

Lot 13, Block 1 Plan of Rayne

"That fellow that owns his own home is always just coming out of the hardware store." — Barbed Wire

By Sidney Stutes
Special to the Tribune

At the wedding of his first daughter Jeraldine in 1950, Walter J. McBride was 50 years old — a relatively young man, still.

But the marriage of a daughter is a major event in any father's life, one certain to bring one to "pause" and to wonder "Where have all the years gone?" Here was Jeraldine — "little Jerry" — in all those family photographs, of which there were many. There she was as a child, and within the blink of an eye, she was a college graduate and a bride.

An event as momentous as this was bound to cause reflection. And, there was much "to turn over in the mind."

Walter J. McBride had been born in 1891, within the first decade of Rayne's beginnings, the son of two "original families" of SW Louisiana, whose settlement here even predated the community of Pouppeville.

Walter's mother, Aurelia Perres McBride, was the granddaughter of Mattias Arenas, the original purchaser of property from Dr. William Cunningham's "Plan of Rayne" of 1880 (Block No. 1). Aurelia's parents had been Auguste and Dolores Arenas Perres, whose family continued to own property on Block No. 1 for years.

Pharmacist Walter J. McBride's father, Walter Scott McBride, traced his ancestry back to Virginia, to his grandfather, Thomas McBride who had married Mary (Scott) McBride. And, through the generations, Walter Scott McBride (one of 12 children) had come to Pouppeville by way of Plaquemine Brulee (Church Point) "living in the established family trade, as a blacksmith." Walter Scott had, himself, wasted no time in joining his fellow entrepreneurs of Pouppeville in purchasing land from Dr. Cunningham's plan. He bought Lot 3, Block 13, which assured his mid-block location on Rayne's main street, Adams Avenue (south).

His establishment there was captured in one of Rayne's "iconic period photographs."

In it, a nursemaid attends to baby Corinne Mouton, daughter of Rayne pioneer physician Dr. George Clinton Mouton, son of Louisiana Governor Alexander Mouton. The fancy baby carriage attests to the affluence of the Mouton family. The young lady, at center, is Mr. McBride's older daughter, Ella. And Walter Scott McBride, himself, stands astride the front door of his blacksmith-hardware shop.

It would be at this very front entrance that an historic "business transaction" took place in the early fall of 1881. Jesuit priest, Fr. Joseph Antonioz, assigned from Grand Coateau, appeared one day with a special request. St. Joseph's Church, built and blessed in 1872, stood "on a rise in the prairie," a mile or so east of the newly-established community of Rayne. That placement had been a compromise between the competing villages of Castille and Pouppeville.

Now, in 1881, Mattias Arenas, a parishioner, had donated the whole of Block No. 9 for the express purpose of "building a church" in town. Father Antonioz already had a church, but it now needed to be hauled from the rise and across the slough at the eastern edge of the Bradford property (just off today's S. Arenas Street) and onto Block No. 9.

The Jesuit newspaper, Morning Star, reported what Fr. Antonioz had in mind. He had conceived the idea of a "Gospel Wagon" — a contraption with huge metal wheels to "roll the church," as it were pulled by teams of oxen into Rayne.

Father Antonioz's question to Walter Scott McBride: Could the blacksmith "fabricate the wheels" for his "Gospel Wagon?" And, so the name McBride would forever be associated with the grand effort that hauled the original St. Joseph church into Rayne, finally, to rest at the corner of S. Adams and Anding.

But, the back door of Walter Scott McBride's business house witnessed its share of legendary moments as well. It would be at that opening onto Devil's Alley that a young Walter J. McBride would stand with his blacksmith father to watch the "cattle drives" rumble past them only feet away, as farmers from the south Pouppeville area herded their cattle into Rayne in "cute-like" fashion up the narrow Devil's Alley pathway and to the Southern Pacific "cow pens" on W. Texas at the railroad tracks.

Town fathers had begged the cat-

tle owners not to drive their herds up S. Adams Avenue. It seems that earlier "drives" had turned Rayne's main street into "a quagmire pitted by thousands of hoof prints and more!"

