

## Mansfield's Historic Nabors Trailer's Red Neon Sign!

The new refurbished sign was dedicated Friday, January 15, 2021. It is now located close to the intersection of Washington and Polk St.

### DID YOU KNOW? By Raymond Powell

With the interest in the preserving of the Nabors Trailers Sign headed up by David Calhoun it appears appropriate for a historical article to be written about W.C. Nabors, the owner and founder of the Nabors Trailers Company. W.C. (Will) Nabors was born in Naborton, La. on Dec. 16, 1977. There are not many people living today that knew Mr. Nabors personally. This writer knew him but not on a social level.



W.C. Nabors was one of the earlier DeSoto students attending L.S.U. and received an accounting degree. He was employed as an accountant in Shreveport at the time he bought the Ford Agency and moved back to Mansfield, La. He Built his first home at the S.W. corner of Martha Ave. and First St. This home was moved to Grand Cane in 1919. He built his next home on the east side of U.S. Hwy 171 and kept the name Briarwood. He had married Cara Rives who was the daughter of Albert Rives and he had already named that location Briarwood. It is interesting to note that this is the location at the bottom of Hungerbeller Hill was the last location that a family of American Indians had occupied near Mansfield.



W.C. Nabors realized if he was going to be able to sell Ford trucks that a trailer would be needed to haul logs to the sawmill. Until this time logs were hauled by wagons pulled by mules or oxen. To develop a trailer company, he took Willard D. Benson as Vice President and Earnest L. Martin as Secretary/Treasurer. Nabors and Martin developed the trailer hookup called a "5th Wheel" which revolutionized the trucking industry. It was agreed between them that the survivor of the two would own this successful patent. Mr. Nabors ended up with the patent because Mr. Martin pre-deceased him.

The log trailer was the first development with a sugar cane "V" typed trailer next. This was a very big seller and is still used in South Louisiana. This was followed by a cotton trailer and even school bus bodies. La. Normal School used the school bus body on a Ford chassis for many years to transport students from Sabine, Natchitoches and Winn Parishes. Possibly the most important body developed was the refrigerator vans.

The company policy was to train local people, offer them regular work hours and pay regular industrial wages. In 1942 with war looming the Mansfield Lions Club sent a delegation to Washington D.C. to help secure a War Dept. contract. It was said that "The Sun never sets on a Nabors Trailer" as they were all over the world because of the

war. The company opened sales offices in Dallas & Houston, Tx. and Memphis and Jackson, Ms. There were 400 employees at the Mansfield Plant.

Mr. Nabors sold the plant in 1959 to Sterling Precision Corp. with Mr. Claude Roberts and Mr. Hartwell Smith continuing as management. Roberts was with Mr. Nabors from the opening of the Ford Agency in the early 1920's. It never was as successful after the ownership and finally was closed. Nabors Trailers was the life blood of DeSoto Parish along with Hendrix Manufacturing Co. It was a sad day when Mr. W.C. Nabors was no longer able to operate his famous company at Mansfield, La.

## **Mansfield's WWII Contributions**

**By: Van Reech**

At the recent DeSoto Historical Society's quarterly meeting I substituted for David Calhoun to give an update on our progress in saving the old "Home of Nabors Trailers" sign. Of course, I was interrupted but that is one of the things I really like about our meetings – the impromptu reminiscing of history. One subject usually leads to another and soon we are wildly off center and having fun talking about DeSoto Parish!

When I mentioned coming up the hill on old Hwy 171, Mr. Powell mentioned how Nabors Trailers occupied that entire block where the old sign had stood. Mr. George Gilmer remembered that when coming home as a child he was encouraged to stand up in the back seat of his parent's car and count all the trailers parked there waiting to be shipped all over the United States. During WW II he remembers cannon carriages and ammunition caissons being parked there instead of truck trailers. There were rows and rows of them waiting to be transported across town to Hendrix's Manufacturing who had the contract to make the axles for those same bodies that would then be shipped all over the world to every theatre of battle that America or our Allies fought in. The sun truly "*Never Sets on a Nabors Trailer*" as their slogan boasted.

