

Economic and Cultural Progress

As you read, look for:

- economic improvements during this period,
- technological progress of this era, and
- vocabulary term **jetty**.

Louisiana had a mild climate, abundant water resources, low-cost fuel, a large labor supply, and rivers for transportation. These resources helped bring industry to the state in the new century. New discoveries and developments made the resources of the state more valuable.

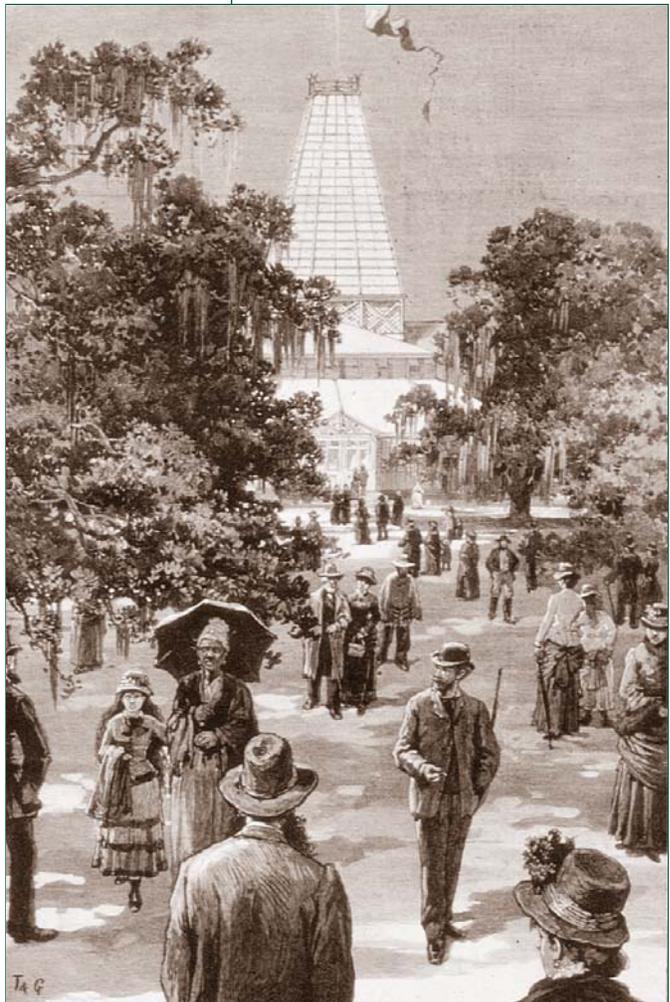
Agriculture

After the railroad was built, southwest Louisiana became the rice center of the state. Land companies such as the Watkins Syndicate from the Midwest bought millions of acres of land in Louisiana. They hired the head of Iowa's Agricultural College to bring farmers to Louisiana's prairies. These experienced wheat farmers applied their skills to growing rice. With new scientific farming methods and new machinery, they established profitable farms.

This progress and economic growth led to the 1884 Cotton Centennial in New Orleans. Exhibits from all over the world filled the area that is now Audubon Park. This exposition represented Louisiana's attempt to become part of the "New South." Even the Bourbons, who did not want social change, approved of economic growth. One Centennial speaker noted, "We must develop our great resources. We must multiply sweat in steam, and multiply muscle in machinery."

Lumber

The huge forests around the state attracted outside investors who knew they could make a fortune cutting this timber. The railroads built in the state in the late 1800s ensured easy transportation for the lumber. The lumber industry grew rapidly, peaking between 1880 and 1920. The lumber companies harvested



Above: With exhibits from all over the world, the 1884 Cotton Centennial Exposition in New Orleans represented Louisiana's attempt to become part of the "New South."



Above: The Watkins Syndicate and other land companies brought experienced wheat farmers from Iowa to apply their skills to rice cultivation. With new scientific agricultural methods and new machinery, they established profitable farms, like this one in Crowley.

yellow pine from many areas of the state and cypress from the swamps of South Louisiana. The cypress lumbermen, in fact, were usually called “swampers.” Massive trees provided billions of board feet of lumber. Some pine logs measured seven feet in diameter, and many cypress logs were even larger.

