

The Mississippi River and Kings Point Island

by James Earl (Sam) Price

Part I

From the Beginning until the Great Centennial Cut - Off of 1876.

The Mississippi River approached the Walnut Hills, where the city of Vicksburg now stands, from the northwest. Several miles out, it made an abrupt turn and flowed almost due north for a several miles. The big river impinged off the valley wall, where Vicksburg National Cemetery is now located, and turned southwest. The bend was known as the "Great Bend of the Mississippi." The current in the Great Bend was hard against the outside bank, (the Vicksburg side) very fast and filled with whirlpools, a steamboaters nightmare.

The Yazoo, a major tributary of the Mississippi River, drains much of the central and northern part of the state of Mississippi, including the Great Swamp - Mississippi Delta. The Yazoo impinges off the valley wall at Redwood, and flowed westward and then southward to its confluence with the Mississippi ten miles upstream from Vicksburg.

What we know today as the Mississippi Delta, with its flat rich farm lands (the most fertile soil in the world, perhaps), extending 200 miles from Vicksburg to Memphis and sixty miles wide at Greenville - Greenwood, was known as the "Great Mississippi Swamp." The Swamp would fill with water about Thanksgiving and drain about June. Much of the Great Swamp drained through the Yazoo River. This water was dark and foul smelling. The entire area was equated with death. The few settlers lived on the areas of higher elevations along the big river or the Yazoo and its tributaries. In this era, the area we know as Kings Point - Browns Point was the southern end of the Great Swamp. Desoto Point was across the big river in Louisiana.

A. The narrow point of land with the Mississippi River on the west and the Yazoo River on the East, both flowing southeastward, was known as Brown's Point. The Mississippi River was to "cut - off" Paw - Paw, or My Wife's Island, from the Louisiana side and it became attached to Mississippi along the upstream area of Brown's Point. Brown's Point was very narrow at one point, opposite what we know as Paw - Paw Island, it was less than one fourth mile across. At this place there was a low area in Browns' Point and the waters flowed from the Mississippi to the Yazoo and vice versa when either river filled.

B. The narrow point of land with the Yazoo on the west flowing southward and the Mississippi on the east flowing northward was known as King's Point.

C. The narrow point of land, attached to the Louisiana side, with the Mississippi on the west flowing northward and the Mississippi on the east flowing southwestward was know as Desoto Point. (#1)

A short distance downstream from the confluence of the Yazoo River and Steele Bayou was "Wrong End Bayou." Wrong End Bayou was an old river scar, one half mile wide, that extended southward from the Yazoo for several miles. It remained flooded for much of the year. As early as the 1820's, the timber companies used this slack water area to gather logs from the Steele Bayou, Sunflower and other Upper Yazoo River areas. These logs were made into rafts and floated to Natchez where they were manufactured into cypress lumber for the New Orleans market. (#2)

The soils in the Kings Point area are very fertile. Thus the settlers arrived early. These settlers included the “King Family” from which the point derived its name. (#3) The early homes were built facing the rivers, much as we build our homes, today, facing the street. Communication was by water. The few roads were impassable except a few of months during a dry fall. The mosquitoes and other biting insects were horrible.

Major floods have always created problems on Kings Point. The homes were constructed on stilts, some of them several feet above the ground. As the waters grew higher, the inhabitants moved up the stairs, or into the loft or attic. The furniture was placed on blocks. Tending the livestock, in these situations, presented big problems. In major floods many drowned. During the flood of 1898, the Ferry Mattie M was dispatched to Kings Point on April 09th, to bring the livestock to Vicksburg (#4).

During the Civil War, the Union gunboats would be traveling north when the Confederate gunner, at Vicksburg, made his first shot. The gunboat must travel around the Great Bend, under fire at all times, and pass the cannon at point blank range. The cannon located near National Cemetery were located, in 1863, much as they are today. The Union mortar boats tied up on the part of the Mississippi river that flowed northward and fired shells through the tree tops into the city of Vicksburg.

In July, 1876, the Mississippi cut through Desoto Point. It was named the “Great Centennial Cut - Off of 1876.” Thus Vicksburg was situated on the bank of a fast filling ox - bow lake.

Part II

The Great Centennial Cut - Off until the Completion of the Yazoo Canal in 1902

The cut off was accomplished July 04th, 1876, and the Mississippi River soon became much as it is today. Except during high water, it became necessary for Vicksburgers to meet the steamboats, that meant its life, at “Kleinston Landing.” Kleinston Landing was located a short distance upstream from the modern day Isle of Capri Casino - old Vicksburg water plant (#5). The water plant was located two miles south of town. The road maintenance must have been a nightmare. On July 20th, 1898, A L Pierce was making a survey of the road to Kleinston Landing. (#6) On August 20th, 1898, Alderman Joe Homburger advocates the construction of a first - class road from Vicksburg to Kleinston Landing (#7). The city of Vicksburg on September 07th, 1888, had seven teams and crews working on the road from Vicksburg to Kleinston Landing. (#8) Because of the fast silting up lake, the steamboats required a higher stage of water each year to reach what had become known as the old Vicksburg Landing.

