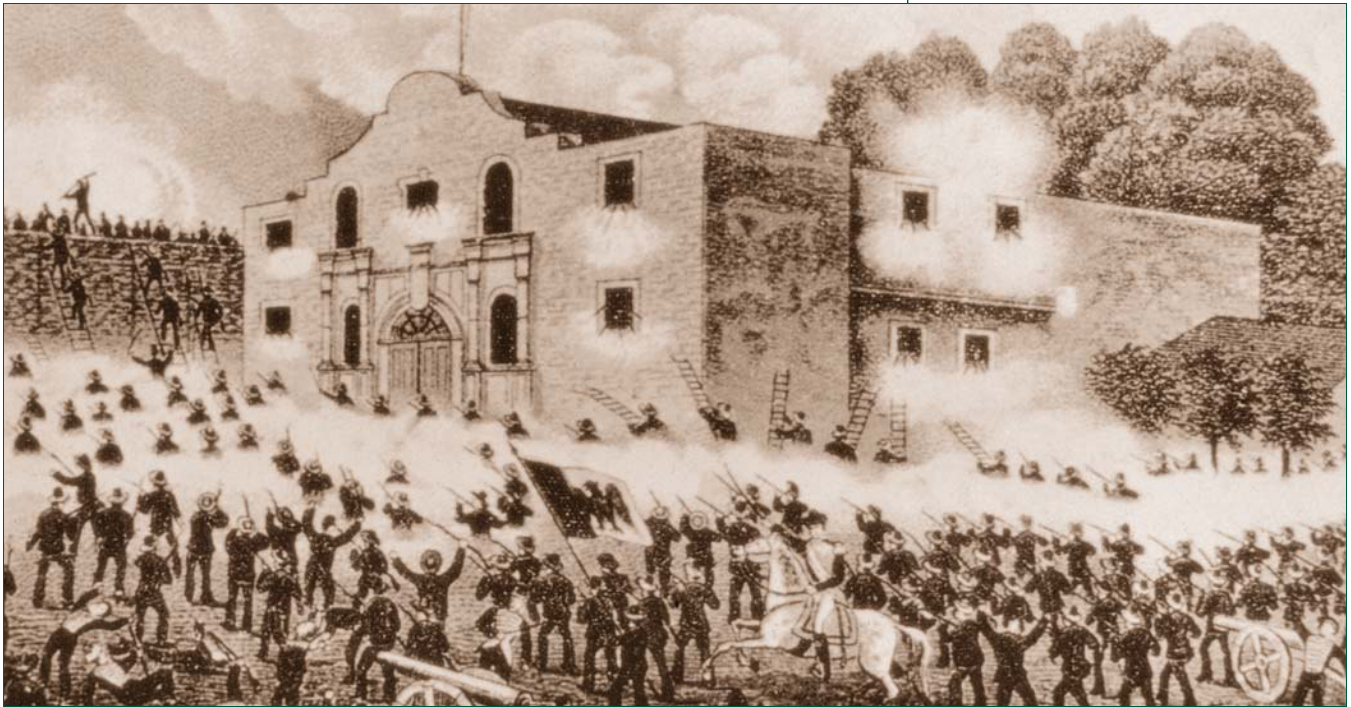
Many pioneers traveled overland in wagons pulled by oxen. Often, the travelers were groups of family and friends. Some came with minimum supplies and few assets. Others moved from once-prosperous cotton plantations whose soil had worn out. Those newcomers brought their slaves and expected to create more plantations.

The opening of the Red River brought more pioneers to North Louisiana. One Louisiana family has passed down the story of their pioneer ancestor who arrived in North Louisiana in the late 1830s. As a boy, he had come up the Red River with his family and vividly recalled gripping the steamboat's rail as the captain ordered more wood for the boiler. The captain just could not resist a race up the river on the way to Shreveport.

Major James Dyer, another pioneer and a veteran of the War of 1812, settled in North Louisiana in 1822. He had come from Missouri. When Claiborne Parish was established, he became its first representative to the state legislature.



Top: This Washington Parish log cabin, built around 1810, has been relocated to the LSU Rural Life Museum in Baton Rouge. The cabin was actually lived in until 1960.
Above: This typical dogtrot cabin at the Rural Life Museum has front and rear porches and a central open hallway.



The Texas Connection

The northwest corner of Louisiana became the state's Texas connection. Mexico began a war of independence from Spanish rule in 1810, finally winning its independence in 1821. Mexico still held Texas, but in the 1820s Americans began moving into the region. Many of these pioneers traveled the trails of North Louisiana "going to Texas." These Americans did not leave their democracy behind when they crossed the Sabine River. Soon, talk of "freeing" Texas was heard at the inns and taverns along the route. The plots were whispered about in Texas and in Washington.

Finally, in 1836, the Americans in Texas declared their independence. The heroes of the Texas revolution died at the battle of the Alamo. The people of North Louisiana had seen these Texans travel through their land. After the Alamo, Louisiana supporters joined the Texans in their fight for freedom. The streets of the town square of Shreveport, laid out the same year that Texas won its independence, were named to honor the Texans. Texas Street is still the name of the street in front of the Caddo Parish courthouse.

Above: The talk of "freeing" Texas led to the Battle of the Alamo, where many of the heroes of the Texas Revolution died.

Check for Understanding ✓

1. How did clearing the Red River raft change Louisiana geography?
2. Where did the pioneers come from?
3. What happened in Texas after the Americans moved in?