One of the first major sawmills was Pharr and Williams’s Sawmill at Patterson in St. Mary Parish. The lumber industry also developed around Bogalusa in Washington Parish. There, the Great Southern Lumber Company established one of the largest lumber mills in the world.

These early lumber mills produced railroad ties and telephone poles. Lumber and cypress for fine-finishing work left the mills for construction sites around the United States. The *Southern Lumberman* said Louisiana cypress “makes up easily, finishes beautifully, and lasts without end.”

Lagniappe

Today Louisiana is one of the six largest rice-producing states in the United States. The wet fields of rice farms are also important to the crawfish industry.





Wages for lumber workers varied from \$2.50 to \$10.00 a week. They were often paid in *scrip*, paper certificates used in place of money and usually only good at the commissary store run by the company. Prices at the company store were high, but workers could not shop anywhere else.

The work was hard and dangerous. It was common for old loggers to be missing fingers, if not arms or feet. Falling trees or the slip of an ax could end the life of the lumberman.

When Louisiana's big lumber boom began, more than 75 percent of the state was covered in forest. By the 1920s, much of those forests had only stumps left standing. Sawmill towns became ghost towns as workers moved on.

Oil and Gas

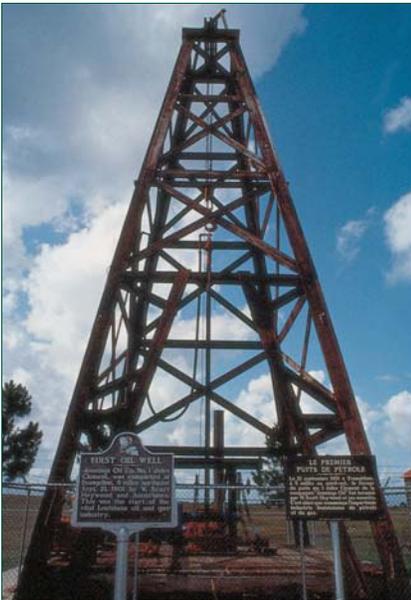
As the lumber industry declined, an even bigger economic boom began. In 1901, the first successful oil well in the state was drilled in Acadia Parish. The state's second major oil field was in Caddo Parish, and the very first offshore oil well was drilled in Caddo Lake in 1911.

New boom towns, like Oil City in Caddo Parish, developed as the oil industry grew. These towns, filled with oil workers, gained the reputation of being rough and wild. The Oil City hotel was a tent, but it had good meals. The general



Opposite page, below: The state's pine forests yielded thousands of huge trees such as the one being cut here.

Above: Log trains transported cut timber to the lumber mills around the state.