As a result of the cut - off, Desoto Point became Desoto Island and moved from the Louisiana side to the Mississippi side of the River. The cut - off did not really effect Kings Point, however, Vicksburg was facing economic disaster. Enter the United States Corps of Engineers. It was decided to dredge a ditch from the Yazoo River to the old Great Bend of the Mississippi. Wrong End Bayou and other lakes and areas of low elevation were utilized. The new Yazoo River, today known, correctly, as the Yazoo Canal, immediately changed to the new course and began to flow past the old landing, putting Vicksburg back on a river.

The abandoned river bed began to fill. Today, one needs a guide to find it in many places (and the names King’s Point and Brown’s Point are interchangeable). A dike was placed across the ends of the western part of the ox - box lake, creating Centennial Lake. The name Desoto Point was changed to Desoto Island. (Note - Desoto Island is the land across the Yazoo Canal from Vicksburg City Front.)

Part III - 1902 to the Great Flood of 1973

It all worked amazingly well. The new canal had little effect on the residents of Kings' Point, they usually communicated by water, regardless. Centennial Lake became a fisherman's paradise "when the river is right." (#9) A ferry operated across the Yazoo Canal. The construction of the Yazoo Canal in 1902 and the Vicksburg Harbor Project in the 1960's destroyed much of the remnants of the Great Bend of the Mississippi. Also, during the 1960's what we know as the "Eagle Lake Road" was constructed from U S Highway #61 northwestward to Eagle Lake. It followed along the north side of the Yazoo River for approximately ten miles. It crossed Steele Bayou and passed opposite the old entrance of Wrong End Bayou, now the point where the Yazoo River turns southeastward. The Old River Lake, alongside the road in this area, is a part of the old bed of the Yazoo River.

During this era, changing land use caused the many people living on King's Point to move to the mainland.

Part IV - From 1973 to the Present, 1998

The Mississippi River began to fill ominously during the fall of 1972. (#10) The big river remained full all winter, thus with the arrival of the spring rains, the stage was set for the "Great Flood of 1973." A great disaster occurred. All the land in the Vicksburg area below 100 foot mean sea level, a huge area, flooded. Unbelievably, a small area on Desoto Island was above this elevation, the only land on Brown's Point, King's Point, or Desoto Island not undulated (#11). (This small area is located across the Yazoo Canal from the Vicksburg National Cemetery.)

Many changes took place under the floodwaters. A "Blue Hole" (#12) was established at the low, narrow area in Brown's Point. Thus today, when the Mississippi River is high and the Yazoo low, water enters Paw - Paw chute, passes through the blue hole, the willow brake (#13), the old river lake (#14), and into the Yazoo. When the Yazoo is high and the Mississippi low, the reverse occurs. This phenomena begins to happen when the Mississippi River is about eighteen feet on the Vicksburg gauge.

Soon after 1973, private interests constructed a dry weather, low water road from Eagle Lake Road to the North End of Kings Point Island. This road is located entirely on private property. Some years the rivers remain over the road bed, thus the only sure way to travel to King's Point, Brown's Point, or Desoto Island is either by boat or the King's Point Ferry.

Today, there is a movement to build an all weather road from the Eagle Lake Road southward along the bank of Paw - Paw Chute on Brown's Point to Kings Point Island. If this road is constructed, the blue hole in Brown's Point will be filled and the entire water situation described above will change (#15). Again!!

Today, there are no permanent residents on King's Point it is all farm land, timber land, and hunting clubs.

- #1. James Earl Price - Much of the information in this report is from my personal experience and knowledge.
- #2. Andrew Brown and Cypress Lumbering in the Old Southwest by John Hebron Moore, Louisiana State University Press.
- #3. See attached King Family by Mary Nell McMaster.
- #4. The Vicksburg Post of April 09th, 1998, the Old Post Files 100 years ago.

