U. S. COAST AND GEODETIC SURVEY.

A. M. Thront, Superintendent.

State: Louisiana.

DESCRIPTIVE REPORT.

Topographic Sheet: No. 1822
& part of No. 1823.

Locality: Atchafalaya River.

1858.

Chief of Party:

C. H. Sinclair.
Descriptive Report for lower topographical Sheet (Sheet No. 1) of the "Atchafalaya River," from "Atchafalaya Bay" to "Sweet Bay Lake."

The general character of the shores of the "Atchafalaya River," one of the great delta branches of the Mississippi, is flat and of uniform breadth, from "Sweet Bay Lake" down to its mouth, a distance of ten miles (statute). The alluvial lands embraced by this section are of a boggy and marshy character, of a dark color, and being covered with a thick growth of wild cane or reeds, attaining a height of 12 to 30 feet, they bar the traversing of these lowlands, even where the ground is sufficiently hard to permit walking over. These wild cane fields are frequently burnt down to a great extent by hunters in the fall of each year, which procedure not only facilitates
the traveling across these plains, but as such
untouched are covered with a luxurious growth
of vegetation in the following spring, these are
afford good grazing for cattle and fine grass
for the browsing of the bounteous deer and other
game. Notwithstanding the general surpicious,
times of these vast lowlands, the rich allu-
imine soil of the Atchafalaya marshes could
be, by proper drainage, turned into fruitful,
artly fertile fields, as they are intersected by
a close network of sloughs or "Bayous," most
of which have a good depth for navigating
purposes and all being connected with the
"Atchafalaya River" they form the natural
means of communication.

After once piercing through the layer of root
and texture of vegetable matter ("floating log")
which covers this rich soil, it can be traver-
sed to any depth without offering much resis-
tance. Some few exceptions from the general
soft character are found in the area referred
to in this report, forming so called "Islands,
which isolated spots, however, cover but re-
latively small areas and as they can be
cultivated without taking recourse to deer, since they are without exception utilized by settlers. "Deci" and "Shell Islands" are the most prominent ones of these exceptionally hard-bottomed localities, their verdant trees and orange groves forming a pleasing contrast to the far extended marshes, covered with the yellow coloured wild cane; they owe their existence to an aggregation of clam shells with very little or no sand admixed. At "Shell Island" this bed of white shells appears on the surface, conditioning the white colour of the beach on the N. side of "Shell Island Inlet" and here also we find quite a little Knoll, some twenty feet high (about low water) composed solely of this calcareous material. This huge pile is of quite an age, judging from the presence of two venerable old moss-covered live oak trees, standing upon the same. It is generally be, lived, that these masses of shells, peculiar to marshes are the remains of often repeated meetings of Indian tribes at this place during their fishing expeditions to
the tower "Atchafalaya." There are many reasons leading to doubts, that nature alone have tended a hand towards making these calcareous deposits at the places in question and the supposition that buoys, acting Indian fishermen were instrumental in depositing these shells is strongly supported by the frequent findings of fragments of Indian pottery among the shells of the Shell Island Inlet beaches. The little Knoll (under the northernmost building) mentioned above is supposed to be a place of burial of Indians, as some well preserved human bones (humeri, femur, and tibia bones) are found among the shells on the N.W. slope of this pile, which does not appear to have ever been opened for a closer investigation in this respect.

At "Deer Island" the shells are visible on the surface in a few places only, the rest being covered, with a dark colored earth similar to that found in the adjoining marshes. This circumstance is probably due to a very thorough and prolonged cultivation.
At "Hell Island" the once large and well yielding grove of orange trees has been destroyed by frost in the past decade (at which time nearly all the grove in this section of Louisiana suffered severely by the unprecedented cold weather). Still there are some fruit bearing quinces and peach trees there at the present time, while a new grove of orange trees, quite recently planted, seems to promise well for the future. The trees flanking the shores of the "Atchafalaya" (indicated on the chart) are willows, live oak, honey locust and ash trees, the first predominating on the lower part of the river. Sand is rarely seen along the shores of this part of the river and found only in a small quantity at a place opposite "Fordon Point" (f. w. of "Double") indicated on the W. side of the "Atchafalaya" on the chart.

"Deer" and "Hell Islands" are inhabited by fishermen, the next dwelling above these places is at "Ratscliffe," these people depend on "Morgan City" to dispose of their
fish catches.

"Shell Island" is provided with a tower or lookout, built by the "Morgan Steam Ship Co." and it is connected with the company's telegraph office at "Brashear" or "Morgan City" by a single wire, the main direction of which telegraph line is indicated by some poles (mostly iron on account of the prairie fires) located on the No 1. Up to the early spring of this year there was a telegraph operator stationed at "Shell Island", whose duty it was to announce the arrival of every Ste. belonging to the "Morgan S. S. Co." communicating to "Morgan City" the character and amount of their cargo in order to have a gang of "Row boat" in readiness for use and re-loading the vessel at her arrival in "Morgan City".

The shoreline given on the chart is the mean low water line and the wetlands indicated outside of this, consists of a growth of "Cattail", sufficiently dense to make it difficult for a small boat to be
forced through the same up to the shore.

The "skags" shown on that Chart are visible at low water and when seen in number they give a general idea of the extent of mudbanks. The numerous "rocks" locat

ed on the chart are remains of old bars, yet, which in the course of time have been carried down stream from the upper River, (by freshets and other ca

uses) where numbers of these are tied up annually, after their contents have been disposed of, and where they are held for sale, having a value only as old lumber.

Whenever the shore presents a very ragged and jagged contour it is a sign of its being gradually eaten away by the constant and unrestrained influence of waves and ebb tide, the shore being generally so low at such places as to be partly submerged by flood tide, especially when aided by a favorable direction of the wind.

The three lower "bush staks" in question (W. of "Cut Off Bayou") are on the E. side.
but very near the edge of the main channel. The lower two of the next three above these (near and S.W. of "Swamp Pt.") indicate the W. edge of the channel, while the upper one of these three is S. of the entrance channel to "Bayou Hatter" and E. of the main-line channel. These stakes are characterized by a tuft of palmetto leaves fastened on their tops and they are counterparts to those used by the Morgan & Co. to stake out their ship channel through the "Atchafalaya Bay."

Most of the other stakes located on the chart have been erected by fishermen at various times, and some few have been placed by loggersmen as a warning of shallow places.

Whenever palmetto growths are indicated, they are a criterion of a hard and more elevated riverbank, than the general river, tiny pieces of the lower Atchafalaya, still the hard character does not extend inland, but only forms as narrow plies along the river banks at public places. Atop it is a swell
observed fact that these wild cane marshes grow softer and more humid with the ice, creating distance from the shoreline.

J. H. Lemon,
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