Young Walter J. McBride, then had been born in Rayne in 1891, to grow up at his dad's blacksmith shop, just a block from the railroad tracks that had "lured" the very start of Rayne.

And young Walter had attended Rayne Graded and Training School — the original two-story, wooden building at the center of the 500 block on N. Polk.

And now in 1950, among the family keepsake pictures, beyond those of young Jeraldine, was one of Walter J. McBride himself at Rayne Graded School in 1902, with his teacher, Miss Nellie Cunningham, daughter of the founder of Rayne. And, there in the front row, was Miss Cora Morales (See Photo) who would marry Arnold Stamm, son of John Stamm, founder of Stamm-Scheele and benefactor of the rice industry.

But mostly, it was all those photos of Jeraldine that flooded Walter J. McBride's mind with so many memories, each one recalling "moments that were gone" — young Jerry in school with her classmates, around the store with her cousin Tony Privat, and all of Jerry's girlfriends "touring" the flooded streets of Rayne in 1940. And, this one special picture, Jerry posing with her paternal grandmother, Mrs. Aurelia Perres McBride.

Everyone in the family loved Grandma Aurelia. She lived at Walter's home on Wiltz Street after she was widowed, and everyone viewed her as a "family treasure." Grandma Aurelia knew everything about everyone in town and could trace the family history of each of Jerry's friends, back to when their ancestors had first arrived in town. And the amazing thing was to "discover" how all these families were inter-related in one fashion or another.

But, upon thought, there was really nothing remarkable about all these family connections. After all, Rayne had been a small community on a rail line across a prairie at its start with a "marrying pool" extending only a few blocks from the Depot Square.

But an understanding of these relationships explains so much of Rayne's early days and, in effect, provides a genealogical history of the community, as it were.

In any case, in 1950, Walter J. McBride found himself operating a pharmacy on Lot 3, Block No. 13 on S. Adams, the very spot of his father's blacksmith shop of 1881. And he found the "pause" in his doing, caused by Jerry's wedding, to be a blessing, an opportunity to assess how he, himself, had arrived at this stage of his life.

Walter J. McBride had, indeed, completed schooling in Rayne in 1907 determined, at the time, to "break" from the family blacksmith tradition.

He would join the United States Navy and serve his country from 1910 through 1912. And he loved the military life. He had returned to Rayne awaiting an answer to a request he had submitted to the United States Navy Department at his discharge. His wish, he told officials, was to join this new "elite" branch of the Navy specializing in deep-sea diving operations (mostly associated in those days with submarine ship matters). And he had filed all the necessary paperwork to do exactly that.

Back home in Rayne, Walter waited for a response to his application. None ever came, or so he thought, for years and years.

In fact, it wasn't until well after World War I had ended (1914-1918) that Walter's older sister Ella divulged a secret she had kept for over a decade. The U. S. War Department had, indeed, answered Walter's request to rejoin the military with an "appointment" to the Navy's Special Diver's School. The letter had come through the mail only to be intercepted by Ella, who had mounted guard to prevent her brother's entry into "such a dangerous field." This time, fate had been twisted, by human hands. Ella had destroyed the application papers.

Unaware of his sister's actions, a disappointed Walter McBride (who would hold a life-long admiration for the military) reluctantly moved to Texas to live briefly with his older brother Henry, who had, himself, left the family blacksmith tradition behind by becoming a druggist.

And, when Henry briefly "opened shop" in Rayne, Walter continued his training as an apprentice, then as a



This is a rare photo of the students at Rayne Grade School in 1902. First row (left to right), Nettie St. John, Julian Kahn, Florence Pierce, Arnold Kahn, Julia Bull, Dora Morales, Dora Dickinson, and Kathleen Johnson. Second Row: Conrad Hoffpauir, Bowden Manouvrier, Eugene Hawkins, Henry Addison, Henry Bull, Clyde Bruner (Dr.), Tresmond Soileau, and Leo Kahn. Third Row: Miss Nellie Cunningham, Eugenia Marlowe, Winfred Carver, Walter McBride, Alfred Locock, Daulton Faust, Mercedes Morales, Flossie Kahn, unidentified, and Prof Thomas McGregor, Principal. Fourth Row: Jules Juilin, Reeves Bull, Rev. Brown's nephew, Agnes Richard. Inez Morales, E. J. Pettjean (Dr.), Louella Hawkins, and Leon Hoffman.



