

#43
D. Memories
1 A HISTORY OF CAMPTI

2 by Kate A. Keator

3 Campti, Louisiana, May 28, 1940.

4 The little town of Campti, located in Natchitoches Parish
5 about ten miles north of the City of Natchitoches, is one of the
6 oldest towns on Red River.

7 Much has been written and much said about the origin of the
8 name of Campti. As far back as 1788, following references from
9 American State Papers, the spelling at that time was "Campe".
10 From records of 1806, 1816, and 1812, it was spelled "Campte".
11 Darby, who was unusually accurate for his time, 1816, refers to
12 "Tulin's Campte", which is identified in other records as
13 Francois Grappe's trading post. "Le Campte", or where Grappe
14 kept his accounts, could easily be corrupted into "Campte" by the
15 Americans who, unfamiliar with French, would call it by its
16 present name.

17 Tradition, dating back into the past century, maintains that
18 the name "Campti", was derived from an Indian chief, Roi de
19 Campti. This chief was a favorite not only with his own people,
20 but also with the white men of the settlement and surrounding
21 territory, with whom he was particularly friendly.

22 Because of these harmonious relations, and the great esteem
23 in which the settlers held Chief Campte, the settlement was named
24 for him.

25 As early as 1805, Francois Grappe, whose father was a French
26 officer and superintendent of Indian affairs, was appointed
27 interpreter by the Natchitoches Indians in selling a portion of
28 their old Spanish grant of 1790 on Lac de Mure above Campte to
29 Hypolite Bordelon. The latter paid \$90.00 for this grant. The
30 United States Commissions did not confirm Bordelon's claim,
31 holding that the grant of Chief Tomac of 1790 was only
32 provisional.

33 According to Sibley's report to General Dearborn, dated
34 Natchitoches, April 10, 1805, he says his principal informer was
35 Francois Grappe. He further states, "We find irregular
36 settlements, including Campti, where a few families are settled
37 together on a hill near the river on the northeast side."

38 Quoting from the report of the Freeman-Custis expedition of
39 the next year, 1806, "I find the highest white settlement on the
40 bluff just where Campti is now located."

41 In one of the land cases decided early in the last century,
42 Francois Grappe is referred to as having had his trading post on
43 the road to the settlement of the Illinois and Ouachitas, and an
44 early map shows that this is almost the exact location of what is
45 known as "old Campti".

46 Undoubtedly, Grappe was the oldest known settler of this
47 region. Other pioneer French settlers were the Prudhommes,
48 Perots, Robieus, Dovenons, Trichels and Lambres. A number of
49 Italian traders, the Trizinnis and Scaupinis, came in about the
50 same time. Large tracts of land were purchased from Indians by
51 these settlers.

52 Over here in America on the banks of Red River, surrounded by
53 new people, Indians living in skin-covered wigwams, with all of
54 the range of human thrills, with all the range of physical
55 adventure, no wonder these hardy sons of France never cared to
56 return to their mother country.

57 However, the women do not like such things, but they love the
58 men who do. Consequently, these French women followed their
59 hearts and brought with them to this new world their ideals long
60 established in France.

CAMPTI

2 Campti grew following the entire character of France. Many
3 of the descendants of these pioneers live in Campti and its
4 surrounding territory today.

5 A very important occurrence in the early history of Campti is
6 worthy of special mention. In the year 1830, Count von Leon
7 became involved in a socialistic movement popular in Germany at
8 that time, but this movement was soon declared treason by the
9 crown. One account states that the count was arrested and
10 ordered put to death, but a Masonic order, to which he belonged,
11 intervened and had his sentence changed to banishment. The other
12 account states that, because of the intervention of the retainers
13 on his estate, all attempts to arrest him failed. But he was
14 banished and his estate confiscated. Peter Kizer, a relative of
15 the countess, gave the large sum of money necessary to finance an
16 expedition to America.

17 The banished nobleman emigrated to America, accompanied by
18 his wife, the beautiful countess, daughter of a merchant prince
19 in Frankfort-on-the-Rhine, his one daughter and 300 or more
20 followers, and finally settled in Campti. Two children were born
21 in Pennsylvania, where they first settled. It seems most
22 probable that the trip from Pennsylvania was made down the Ohio
23 and Mississippi Rivers on flat boats, a common mode of travel in
24 those days, as tradition tells of their slow trip up river and of
25 the storm, that the little band encountered near Campti in
26 Natchitoches Parish. Many of their boats were swamped and most
27 of their supplies for the new colony lost.

28 Soon yellow fever broke out and swiftly took its toll. The
29 count and many of his followers died and lie buried on the banks
30 of the Red River at Campti.

31 The countess then had to bear the heavy burden of
32 responsibility for her people's welfare. She had to sell many of
33 the valuables brought from Germany, among them a set of Masonic
34 regalia set with precious stones and valued at \$6,000.00 which
35 was purchased by the Masonic order of Natchitoches, and is said
36 to still be in their possession.

37 The members of the exiled colony expressed a desire to seek a
38 more healthful spot as a permanent location, but funds were
39 lacking with which to purchase land for this purpose. A
40 Louisiana congressman brought the attention of President Jackson
41 to the plight of the colony when he introduced a bill to grant
42 them a tract of several thousand acres of virgin land in
43 Claiborne Parish. The bill was passed, the necessary implements
44 and provisions secured, and with the countess von Leon at its
45 head, the little group of immigrants moved to its new home in
46 1835. They called the place Germantown, and it is about eight
47 miles north of Minden.

