

Beginning Steps ...

When W. A. Casler, newly appointed construction supervisor, arrived in Natchitoches on June 26, 1931, he must have wondered what was ahead. The weather was undoubtedly hot and humid as it usually is at that time of year, and he and Glenn Leach, Chief of the Division of Fish Culture, were standing on nearly 100 acres of plantation land recently purchased by the U.S. Government. Looking at several old structures on the property, some that could be salvaged and others that would have to be torn down, it sunk in that he would be responsible for transforming the area in to a national fish hatchery, a daunting task to say the least.

The following morning, he and the Chief started laying out ponds and measuring for the construction of a pump house. That evening he was making proposals for hiring the necessary workers and getting the equipment needed to accomplish his mission. The following day was more of the same. By June 29th, just three days later, he was at the Natchitoches Chamber of Commerce with his proposals. That same afternoon he laid out the site for the pump house, which would be used to transfer water from Cane River Lake into the ponds.

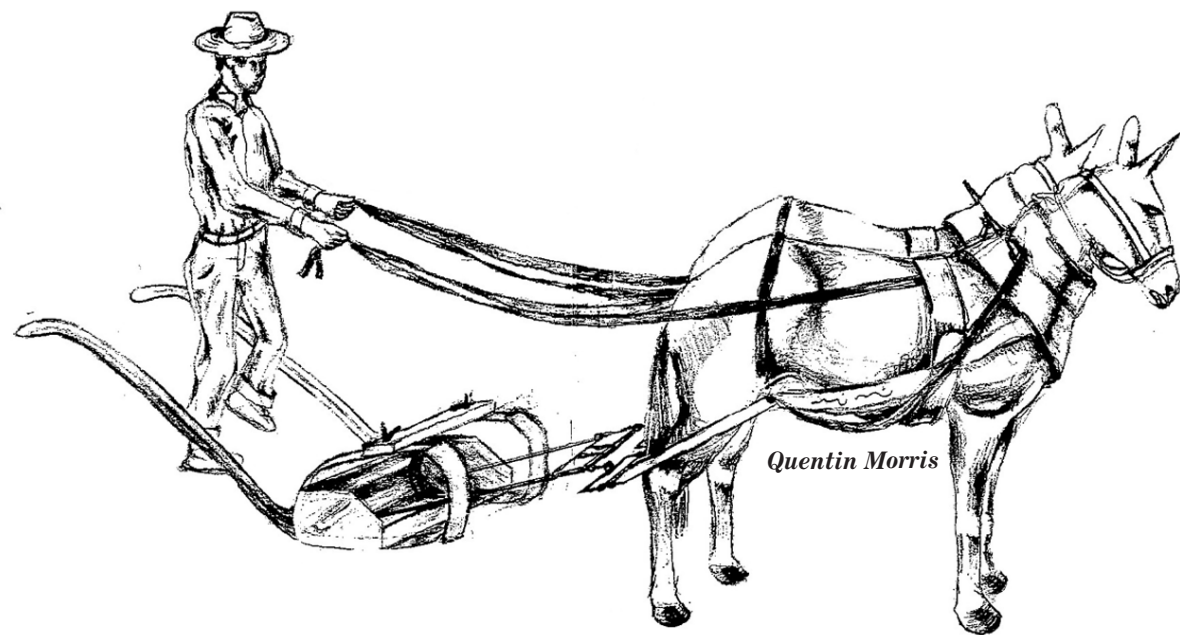
The log of June 30th states, "Commenced work excavating for embankments, picking up fence wire, tearing down old buildings, repairing old shop for temporary office and other preparatory work." From that time on, with the



1930's Pond Construction

exception of Sundays and holidays, Casler worked with the crews and community until he was transferred in December of that same year.

Pond construction crews were local farmers who had mule teams and fresnoes. They were paid \$5.00/day for the teams and drivers. Temporary workers hired by the station manager were paid \$1.50/day. Based on his expenditure accounts, Casler stated during the first six



Quentin Morris



Original Holding House from 1951 Annual Report

months of work, the hatchery increased the local economy by \$38,841.04 through such items as payroll for temporary labor, mule team hires, and purchases from local businesses. Translated to today's economy, that is \$250,000! And that did not include other workers like carpenters, painters, and plumbers who were paid by government entities such as the Federal Emergency Relief Act (FERA) and the Works Project Administration (WPA). These men also spent their wages in Natchitoches and the surrounding area.