Looking southward, with Polk Street at the right, the burnt out Valverde Hotel stood for a while as a "shell" of its former self. In time it would be renovated, and eventually to be used as a movie theater.

"qualified druggist" and finally as a "Registered Druggist." That was the accepted manner of entering the profession in those days; there being no formal schools of pharmacy, per se, in this part of the country.

Fixing prescriptions was learned from an experienced druggist; then examinations were taken at a qualified college. Walter J. McBride passed exams from both Loyola and Tulane Universities.

Walter's entry into the profession began in his brother Edward McBride's small grocery next to the Plattsmier-Hulin building at the corner of S. Adams and S. First Street. He would soon move "two doors up Adams" to Lot 3, Block No. 13, where his father had once operated his blacksmith shop.

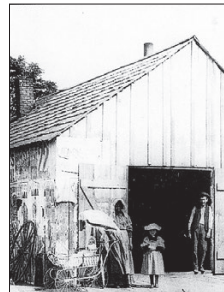
From its beginnings, Rayne had had several "pharmacy houses" -- from Dr. James F. Morris's "Star Drug Store" on Texas Avenue in 1881. Pioneer names Caillouet, Bull, Duclos, Mauboules, Young all, at one time or another, had been associated with the profession.

By 1914, however, two pharmacies had become the "established dispensaries of medicine" in Rayne: People's and O. Broussard. Walter J. McBride's entry into the business was met with stiff competition.

To supplement his income, the young druggist would "fall back" on another trade he had learned while in the Navy. Over the next three years, Walter J. McBride operated a barbershop, just "off the lobby" of the Valverde Hotel (between today's Townhouse Cafe and the tracks). The McBride family, to this day, still has Grandpa McBride's hand-operated hair clippers he used at the Valverde. In fact, grandson Steve Raymond recalls many a session with those clippers, which did more "hair pulling" than "hair cutting" at times.

But alas, Mr. Walter gave up his "second occupation" in May, 1917 when the great Valverde fire destroyed the hotel that Saturday, leaving nothing but a burnt-out brick shell (See The Independent, August 29, 1909).

By then, however, Walter J. McBride had established a "foothold" in the pharmacy business in Rayne. Moreover, in September, 1919, he purchased Lots Nos. 8 and 10 in the Ealer Division of Rayne on Wiltz Street from the Chappuis Land Company. And more, in 1921, he married Miss Eva Claire Lancaster, a young lady from Lorena, Texas, he had met while apprenticing with his brother. Part of her family followed her to Rayne. Her brother, Ed Lancaster ("Uncle Ed" to the family) would later



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manage Joe Privat's fruit and vegetable stand on the 700 block of S. Adams. Joe Privat, married to Walter's sister Julia, had fruit and vegetable stands in Crowley and Lafayette, and sold produce from the "Privat Farm" south of Rayne (Edwin Drive) to local stores from his truck. It was "all in the family."

"Uncle Ed" was quite the character himself. He had gotten his ration books from the government in May, 1942, but that only made him realize he was not contributing to the war effort. So, at age 42, "Uncle Ed" volunteered for the United States Army and would take part in the U. S. military landing at Anzio Beach in Italy in 1944, no doubt the oldest "private" infantryman there. On his return to Rayne, he operated a radio repair shop on Second Street, where he also built crystal radios for sale.

Eva Claire (Lancaster) McBride was, herself, a very accomplished musician, a piano player extraordinaire, with a "great ear" and voice for music. Her mother, Emma Murphy Lancaster, was a much published author of books of poetry, all copyrighted by the Library of Congress.

The home that Walter and Eva Claire established on the 300 block of Wiltz Street would not lack in the fine arts. Mrs. McBride saw to that!

NEXT: Eva Claire Lancaster, a guitar, and "Happy Fats."