

# Opinions

June 9, 2021, Catahoula News Booster

Page 3A

## Progress report on the garbage

By: Leo Chappelle

I don't know what it is about the middle of December, but you revolutionary types seem to have a thing for that month when it comes to starting trouble. On December 16, 1773 the Sons of Liberty protested a tax on tea and dumped a boatload of it in Boston Harbor. Then on December 14, 2020 the Catahoula Parish Police Jury passed a tax for sanitation service (picking up the garbage) and people have been dumping their tax bills ever since.

After submitting my monthly request to the Police Jury office for a report on the new \$12 per month sanitation taxes collected for us by JCP, Inc., we have finally received a version of that report with enough information in it to understand approximately what the real response to this tax has been.

The parish received \$16.63 more in May than in March. Progress, I suppose. I can't explain that odd number, \$16.63, though. There seems to be no late fee charge. The monthly tax per household is \$12 and JCP, Inc. gets \$1.75 of that so none of those numbers divide evenly into the amounts collected, but whatever. All of this is a little mysterious anyway, especially the part about whether this tax was legally instituted in

the first place.

Canaan Cotten, who does such an outstanding job for the Town of Jonesville when reporting on JCP, Inc.'s collections of their water and sewer service charges, prepared this report. It's sufficiently detailed to be useful.

First, there were 2,466 bills sent at the end of April to collect \$29,592 in May. There were, however, only 1,754 payments made, or about 71%. Well over one fourth of you scofflaws didn't pay. And it could actually be worse than that because the number of payments (that 1,754 figure) could include multiple payments on the same account.

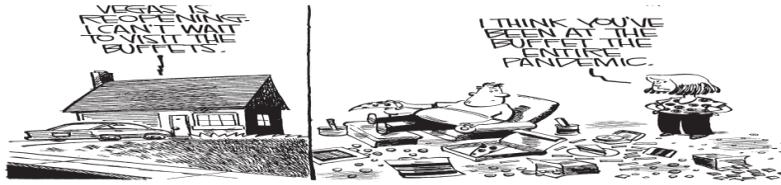
As of now, 869 of the 2,466 accounts subject to collection are past due. That's over 35% of all the accounts that are not being paid on time or perhaps not even being paid at all. It would appear that either the people have not been sufficiently educated about the tax or else they are in revolt. If the water in Black River is the color of tea, we may know the reason.

It has been my view that this tax should have been submitted to the people in a referendum rather than passed by the Police Jury on the presumption of its authority to do so. Referenda

tend to do very well at the polls and I think that the people may have had to swallow hard, but they probably would have passed it. I don't know about that of course and now the calculations are different.

Nonetheless, it is my view that this tax should be repealed the same way it was passed, and the past due amounts should be forgiven by the ordinance that repeals the tax. Then the question could go to the people as it should have in the first place. Refunding the money that has already been paid would be the right thing to do, but I don't know how practical that would be because \$1.75 of every payment would have had to go to the collection agency, JCP, Inc. That's a sunk cost we can't get back. So, instead of making money, this little episode would actually end up costing the parish money.

If Ordinance 2975 ever were repealed, there most probably would be no refunds at all, just a bitter taste left in everyone's mouth. I'm not sure what real choices other than repeal are available for this failed tax. At least we would have collected money to put toward paying for a referendum election.



## JEB Tales

### Hard Workers

Recently as Shirley and I arrived at the Duty Ferry landing on the east side of the Ouachita, there was six vehicles getting off the ferry. Most of them were trucks. As we got on the barge, we were accompanied by five other vehicles going to the west landing. As we went up the road to Highway 124, I counted thirty-two vehicles waiting to get on the ferry.

Seeing all this traffic made me realize "Boy those boys on the Duty Ferry are working hard these days." It made me think back to many years ago when the new ferry landing was first put into operation on the west side of the river. It had been a much longer ferry ride when the west side landing was several hundred yards up the Ouachita, taking about fifteen minutes each way. As we were riding across the river, the old deckhand complained, "They are treating us like the Egyptians treated the Israelites!" "What do you mean", I asked? He said, "The Israelites had to get their own straw to make the bricks but had to make the same quote of bricks as before when the Egyptians had provided the straw."

The old timer had a point, it now takes about two or three minutes for the Duty Ferry to cross the Ouachita. The deckhands and the captains are really working hard.

Now I would like to introduce some of these deckhands and captains. First, Captain Shelby Montpelier, who has come out of retirement to help keep the "Duty" running. Captain Drew Storey, who once worked fifty-seven days without a day off. Captain Thomas Rails, who has worked many days while he was ill. The deckhands are Greg Basset, Christ Barnes, Todd Insko and Dylan Smith.

Did you ever wonder why the Duty Ferry only charges one way? Several years back when the state of Louisiana was facing some hard times, it was proposed that several of the state ferries be closed. The Duty Ferry was on top of the list. Our Senator, Mr. Jim Brown and State Representative Mr. David I Patten sprung into action and a meeting was set up in Lafayette. Since I was from Enterprise, I was asked to attend the meeting. One of the first proposals made was to charge a fee of one dollar both ways. A State Senator from South Louisiana jumped up and said, "When a Cajun he go out on Saturday night, he spends all his money to pass a good time! He not have no money left to go back home no!"

