

Jennings, Louisiana

As you travel toward Jennings, imagine yourself as one of the first settlers from the Midwestern wheat belt, riding the stagecoach to Louisiana in the 1890's. The anticipation that you feel is overwhelming when you gaze through the window of your railroad car - the beauty and magnitude of the country landscape in Louisiana is completely new and foreign to you.

Nothing that you have heard from friends and neighbors who had come to Jennings could have prepared you for your own experience. Your story is like those of true American pioneers, looking for something new and forging your own destiny. Maybe you could go out west and make your living, or maybe further south to the areas around the gulf. However, an old acquaintance of yours, Sylvester L. Cary, had become known as the 'Father' of the Jennings, and through his letters and conviction has convinced you of the opportunities that this particular part of the country could offer, so you find yourself in the heart of Louisiana ready to make your mark on this new territory.

Now, imagine that in the last few years you worked hard and have become a respected member in your community following in the footsteps of A. D. McFarlain, who was the first member of the Jennings community to farm rice, and become Jennings' first merchant, postmaster, brick maker, builder and carpenter. You have built a wonderful home with your own hands and are farming your own crops on land you bought with labor through years of hard work. The sustainability of rice production in this area has been keeping the economy viable.

Then suddenly in 1901, everything changes. A massive fire engulfs nearly the entire town and changes the community in every way you could imagine, destroying a large portion of Jennings. Seemingly, all hope for your hometown is lost and it seems like Jennings will never recover. Just as soon as the ashes die down one of your closest friends, Jules Clement, discovers natural gas while farming his rice fields.

Overnight the town of Jennings, Louisiana is booming again with oil production and new jobs, coming in everyday to help man the first oil refinery built in Louisiana. The economy in this region became one of the largest creating new jobs and expanded very quickly. Surprisingly; most places that experience a petroleum surge will usually bust very swiftly and fall off the map.

Jennings did not. Oil was merely a peak in the continuous growth that Jennings has experienced in its colorful history due to the agricultural economy keeping the area alive and thriving. Now, nearing old age, you look back on the ups and downs of this small city you call home and how even through railroad developments' rise and fall, the fire of 1901 and the cycle of oil production, your home has survived it all and will not be going anywhere.

Source(s):

Hoffman, E. J. (2009). A Guidebook To Amtrak's Sunset Limited. New Orleans to San Antonio.

Riser, L. R. (1948). The History of Jennings, Louisiana.

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