

Louisiana Sugar Industries

As the Acadian immigrants arrived from 1765–1785, they received land grants from the Spanish government. A provision of these land grants was that those residents living along bayous and rivers were to build and maintain a levee on their property.

Etienne de Bore was granted Laurel Valley Plantation in 1775. Laurel Valley is the largest nineteenth century sugar plantation complex still surviving. In 1795, Etienne de Bore developed the vacuum pan process for granulating sugar. This established the sugar industry in Louisiana, and increased the demand for agricultural land.

Here in Lafourche Parish, we have our own sugar empire. The Raceland factory began operating as a then modern, large sugar factory in 1892. It operated under the name of Leon Godchaux Company, Limited. The L.G. logo and plaques of 1892 and 1894 are still in place on some of the old buildings.

In the early operations, Raceland was grinding about 100,000 tons of cane per year. Increasing equipment size and type over the years in the 1930's; 300,000 tons in 1961; 400,000 tons in 1976; 500,000 tons in 1981 and can process over 600,000 tons of cane per year today.

During the one hundred years that Raceland factory has been a central factory, it has led the state in tons on cane ground per year for thirty–five of these years. Most recent was the 1990 harvest season where 570,000 tons were ground.

The name of the company changed to Godchaux Company, Inc. in 1914 and to Godchaux Sugars, Inc. about 1929. The number of sugar cane processing factories in Louisiana has changed from 746 in 1889 to 20 today.

The Leon Godchaux family continued to run the Raceland factory until 1956. At which time, after a prolonged workers strike at the Reserve Refinery, the family sold some of its assets. One of the sales was the Raceland mill and farm lands to Gulf States Land and Industries. In 1958, The South Coast Corporation, the largest Louisiana sugar company, purchased the Raceland factory and its farmland. Under the South Coast Corporation ownership, many major improvements were made allowing the factory to eliminate one of the two grinding tandems so that all cane



processed could be handled on one large modern tandem beginning in 1964. Improvements and expansions continued during the late 60's and during the 70's.

In 1979, The South Coast Corporation, a subsidiary of Jim Walters Corporation, sold its holding to a group of three investors. In 1980, these investors divided the South Coast holdings. The Raceland factory became known as South Coast Sugars, Inc. During the early 1980's, the company installed a dual can core sampling system, a bagasse reclamation system, and a 2,000 cubic foot vacuum. The Raceland factory continued to increase its capacity in the 1980's. The daily grinding rate increased from 6,000 tons in 1979 to 8,272 tons in 1990.

The Raceland factory continues in operation after having gone through floods, depressions, world wars, hurricanes, cane disease, and bad economic periods. The latest of their major obstacles was the near closure of the Raceland Mill in 1991.

In 1991, South Coast Sugars ran into financial difficulties. The Raceland factory was saved from being closed permanently when Savannah Foods & Industries, Inc. of Savannah, Georgia, purchased certain assets of South Coast Sugars, Inc., mainly the Raceland Mill. The name was officially changed to Raceland Sugars, Inc. In its first year of operation under Savannah, \$3.5 million of new capital items have been approved and are being installed. These include a 150,000-pound boiler, complete automation of the pan floor, centrifugals, and a 1,300 horsepower seven-foot mill for the 1993 harvest season. Also, for its farm operations two of the most modern two-row cane loaders, harvester, transloader wagons, and cultivation equipment have been put into use.

This factory and its related operations have provided jobs, livelihoods, and security for many people and families over the last one hundred years. Raceland Sugars, Inc. goal is to again lead the state in cane ground and sugar per ton recovered.

