

SATURDAY, MAR. 18, 1899

THE RESULTS OF THE FREEZE

BITS OF FORMER HISTORY



Cyprien Buras

A correspondent of the Protector went from the upper line of the parish as far down as Venice lately on the west bank of the river and noted the effects of the freeze carefully.

The plant cane as a rule is very good and the late beautiful weather has enabled a splendid lot of field work to be done. The first year stubble cane has stood the cold well and already here and there sprigs of cane are showing, especially where the stubble has been well shaved. The second year stubble, where it was badly hilted up last year, has been hurt, but by stringing out the seed cane and fertilizing well a fair crop of cane will be made.

The large forces of the Myrtle Grove Planting Company and Magnolia Planting Company have put the fields on the many places worked by these companies in beautiful order.

Further down, on both sides of the river, preparations have been made to put in large rice crops, and the late supply of water that ne plus ultra of a river rice crop has never seemed better assured. The truck crops have been thrown very much backward. Onion crops have recovered rapidly, not so cabbage, potatoes and cucumbers and the early vegetables of which this parish ships about 50,000 barrels a year. But the orange groves are a spectral ruin. Where mile after mile the glossy green leaves and lovely blossoms gladdened the eyes, while the perfume of their odors filled the whole air, they stand sear dead ghosts of their former luxuriance and beauty.

Your correspondent did not see in the whole orange belt a single living sweet orange tree, which had been exposed above the ground during the freeze. Think of it, ten thousand times twenty thousand dead trees, drying up, with all the soft air of spring and beauty of early verdure around and about them. It gives one the heart ache to see it.

But how sweet the uses of adversity. Though unprecedented for over two generations, this cold spell has taught the orange growers a salutary lesson. Probably five to ten thousand trees were saved by throwing up earth several feet high around the trunk some distance above where the sweet orange bud had been budded on the sour stock or mother. This saved both the trunk and sweet bud up to the surface of the ground, and the top being cut off at the ground, the upper sweet trunk will rapidly produce a good bearing tree, otherwise the sour orange stump or stock will shoot up again and have to be re-budded. Thousands of trees have been ordered and ere two years have past the lower parish will have probably one hundred thousand orange trees again.

Your correspondent noted one place below Fort Jackson belonging to Mr. Tony Commander of New Orleans, where two thousand new trees are being put out.

Your correspondent had quite a talk with Mr. Cyprien Buras over 83 years of age and who has lived near the Jump, or Venice, all his life. Mr. Buras who is a direct descendant of the Buras after whom the large Buras settlement above was named, took the results of the freezing of his orange grove philosophically, and will soon have other trees, if he can get them, in their places.

"This is not the first time," he said, "It has happened. My father Hubert Buras who died 50 years ago at 80 years of age, told me many times that in 1789, now one hundred and ten years ago, that he was living at Pointe-a-la-Hache and that the weather was so cold and so much ice floated down the river that he could leap from piece to piece of ice all the way across. He particularly mentioned a large tree that had become wedged in between the large blocks of ice and floated down the river with its top partly in the air. My father moved down to the Jump later and lived a little below where I live now.

"A few years before I was born, he and his family nearly lost their lives in the storm of 1812. He and my uncles often told me, when I was a little boy, of how they saved themselves. In August 1812, it began to blow from the northeast at night and the wind raged with such terrible force that the sea on the other side of the river

swept across the land into the river and began to flood our side. My father got lines out and tied his house to the stumps of four large trees. By the next night the wind was howling like ten thousand devils and his large lugger was anchored by him near his house, in which his people all got safely. The lugger was anchored with a chain to which the anchor was tied with a rope. Finding the lugger was sinking, by the bow going down, my father pulled himself hand over hand under the water with a knife or hatchet in his teeth and cut the rope. The lugger was swept back behind the large cypress trees, which were bent over with the fury of the wind. He succeeded in tying the boat to the branches, but was beaten black and blue by the branches, the clothing he had on becoming perfectly green with the sap and gum from the branches. The trees were blown over but were held by the roots and in their shelter his family were saved, but his house and all he had were swept away.

“A very large number of people were drowned in that storm. My father’s sister Mrs. Fontenelle and all her children were lost. At Philibert Dennis’, just above where Fort St. Philip stands, thirty people had taken refuge in his house, which was considered very strong, the lower part being of brick. This house was knocked down and all were drowned. One woman further down, who could swim, was washed from the other side of the river to this shore and was found in the fork of a tree more dead than alive.”

Mr. Buras is a very truthful man and these incidents may interest those who think that the climate is changing.¹

1 *Plaquemines Protector, March 18, 1899*