

# Louann, Arkansas

## LOUANN'S HISTORY: ROWDY, NOW QUIET

Published in the 2-13-1958 issue of *The Ouachita Citizen*

Back in 1922 Louann had only two general stores, and they were owned by R. L. Shirey and R. J. LaGrone. The town had been named "Louann" for Mrs. Shirey, who was Louann Wells before her marriage.

Louann was a quiet little country community in those days. Nobody felt much need for hurrying; farmers came to town to stock up on flour, sugar, shoes, calico, and other essentials, and to swap bits of news from their neighborhoods for news of the outside world; the tempo in that part of the county was slow and things moved along in undisturbed contentment.

Then one morning, Louann opened its eyes and found itself the center of feverish excitement. Oil had been discovered, and the first well, the Burton Gusher, was pouring out 75,000 barrels of liquid black gold every day. A boom was born and the town mushroomed overnight.

By 1924 Louann was a city of second class with a population of 2,800. By 1928 the 40 acre town site had a 3,500 population. Buildings, a few two stories among them, lined the streets. Soon there were a dozen hotels, three moving picture shows, a bank, and several wholesale houses. Oil field structures and "shot-gun" houses sprang up overnight.

Today, children and adults alike are fascinated by wild frontier life portrayed in movies and TV. In the oil boom days such scenes were acted out day and night on the streets of Louann. Killings, high-jacking, robbery, drunkenness, and general lawlessness prevailed in spite of guns bulging from holsters worn by most of the male citizens, and in spite of untiring efforts by a marshal, his deputies, and a deputy sheriff. Murder became commonplace. A wild element had moved in, and they had to be reckoned with.

On one particular occasion, one of the residents of Louann was walking down the main street after supper and suddenly a man came hurtling down from the roof of a "barrel" house, falling across the walk at his feet. He stopped and looked closely at the man and saw that his throat had been slit from one ear to the other. Sudden death is shocking and terrible, and yet, remembering those hectic fear-ridden days, some know that things worse than death went on in dimly lighted dens of iniquity.

Fire almost destroyed the town twice, but not long after the second fire, the "shot-gun" houses began to be replaced by buildings of brick and other substantial materials. Transient oil drillers began moving out and settled families began moving in. Five churches were built and became an important factor in the life of the community. They were the Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian, Pentecostal, and Assembly of God. With the exception of the Presbyterian, all these churches remain today thriving and well supported.

Louann, now free of the lawless hordes of unknown wanderers, put its shoulder to the wheel and shaped itself into a town that has been progressive, attractive, and respected by its neighbors.

A fine school was built which at one time was second to none in the county and offered more credits than even the Camden schools.

Then, came the depression—the boom slowly evaporated. The bank failed. Many people moved away. Today the population is 291. Only six stores remain in Louann.

Some of the original settlers in and around Louann were these: L. H. Hicks, the W. A. Smiths, the A. B. Allens, the R. J. Smiths and W. F. Patton.

Leo D. Perdue, who is one of Louann's oldest settlers, came there in 1922. He established an army surplus store when the boom started and within two months he had paid for it completely and enlarged the store to include groceries and feed.

Mr. Perdue was the second mayor of Louann. He served two terms in this office and later became city treasurer. He was president of the school board and was largely responsible for the building of the school. In 1933, he became Postmaster of Louann in which capacity he still serves. He is also owner of a hardware and furniture store.

We would not like to give the impression that Louann has gone back to its days of "sleeping in the sun". It is a small community of loyal people who believe in the future. Mr. Perdue voices the attitude of its people as he says, "The residents of Louann have faith in a promising future for their town. We will be a city again in the near future."

*NOTE: In 2013 there are no schools in Louann; children in that community attend Camden Fairview School District. Plans are for the Post Office to be closed as a cost savings measure by the Postal Service. Residents must travel to Camden or Smackover for shopping and other services, Louann is once again a small rural community.*