Many of the merchants dealing with the hatchery are still in business today. Among the first purchases listed in the accounts log are hand tools from S. & H. Kaffie (now Kaffie-Frederick) for \$24.70, and a 1931 Model A Ford truck from Natchitoches Motor Company, Ltd., (now Natchitoches Ford Lincoln Mercury) for \$872.54. There is also an expenditure of 75¢ to Cubb Farley for sharpening shovels!



1932 garage

The Next Step...

In early September W. A. Casler was joined by C. H. (Swamp) Walker. The powers in Washington, D.C., that assigned him to be the first Hatchery Superintendent could not have selected a better man. Though he too must have wondered what he was getting in to, he jumped right into the job, working seven days a week except for brief vacations. On December 15, 1931, Swamp Walker took over his role as Superintendent and W. A. Casler moved on.

As the new Superintendent Walker worked along with and supervised all the carpenters, plumbers, electricians, and other tradesmen hired to build the hatchery. And during



The 1956 garage is now used as a sturgeon culture building

the same time period, he took all Sunday duties and could often be found sanding, varnishing, painting, and installing lights in the cottage that was to be his quarters and office. From the time he arrived in Natchitoches until he was transferred six and a half years later, Swamp Walker was on the job "twenty four/seven."

During this time, the depression years, he coordinated with the various government programs that supplied labor for building and expanding the hatchery facility. A jack of all trades, he ran all the levels and staked out all the ponds that were to be built by the WPA workers. Day in and day out he sweated, worried, and labored as he transformed the old plantation property from flat farming land to a series of ponds ready for production.



Main entrance from Highway 1 in the 1962 Annual Report

Fish at last...

In July of 1932 the L. J. Taylor farm pond was going dry. It was seined and 25 buffalo and crappie were recovered for stocking ponds. Swamp Walker began filling ponds and all one-acre ponds were filled by the end of August. A lake was drained in Mound, LA, and 200 adult bream, along with 2,000 sub-adult bream were saved. Black Lake and Bayou Pierre were also seined and 93 largemouth bass were caught and transferred to the hatchery. Walker caught another 41 bass and 25 bream from Cane River Lake. In September, another 100 fish were taken for stock.



Distributing Fish in 1969



Early crew and entrance sign

The fruits of Walker's labors were evident on January 26, 1933, when 25,000 bluegill were delivered to Chapman Lake and 10,000 to Collins Lake. In addition to the stocking of public waters, private fish ponds were also stocked. The first delivery to a farm pond applicant was made on June 6, 1933, when 300 bass went to B. E. Collins' farm pond. These were the first fish stocked in to public and private waters by the Natchitoches National Fish Hatchery, beginning a legacy that has extended 75 years.



Seining ponds in the 1960's

Natchitoches

National Fish Hatchery

75th Anniversary

Natchitoches
National Fish Hatchery
615 South Drive
Natchitoches, LA 71457
318/352 5324
<http://natchitoches.fws.gov>

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
1 800/344 WILD

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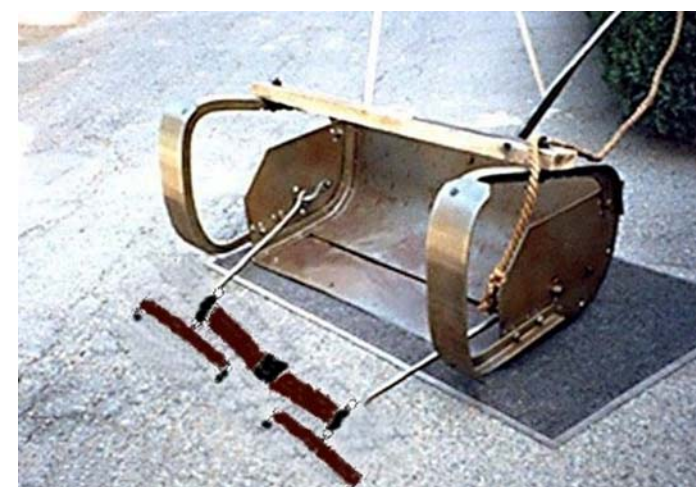


Biologist Brett Hortman with adult paddlefish from Red River

The hatchery would like to offer a special thanks to volunteers Ron and Nell Harwood. Without their tireless efforts to research the history of the hatchery, this brochure would not have been possible.