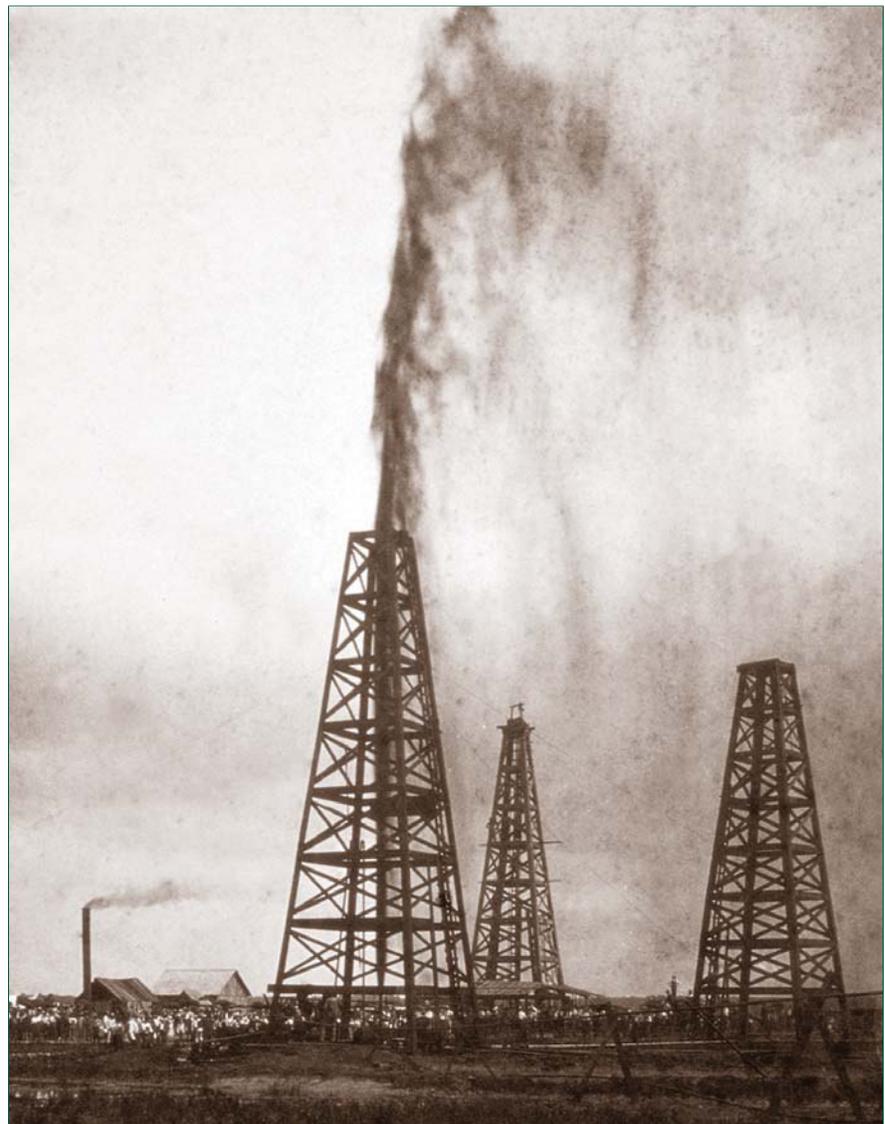
Above: A replica of the small wooden oil rig used to drill Louisiana's first oil well is on display at the Louisiana Oil and Gas Park in Jennings.
Right: Here, Southern Well #3 is gushing oil near Crowley.

store also served as a post office, billiard parlor, and a meeting place. The railroad and telegraph offices were operated from freight cars.

Money was made by those with oil on their land and those who supplied the oil industry. One Caddo storekeeper received \$30,000 a month from land that he had purchased for 70 cents an acre. His neighbors made money selling supplies to the oil companies.

By 1910, Standard Oil Corporation had completed a pipeline to Baton Rouge. That 8-inch pipeline carried northwest Louisiana crude oil to the company's new refinery. By 1911, the Baton Rouge refinery was producing more than 7,000 barrels of oil a day.

Drillers often found natural gas while they were looking for oil. At first, it was burned off as waste, but around the turn of the century drillers discovered its value. Oil producers began transporting the natural gas through pipelines. Cities began using the natural gas as fuel and for lighting. One of the largest natural gas fields was discovered near the city of Monroe in 1916.





Sulphur and Salt

Another important mineral had been mined in Louisiana even before oil drilling began. The first sulphur deposits were discovered in 1869 in Calcasieu Parish, but commercial mining did not begin until a technique to mine the sulphur was developed.

Lagniappe

In 1891, Dr. Herman Frasch designed a method of mining sulphur using superheated water to melt the sulphur underground. The liquid sulphur was then pumped to the surface. Using this technique, Frasch and his Union Sulphur Company made huge profits.

By 1914, Calcasieu Parish was providing 75 percent of the nation's sulphur. The town of Sulphur grew up around the Calcasieu Parish mine. This Calcasieu Parish sulphur field, however, was exhausted by 1920.

Salt had been discovered and used before the Civil War. But commercial salt mining at Avery Island in Iberia Parish did not begin until 1879. By the early twentieth century, Louisiana produced much of the salt used in the United States.

