

FACTS or FEELINGS

It all started back in the late 1800's, it was simpler times, but the way of life was harder, much harder. I can't even comprehend how difficult those days were trying to survive without electricity, along with all the comforts we enjoy today.

A group of men set out to make a better way of life for themselves that would change the region we live in today. Acquiring some 1.5 million acres in southwest Louisiana, Jabez Watkins built the Watkins Railroad that terminated in Manchester and made the northward track to Kansas City. He began offering discounts to ride his rail to bring people to this area. He hired people throughout the Midwest to solicit the advantages of living in what we now call home.

In 1884 Professor Seaman A Knapp stepped down as the president of Iowa State College in Ames, Iowa; and he, along with Professors P.H. Philbrick and Alexander Thomson (Husband of Maria Watkins, sister to Jabez Watkins) made their way to what is now known as the Town of Iowa, Louisiana.

The founding fathers migrated to this region from northern states and most notably the state of IOWA and more specifically the Town of AMES, IOWA (who lost some 1000 residents in that area). Knapp, Philbrick and Thomson were not just the founders of the Town of Iowa, Louisiana, but also Calcasieu Parish. We can look to the west and see the town of Vinton or to the south of Iowa, an area called Manchester which shares a town name located in the State of Iowa. The influence of these early settlers created change that laid the foundation for the area we now call home.

Change has never been embraced by those who choose not to lean into hardships, as difficulties, procedures and habits are all required to accomplish change. Prior to the arrival of Professor Seaman A. Knapp, rice farming as we know it, didn't exist. As a learned and studied man Professor Knapp, through Jabez Watkins was allocated thousands of acres to study and develop the process of rice farming, and as history recounts, he also needed a place for the hogs he brought with him when he migrated. To this day stands a building on the campus of Louisiana State University bearing the name Seaman A. Knapp.

ACTS OF LOUISIANA, 1840 ACT NO. 72., "To create a New Parish to be called the Parish of Calcasieu". Prior to December 31, 1912, Calcasieu was divided into ten wards. On January 1, 1913, in accordance with ACTS 6,7 & 8 Calcasieu was then divided into four parishes, namely, Calcasieu, Allen, Beauregard and Jefferson Davis. This area was truly a regional area, a region today that has become a diamond in the rough.

From an article by the Ames Tribune and Times and published in Ames, Iowa on September 11, 1926. "Prominent men I have met", the author says this about Dr. Knapp. "The broad statesman, the profound scholar, the zealous reformer, the men who organize liberty and found republics, who plan moral revolutions and lead the forces, have positive convictions. They believe in mankind, in the great future, in the enduring character of God." And he closes out the paragraph with this; "It does not require any great strength of intellect to destroy or to doubt".

Here in the middle of 2024, we are witnessing an overwhelming amount of destruction and doubt, destruction of the moral fiber - that develops respect for our fellow man. Doubt is like a cloud over every elected official meant to create chaos. It's the preferred tool of those who yell the loudest to fill the position they are creating doubt about. Has complacency gained a foothold in our everyday lives? Have we as a people become desensitized by facts and truth? Are we guilty of individual self-preservation so much so, that we no longer practice our God given rights?

Our ability to move this town, region, or our state forward shouldn't rely on a D or an R beside your name. Our constitution, that has been thoroughly trampled, still gives us the right to vote; are you using this right that others fought and died to give you? Have we as a society become so cynical that we choose not to vote because we say, "it doesn't matter anyway"? Those who choose not to speak facts or involve themselves in the community, are allowing those who wish to destroy to have free reign.

Do we further choose to assume all elected officials are corrupt; so, we hurl insults, innuendo's, blast our thoughts through social media? Does the word communication or discussion in our world today have different meanings than in the past? How have we as a society gotten to the point that a majority wish to be a victim, and then make it an overriding political theme in hopes that elected officials reverse decisions or suffer a verbal public lynching?

I do agree there are very few statesmen in our country today. Those who have a vision to help the majority can't because there is disdain for anyone that is in public office. It has taken decades to bring our country into this political morass and blame should be placed at the feet of those that have ushered it in. However, there are those who do it for the right reason, to bring about the change needed, or correct corruption. It is very telling today that the general populace gives little time for change, but the last I checked there is not a drive-thru at Town hall. The amount of bureaucracy that surrounds all municipalities does not allow for instant gratification. Time always tells the truth about a man and his character, and the social justice mobs do not care for character. They sow doubt to try and destroy those helping their fellow man, albeit with a hidden agenda, they want to ascend to a position of power to facilitate their social agenda.

Recently, speaking with many of the other Mayors in the Parish, I am encouraged to see that when it comes to doing what is necessary for the residents we represent, we all want the same outcome. To do what is best for our town and residents. It is my hope that we as Mayors of this parish can begin to work together so that we can help effect a better quality of life for all residents of Calcasieu Parish. Through this effort we can then begin to help the entire region of Southwest Louisiana, then the State.

However, I must take off my rose-colored glasses knowing that we can't do it alone. It will take responsible, respectful discussions that are void of individual feelings. Facts, and only facts should dictate the discussions. To understand that between perception and inflammatory comments, it is difficult to find the truth. However, reality and facts can only produce truth. We see our elected officials making decisions, and you have a right to question the decision. It is possible to do so without assuming the worst, without making it a confrontation, without making a public spectacle. It's time to find respect for those who have chosen to serve all people and not just the few. Remember, perhaps one of you reading this article will become an elected official. Would you prefer a yelling match, or a civil discussion.

I am reminded of Matthew 7: 12, "In everything, do to others what you would have them do to you." I implore you to consider the life of Dr. Knapp as an example. And in conclusion I will provide a quote from the article in the Ames Tribune and Times. "This great life has gone out with only a slight recognition in the newspaper press, so strangely are the real values of life misinterpreted. The nation is poorer for the loss of Dr. Knapp, but the plain people, hundreds of thousands of them, are richer materially, mentally, spiritually, because of his missionary work on and for the land. May other hands grasp the torch that has dropped and carry his unfinished work forward with ever growing light and power and with ever increasing blessing to the people he so nobly served!"

Respectfully, let's all reflect on the fact the only shoes we walk in are our own. Remember facts do not care about our feelings. When we are on our death bed will we only look back at regrets, or on what we did to help our fellow man. As I have said many times over since I have taken office "It's not about me or now, its about the Town of Iowa and its future." This saying will now become "It's not about me or now, it's about the future of the Town of Iowa and the region." Please begin to reach out to your elected officials via emails or phone calls, leaving words of encouragement so that we can make this region the crown jewel of Southwest Louisiana. Become involved in the community or volunteer, help stop the destruction and doubt that has permeated politics over the last 4 decades.

It is now time that we become the "pioneers" of this rapidly changing world we live in today. And to learn respect so that we all can move forward to make our communities better. May God richly bless you and your household!

Douglas Neal Watkins

Mayor Town of Iowa, Louisiana