48 In the decade preceeding the Civil War, the first private and
49 public school, a one-room building on the hill where the Lestage
50 home now stands, was opened in Campti by Prof. Edward Barnard of
51 Ohio. He was a devoted citizen of Campti, and, when the war
52 broke out, he joined the Southern forces. After the war, he
53 returned to Campti with his battle scars and resumed his
54 occupation as private and public instructor. He died at Jackson,
55 Louisiana, Insane Hospital in 1894, aged 68 years. He is still
56 lovingly remembered in Campti.

57 The Civil War left its scars on the little village. Gunboats
58 tied up regularly in front of Campti. Once the Federal soldiers
59 halted overnight and went on to Shreveport, whence they journeyed
60 to the battlefields of Keatchie and Mansfield.

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2 On their way back, after these battles, they bombarded Campti
3 and burned nearly every building to the ground. This was the
4 final and most severe of the bombardments suffered in this
5 vicinity. After the war, the old families began to rebuild the
6 village.

7 Since Prof. Barnard's time, the public schools have improved
8 greatly, and now there is a good high school building, a
9 well-equipped home economics building, and a wonderfully
10 constructed and furnished auditorium-gymnasium.

11 To Campti goes the distinction of being one of the first high
12 schools approved in the parish, having reached that standard in
13 1907.

14 The first Catholic church erected in Campti was in 1831 and
15 was called the Church of the Nativity, which name it still bears.
16 The land and the money were donated by Mlle. Francoise Crichton, a
17 very pious Catholic woman. St. Cecelia's Convent for white
18 children and the Sacred Heart School for colored children were
19 built in 1904.

20 This history of the church and the convents was taken from a
21 book called "The Catholic Church in Louisiana", copyrighted by
22 Roger Baudier, New Orleans, Louisiana.

23 The Baptists and the Methodists have had churches here for a
24 number of years, but the congregations are small. There are two
25 negro churches and a very good negro school.

26 A large sawmill was erected by the Frost Lumber Industries in
27 1906, but it is now owned and operated by J. L. Nelms, and the
28 first bank was opened the same year. The first telephone system
29 was built by Dr. E. W. Breazeale in 1908, the construction work
30 being done by C. D. Keator. The system is now owned and operated
31 by Miss Kate Keator. Electric lights were put in the town in
32 1926, concrete walks were laid in 1923, and natural gas piped in
33 in 1927, by the Gulf Public Service Company.

34 Black Lake, truly a fisherman's paradise, is located about
35 six miles east of Campti and draws people from many states to
36 fish in its waters.

37 Luvenia Springs, so called because a farmer named Luvenia
38 once owned it, is located on a hill forty feet high. From this
39 spring flows the purest water in the state, and it flows into the
40 railroad tank by gravity. It has furnished the L. R. & N.
41 Railroad, and now the L. & A., with water ever since it was first
42 built.

43 Robert F. Lowe, son of the late Wade and Josephine Lowe, was
44 the only soldier from Campti killed in France in the first World
45 War, and the Lowe-McFarland Post in Shreveport was named for him
46 and a young McFarland of Shreveport who was killed at the same
47 time.

48 The surrounding territory is all devoted to farming and stock
49 raising, and two cotton gins take care of the cotton raised for
50 miles around.

51 The first mayor was Capt. Alex Gillam, the town having been
52 incorporated November 10, 1902, and the present mayor is R. A.
53 Pourciau.

KEY

- 1. BOUNDARY
- 2. CONCRETE
- 3. BRICK
- 4. WOOD
- 5. METAL
- 6. PLASTER
- 7. STONE
- 8. GLASS
- 9. IRON
- 10. CEMENT
- 11. SAND
- 12. GRAVEL
- 13. ASPHALT
- 14. DRIVEWAY
- 15. WALKWAY
- 16. FENCE
- 17. GATE
- 18. POLE
- 19. UTILITY
- 20. WATER
- 21. SEWER
- 22. GAS
- 23. ELECTRIC
- 24. TELEPHONE
- 25. RAILROAD
- 26. HIGHWAY
- 27. CANAL
- 28. LAKE
- 29. RIVER
- 30. MOUNTAIN
- 31. HILL
- 32. VALLEY
- 33. PLAIN
- 34. SWAMP
- 35. FOREST
- 36. POND
- 37. STREAM
- 38. CREEK
- 39. BRIDGE
- 40. TUNNEL
- 41. DAM
- 42. LOCK
- 43. CANAL
- 44. RAILROAD
- 45. HIGHWAY
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- 94. STREAM
- 95. CREEK
- 96. BRIDGE
- 97. TUNNEL
- 98. DAM
- 99. LOCK
- 100. CANAL

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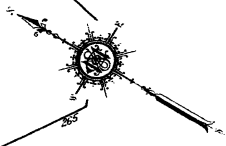
SANDORN MAP COMPANY
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 1921

CAMPTI
 LOUISIANA
 1921

SURVEYED BY
LOUISIANA FIRE PREVENTION BUREAU

WATER FACILITIES:
 Fire Dept. 2

CLONTON HOTEL
 2 CLONTON HOTEL



Scale of Feet.
 0 50 100 150

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Map Drawn
 AUG 23 '21
 Louisianan

MILL
 Located 1/2 Mile N.W. of P.O.

SCHOOL
 Primary School

High School