Above: Although salt had been discovered in Louisiana and used before the Civil War, it did not become profitable until the late 1800s.



Map 37 Railroads in Turn-of-the-Century Louisiana

Map Skill: What town appears to be a railroad “hub”?

Above: This young boy is enjoying an old locomotive during the Railroad Days Festival in DeQuincy.

Transportation

Louisiana’s agricultural and industrial progress needed better transportation. Rain turned the dirt roads into mud, and wagons frequently got stuck. People had tried several techniques to improve the roads. First, they put logs on the roads, making a road they called *corduroy*.

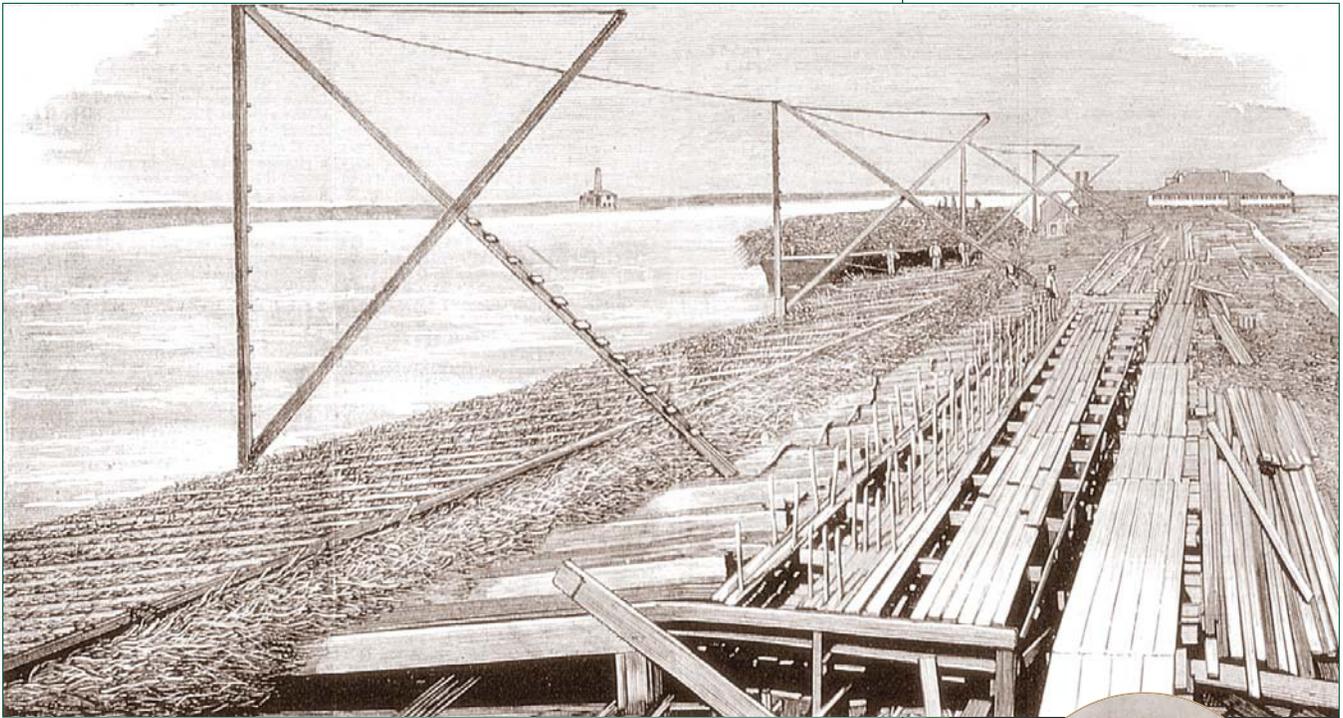
In 1875, an investor from Minden came up with a better plan. He had a covered road built from Bossier Parish to Webster Parish through the swamp. The finished road was less than ten miles long and was called the Shed Road. The “shed,” built of heart pine planks, was eighteen feet wide and high enough for a wagon with three bales of cotton to pass under. Each mile of Shed Road cost about \$8,500. The road builder made a \$20,000 profit by charging a toll of \$1.50 for a wagon with four oxen and \$1.00 for a wagon pulled by four mules. The road was very profitable—until the railroad came through.