Park Ranger Rhonda Clay with a school group



Fresno Scraper

Over the years the hatchery has been involved with the raising of over sixteen species of fish including inland and riverine species. Today, the hatchery still works with largemouth bass, bluegill, and channel catfish. The hatchery also raises striped bass, paddlefish, and pallid sturgeon. And two additional species...alligator snapping turtles and the Louisiana pearlshell mussel...will be added to the species list by 2006. To date, the hatchery has stocked over 164,000,000 fish and continues its legacy of serving the public and advancing the field of fish culture.

Our mission is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.



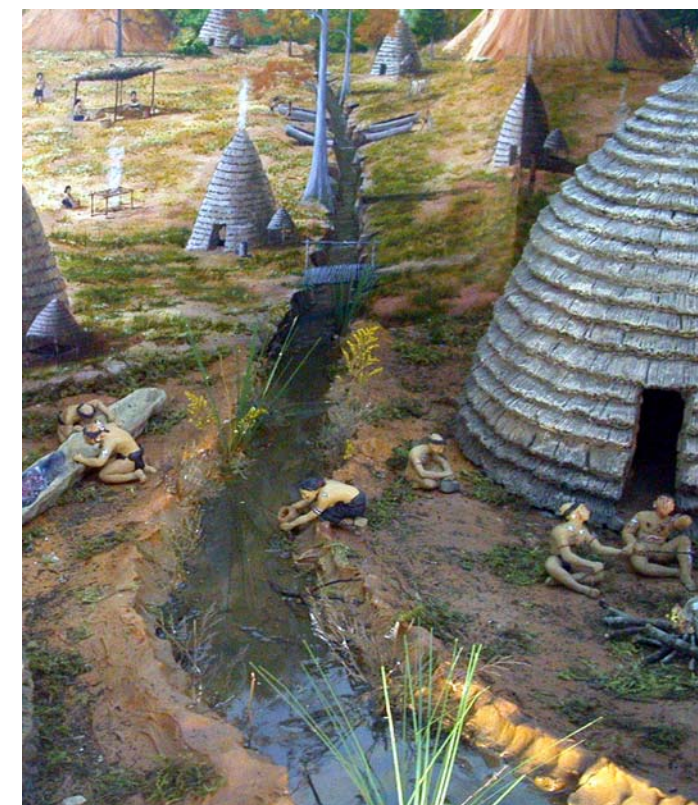
Current hatchery entrance sign

Gregory's findings were confirmed when, under the direction of Girard, the 2003 team recovered about 1300 pottery sherds, vertebrate animal and fish remains, charred wood, nuts, seeds and other plant items. Radiocarbon analysis of charcoal recovered indicated the site was occupied primarily in the fifteenth century A.D. Once again the ceramic items recovered indicated a cultural closeness to both the Caddo and Plaquemine groups.

Based on the findings in the latest dig, Girard verified that the site contained important information and in August of 2005 the site was officially listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Efforts will continue to honor the Caddo Indian Nation and the cultural heritage legacy they created.

Stepping into the future ...

Originally established to provide recreation and food for the public during the depression and war eras, the Natchitoches National Fish Hatchery started out producing largemouth bass, bluegill, and channel catfish.



Caddo exhibit in aquarium



Archeological dig carried out in 2003

A step back in time ...

During the fall of 2003, archaeology investigations at the Natchitoches National Fish Hatchery indicated that the area had been occupied by Native Americans early in the fifteenth century. Conducted by Jeffrey S. Girard, Northwestern State University of Louisiana, this dig was a follow up to investigations that started more than 70 years ago.

During the construction of the Hatchery in 1931, approximately 100 burial sites were uncovered during scraping and trenching operations. The area was then investigated by Winslow Walker of the Bureau of American Ethnology, who was, at that time, conducting a survey along the Red River to find the historic Coushatta and Natchitoches sites.

Most of the burials were found west of a drainage ditch on the east side of what is now State Highway 1. Artifacts found included historic Caddoan ceramic vessels, shell and glass beads as well as metal objects such as scissors, bracelets and an iron spike.

The next investigation was in 1965, when three sewer line trenches next to newly constructed houses revealed artifacts in the soil. Dr. H. F. Gregory of NSU was notified. He examined the exposed area and approximately 300 pottery sherds were found. They have not been fully analyzed but indications are that they were associated with both the Caddoan cultural area to the north and west and with the Plaquemine culture to the south and east. The animal and fish remains indicated that the people living in the area were able to find sufficient food for their needs.