- #5. The Vicksburg Post, of July 20th, 1998, the Old Post Files 110 years ago.
- #6. The Vicksburg Post, August 12th, 1998, the Old Post Files 110 years ago.
- #7. The Vicksburg Post, August 20th, 1998, the Old Post Files 110 years ago.
- #8. The Vicksburg Post, September 07th, 1998, the Old Post Files 110 years ago.
- #9. The Mississippi River is at the proper stage, approximately 10 feet on the Vicksburg Gauge. My personal experience.
- #10. My personal experience.
- #11. My personal experience. I flew over it in a helicopter during the height of the Great Flood of 1973.
- #12. A “blue hole” is a hole eroded under the water when the Mississippi River is in flood. When the water covers the area there was no hole, when the water recedes the hole, often several acres in size, is there. The resulting lake is, usually, round and very deep, the depth making the water blue, thus the name “Blue Hole.”
- #13. A “willow brake” occurs when an abandoned river bed gathers enough silt to raise the elevation sufficiently for vegetation and trees to grow. The first crop of trees is willow on the lower elevations and cottonwood on the higher. The next crop of trees will be pecan, sycamore, etc. Willow brakes usually occur between the elevations of 15 - 25 feet on the United States Corps of Engineers, Vicksburg Gauge. This equates to 55 - 70 feet above sea level. Thus - Cottonwood trees usually occur at elevations of 70 plus feet above sea level.
- #14. When a cut - off occurs an “Old River Lake” is formed. The river, or in this situation, rivers, immediately throw a sand bar across the abandoned river bed and forms the lake. A ditch or “chute” forms on the down stream end so the lake will, to some extent, drain. Thus, the Mississippi River has filled the downstream end, or southwestward end, of this Old River Lake until the old Yazoo River bed can not be discerned in many places. The lake drains Northeastward into the Yazoo. There are many “Old River Lakes” in the Mississippi watershed.
- #15. The Vicksburg Post, Vicksburg, Mississippi, December 20th, 1998.

The Vicksburg Post
Vicksburg, Mississippi
Thursday, April 09th, 1998

The Old Post Files

Thursday, April 09th, 1998

110 years ago (1888) - a bank caves in and crushes the ankle of Noah Vandenburg. The Steamer L H Sargent arrives from Davis Bend. Total Cotton Receipts to date are 60,598 bales. =

100 years ago (1898) - Nellie Carroll is visiting Mrs. Joseph Jayne in Greenville. **Due to high water, the Steamer Ferry Mattie M goes to Kings Point for the cattle of Tom King.** John Pichetto advertises fruit and vegetables for Easter. = 90 years ago (1908) - Captain E Belcher of The Salvation Army tells of the Army's self - denial effort. Vicksburg defeats Monroe 5 to 0. Leo Koestler opens a bakery on Washington Street. Captain William Price is able to be out following an illness. = 80 years ago (1918) - Letitia Klein goes to A&M College to attend a hop. Elmo Rodenberger, Vicksburg Soldier in France, writes he is interest in war, in girls, and in the weather. Louis Switzer leaves for New York on a business trip. = 70 years ago (1928) - jack P Canizaro, Ole Miss Student, is here for Easter. Mr. and Mrs. Richard Jones and Children return from New York. The Gregory Concern starts a bus schedule between here and Memphis. = 60 years ago (1938) - The fifth anniversary of the establishment of CCC Camps in Vicksburg is observed with Mayor J C Hamilton and Judge Harris Dickson as speakers. Lieutenant George W Howard is elected president of the Vicksburg Chapter of the Reserve Officers Association. + 50 years ago (1948) - Circuit Clerk W J Foley issues a marriage license to Harry Cousins, Jr. and Lona Mae Rogers. Vernon Lockett, Deputy Sheriff, is ill. Corporal Charles Morris, Jr., of Vicksburg, is promoted to the rank of Sergeant.

James Earl Price
145 Roseland Drive
Vicksburg, Mississippi 39180
September 01st, 1999

Mr. Tommy Walker, Warren County Forester
Mississippi Forestry Commission
Warren County Court House
Vicksburg, Mississippi 39180

Dear Tommy,

Enclosed please find some information I have put together on They Call Royal Paulownia. During the Royal Paulownia boom from about 1980 to 1990, I probably had as much experience and dealing with the people that harvested and superintended the selling of Royal Paulownia. I have gathered every thing I can remember and put in this write up. I hope you find it interesting.

I had thought about donating a copy of it the Forestry School or the library at Mississippi State. I have not accomplished this mission mainly because I do not know how to go about it. If you think anyone would be interested, I would-be pleased to donate a copy with cost.

I am also enclosing a copy of The History of King's Point Island. I hope you find this interesting. I wrote these two items because it is something that someone may find interesting. I had a unique experience with the Royal Paulownia trees. The King's Point Island item was a little different. I have been in Vicksburg since 1955. When I arrived I could not understand all the changes in the Mississippi River, The Yazoo River, King's Point, and whatever. I have wondered about these changes since that time and finally figured them out. This is something few other people have figured out. I do not want this information to be lost with out me passing it on to someone else.

Sincerely

Sam P