Railroads

Most railroad construction in Louisiana took place between 1880 and 1910. The Kansas City Southern Railroad was built in the 1890s, opening up western Louisiana. A railroad company owned by Jay Gould finally built the line from New Orleans to Marshall, Texas. The company received a land grant of more than a million acres of land in return for building the railroad. After the railroad was built, the company established towns on that land and sold lots.

Other developers brought additional railroad lines into Louisiana. By 1910, some five thousand miles of track crossed Louisiana.





Jetties

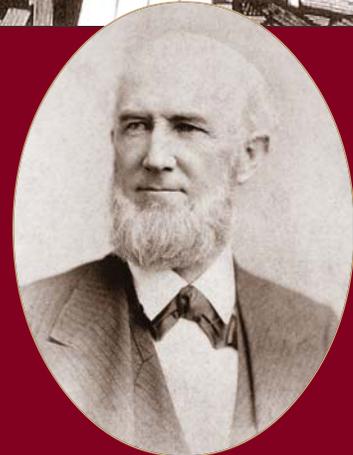
The coming of the railroads did not mean that water transportation was no longer important. The Mississippi River was still a valuable transportation route. But the shallow mouth of the river made it difficult for large ships to navigate the passes. As early as Iberville's day, an engineer said that narrowing the channel would make the channel deeper. The swifter current would then clear away the mud in the river bed. Efforts had been made to dredge (deepen) the river before the Civil War, but the Mississippi continued to deposit sediment.

In 1873, engineer James Eads proposed a system of jetties that would increase the flow of the river and deepen the river's mouth. Congress agreed to fund this project. Eads built retaining walls of woven willows weighted with stone and held by heavy timbers. This **jetty** system worked. The faster current swept away the sediment and deepened the mouth of the river. When work was completed in 1879, shipping to New Orleans increased immediately.