It was then agreed that the ferry fee would only be collected one way.

Another interesting story about the Duty Ferry took place while we still owned Jim Bowie's Relay Station. Our State Representative, Mr. Leland Kenny and his wife "Miss Loretta" ate with us quite often. Miss Loretta's favorite singer was Nathan Roark. One Saturday night at about 9:50 p.m. as they were leaving, Nathan started singing Gene Watson's "Farewell Party". Miss Loretta stopped at the door. Representative

Kenny said, "Come on Loretta we are going to miss the ferry!" Miss Loretta said, "I don't care if we miss the boat, that's my favorite song and I'm going to hear it!"

They missed the boat and had to take the long way home. The next week the Duty Ferry started staying open until 10:30 p.m. on Friday and Saturday nights.

Now I would like to share with you an article written by one of my newspaper men, Mr. Wiley Hilburn entitled Duty ferry makes a long trip in a few brief minutes.

The delta roads on both sides of the Ouachita River in this part of Northeast Louisiana are straight and swift. Swooping into places like Grayson and Holum and Rosefield on the west and Liddieville and Jigger and Holly Grove on the east.

But Louisiana Highway 559 leaps off the ponderous bow of Route 165 at Columbia like a dusty green arrow. It flies past the McKeithen Plantation, parrels of the Ouachita right up to its edge and knives through fresh plowed soybean fields enroute to its target and destination: the ferry at Duty.

It is a free ferry, right where the arrow of 559 splashes into the river and it's the only way across-a time warp, and almost literal gap in the river of history, a Ouachita ride on the waters of days forever gone.

The W. Prescott Foster, an ancient gray and white river tug of Baton Rouge vintage, hauls the barge across the river. The W. Prescott Foster heaves and struggles at the ramp, painting black smoke in the strain. But once in deeper waters the tug moves the four vehicles two cars and two pickup trucks, with a breast stroking ease.

And we can look into the depths of the Ouachita, an obscure, bottom-of-the-Coke-bottle green this cool fall afternoon and let the river passage float us back—back to the cotton instead of soybeans, to old flags and blue bonnets.

It only lasts a moment, that ferry passage, but there is sense of history, of something lost again, in the crossing—a feeling the children, caught only in the wonder of the ride, seem to miss entirely. Perhaps it is only a mood and a moment, and it passed so fast.

The Duty ferry done, we glide through Enterprise and on to Harrisonburg. Just outside this place, we place, we climb out of the flatlands into a high stand of pine trees—the air freshens—and falling away sharply below is Harrisonburg.

There it sits quietly, a church steeple and the columned steeple and the columned Catahoula Parish Courthouse, in the embrace of the Ouachita—which, flanked by soybean fields and fringed by willows, meanders on toward Jonesville.

We stop for cold drinks and conversation at a small Harrisonburg filling station. A snowed-haired observer taps his cane on a bench outside. Then the road is reversed, because the two little girls are tired and not looking outside

## By John Ed Bartmess, Jr.

anymore, and because the old man driving wants to ride the Duty Ferry one more time.

The kids are reading comic books as the W. Prescott Foster pulls us across the river a second time this afternoon. Soon we will ride the 559 arrows toward Interstate 20 and home.

But the gentle current of the Duty Ferry has somehow taken us back home, across a great river, one more time. And that passage at Duty even though the children don't know it now, is ever so brief.

The column above was rewritten from its original publication in 1977 when it was learned that the Duty Ferry was still in operation. One of the reasons I wrote about the ferry was that, to my sorrow, the state was about to close it down as a dinosaur in the modern world and I didn't like it. Some things don't change, thank God.

. This is a reprint from the Shreveport Times.



Pictured above from left to right is Greg Basset and Captain Drew Storey

**Editors Note:** The opinions, beliefs and viewpoints expressed by various authors do not necessarily reflect the opinions, beliefs and viewpoints of the Catahoula News Booster or any employee thereof. The Catahoula News Booster is not responsible for accuracy or completeness, and will not be liable for any errors, or omissions. All opinions are provided on an as-is basis and have not been edited in any way.

## Catahoula News Booster

The Catahoula News Booster is the Official Journal of the Town of Jonesville, Village of Harrisonburg, Village of Sicily Island, Catahoula Parish School Board, Catahoula Parish Police Jury, and Tensas Basin Levee Board. POSTMASTER: Send form 3579 to Box 188, Jonesville, Louisiana, 71343. Periodical class postage paid at Jonesville, Louisiana. Kim Cloessner, Publisher Identification Number is SECDUSPS556-720. Published every Wednesday. Subscription rates: By mail in Catahoula Parish-\$25.00 annually, elsewhere in Louisiana-\$30.00 annually, out-of-state-\$35.00 annually Catahoula News-Booster, 103 3rd Street, P.O. BOX 188, Jonesville, LA 71343. 318-339-7242