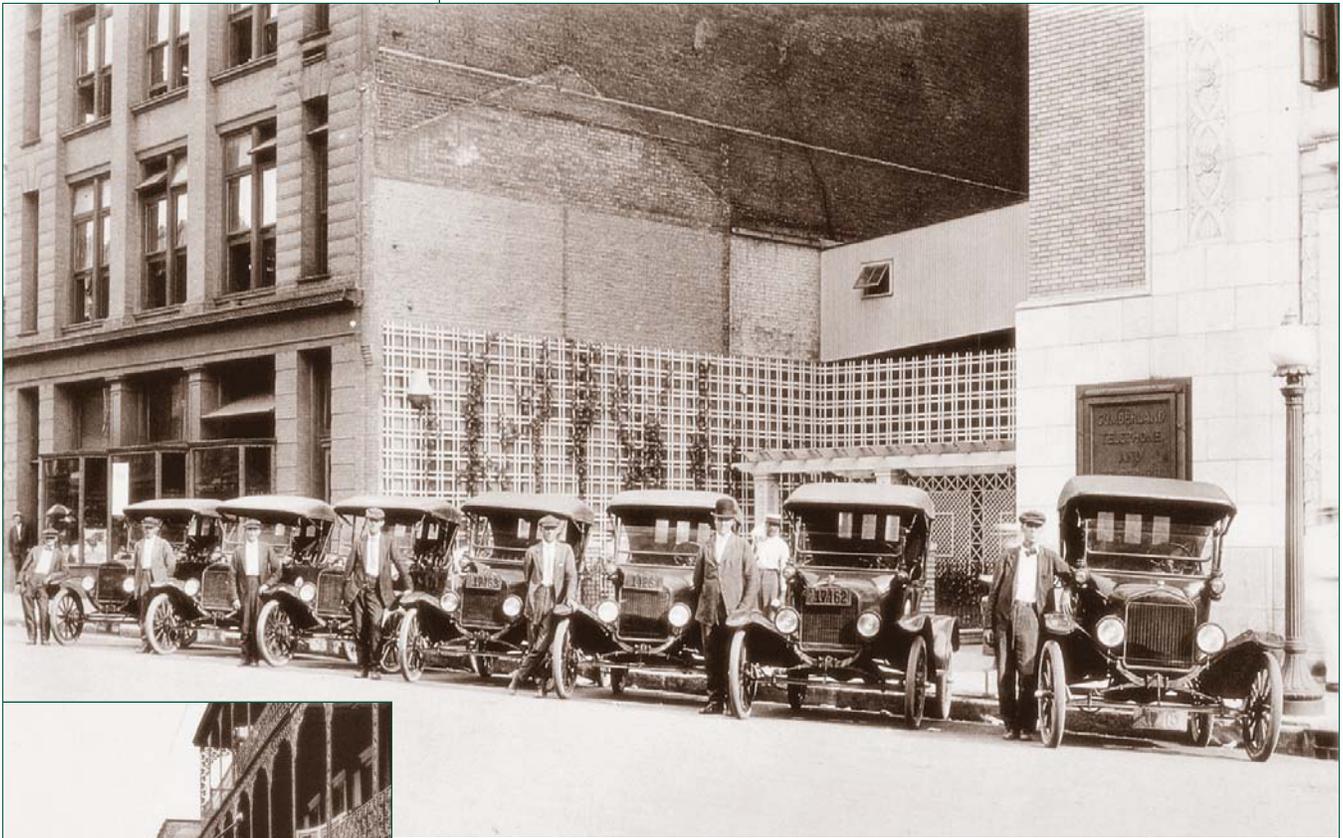
Automobiles and Airplanes

As the largest city in the state, New Orleans showcased a new form of transportation—the automobile. In an amazing race in 1909, the driver set a world record with a speed of 60 miles an hour.

By 1916, more than 9,000 automobiles motored about Louisiana. The increase was due mainly to Henry Ford, who used mass production to reduce the cost of making cars. Ford's Model T automobile cost between \$300 and \$500, and the buyer had to pay extra for balloon tires and running boards. People who wanted to purchase the Model T could use a new credit method. Making monthly payments on the *installment plan* increased consumers' buying power.



Above: Engineer James Eads developed a plan to deepen the mouth of the Mississippi River by using a system of jetties. **Top:** The jetties at the mouth of the Mississippi were constructed of woven willows, stone, and heavy timbers.



Top: The mass production of Henry Ford's Model T changed the transportation system forever. **Above:** In the larger cities, people got around by streetcar. This streetcar (the inspiration for the title of Tennessee Williams' famous play *A Streetcar Named Desire*) operated in the New Orleans French Quarter.

These new vehicles required new regulations. In 1913, the Bossier Parish police jury passed a law requiring automobile registration. By 1915, the state required automobile licenses, charging a fee of 25 cents for each horsepower.

Another major transportation event took place in New Orleans in 1910, only seven years after the Wright brothers made the first airplane flight at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina. At an "international aviation tournament," one plane climbed to a height of over 7,000 feet and flew a mile in just 57 seconds. The featured event was a race between an automobile and an airplane. The Packard car won the race.

Streetcars

At the beginning of this era, New Orleans still had horse-drawn streetcars. According to custom, gentlemen paid before sitting down. It was proper for ladies to sit, and then pass their money to the nearest man, who gave it to the driver.

By 1889, Shreveport had electric streetcars, called *trolley cars*. Children who rode these trolleys watched with excitement as sparks flew from the lines. Office workers and shoppers welcomed the dependable transportation.

Lagniappe

The St. Charles Streetcar line is the oldest continuously operating streetcar line in the country.

By 1893, the New Orleans and Carrollton Railroad operated electric streetcars, charging a fare of 6 cents. This later became the St. Charles Streetcar, which is still in operation. Soon these electric streetcars traveled all around the city. The statue of Henry Clay, which had stood on Canal Street for years, had to be removed to make room for all the streetcars to turn.

New Towns

New industry meant new towns for Louisiana. Lumber towns were built near the sawmills. Fisher in DeSoto Parish is preserved like a museum. This old sawmill town still has the old buildings, but no one lives there. Visitors can see the company store, tidy houses, and white picket fences and imagine what life was like. Other towns have disappeared completely, but some have grown into larger towns and cities.

Many towns were created as the railroads expanded. The layout of the streets in a railroad town was different. The main street ran beside the railroad tracks rather than along the riverfront or the bayou. Towns like Ruston in Lincoln Parish began as railroad towns.

Just as the railroad created new towns, it also killed others. If the railroad bypassed a town, the end was near. During this era when towns were born or died, many parish seats were moved. Some were relocated after a vote in the parish. Sometimes the courthouse records were stolen and moved to another town.

Below: Fisher is a historic treasure. Buildings in this early lumber town include the town hall (bottom) and the company store (below).



New Conveniences

The twentieth century brought new inventions and modern life to Louisiana. Cities and towns were more likely to offer this updated lifestyle. Rural Louisiana continued with life as it had been.

Telephones

The first telephones came to Louisiana's cities in the 1880s. One Bossier Parish man wanted this new invention in his rural home. He received permission to connect his own line to the Shreveport system. His line crossed the Red River, held up by tall cottonwood trees.

Within a decade, telephone companies came to the smaller towns. Donaldsonville had its telephone line installed from New Orleans. One local resident called the telephone a fad that would soon die out. But within twenty years, there were "talking telegraphs" throughout the state.

Gaslights and Electricity

It was in New Orleans that kerosene lamps were first replaced by gaslights. The kerosene lamps burned with a smoky light and had to be cleaned regularly. The new gaslights were clean and bright, a marked improvement. Electric lights came to New Orleans in 1887; by 1900, the entire city was lighted by electricity. Consumers Electric Company advised its customers to burn only four light bulbs at a time, at a cost of \$1 a month. Burning a fifth bulb would blow the fuse and put out all the lights.

Below: Modern conveniences came to the big cities first. This view of Canal Street in New Orleans in the early 1880s shows streetcars, gaslights, and telephone poles topped with some of the first electric streetlights.



The Electric Light and Power Company was formally organized in Donaldsonville in 1896. The company claimed it “could lower the price so that they would soon have its lights in every store and in a great number of our private buildings.” Crowley and Opelousas built electric light plants in the mid-1890s. The Crowley company gave churches and convents a reduced rate.

By 1916, electric lights had replaced the gaslights in the state’s cities and towns. In small towns, the electricity was turned on only at night. Arcadia in Bienville Parish had 24-hour electricity on Wednesday. That was the day set aside to use the new electric irons. Rural Louisiana, however, did not receive electricity until the late 1930s.

Mail Service

The railroads made mail delivery more dependable. Special delivery was even added by 1885. No longer would rural residents have to go to town to pick up their mail. Mail was delivered to homes on the rural free delivery (RFD) routes. This service became available in Thibodaux, for example, in 1896. The first mail delivery vehicles were horses and wagons.

One of the most important deliveries was the Montgomery Ward or the Sears catalog. These mail-order catalogs soon contained more than 1,000 pages of items and offered almost any needed item at a price working people could afford. For example, in 1902, the Sears, Roebuck & Company catalog offered a 100-piece set of china for under \$5 and a top-of-the-line wood and coal stove for less than \$15. No wonder they were called “wish books” by the rural families who ordered their goods.



Above: With Rural Free Delivery, rural Louisianians no longer had to go “to town” to pick up their mail.

Check for Understanding ✓

1. Why did the big lumber boom end?
2. What four minerals became important economic resources in Louisiana?
3. Why did the state give land to the railroad companies?
4. What was the purpose of the jetty system?
5. When did telephones first come to Louisiana?
6. What replaced gaslights?