

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

One does not read far into the history of Rayne without realizing how large a factor "fire" was in normal, everyday life a century or so ago. It heated and lighted people's lives — and cooked their food on a daily basis.

And, unfortunately — too often — it also destroyed and killed. It was so necessary, yet so devastating. Comparatively speaking, the early settlers of Rayne were at the "mercy" of fire — because, once it began to ravage, few resources were then available to extinguish it.

No doubt, that is why almost any reading of any early Rayne activity always includes some comment about this of that fire — and, interestingly, most are called "great fires" — obviously meaning its destruction had wide significance at the time.

In 1903 — people in Rayne had every reason to distinguish their "Groundhog Day" fire as "great." It took a full day — and it left one block of Rayne in ashes and parts of others smoldering.

And it caused several inhabitants to make life-changing decisions. Some, like Donat Pucheu, left town altogether; others remained to "start over."

In the months that followed this great fire in 1903 — several conveyances of "immovable property" were recorded in the Clerk of Court Offices in Crowley. One, in particular, dealt with Lot 13, Block 1 of the Plan of Rayne and one Louis Privat.

Louis Privat's father and mother, Antoine and Philomene Boullard, immigrated to America from France (Argueze) in the 1880's and came to buy a "homestead" to farm just south of Rayne (at the north end of Edwin Drive).

There, Louis and his brother, Francois, "grew up." (Francois would marry and have a son, Joseph, who became a mortician, in time, but left the profession because of an allergy to the chemicals — later, to operate a jewelry store in what was the old Knights of Columbus Home on Adams.

Joseph's children were Frank and Kenneth Privat.) Interestingly, Joseph Privat would also later serve the community as its Chief of the Volunteer Fire Department for years, succeeding one Felix Perres, the son of Auguste and Dolores (Arenas) Perres. Mr. Felix Perres had, moreover, been elected Rayne's 13th Mayor (1928-1930) prior to his service as head of the Fire Department. Joseph Privat's children were Frank and Kenneth Privat.

And more, Monsieur Antoine Privat would take a second wife, Marie Gagnier (Gagneaux), and a son of this marriage was also named Joseph, who would, later, follow Louis (his half-brother) in the bakery business.

Louis had been about 12 years old at the time he arrived in Rayne around 1890.

He worked with his father at the family farm, but let it be known that he wanted to become a "baker."

In mid-youth, Louis began baking bread at the farm and rode horseback into Rayne to "peddle" "door to door", soon establishing a regular route.

That was all well and good, but young Louis realized that there was much more to baking than he did not know — and he knew to whom to turn to "learn the trade."

Louis would "apprentice" himself to the Bertrand Bazeque (Bazaque) family of bakers in Crowley, who were so well renowned throughout the area. It was a natural step for Louis to take. After all, the Privat and Bazaque families were both from the same hometown in France (Argueze) — and had known each other in the old country. (small world).

In time, Louis Privat would "return" to Rayne to open his own bakery, just a few doors west of the corner of Adams and W. Texas (near Rayne State Bank).

As a measure of his success, baker Louis Privat, after the great fire of 1903, inquired of Auguste Perres about the now vacant properties on Adams Avenue — Lots 11 and 13, Block 1.

Negotiations followed. Though Louis was prepared to purchase both lots, Auguste and his wife, Dolores (Arenas), decided to keep Lot 11 "in the family." (Auguste would soon develop the property into a blacksmith shop of his own).

Then came Friday, November 6,

1903, a bitter-sweet day for Dolores Arenas Perres.

As authorized legally by her husband, of course, she would sell the last of her late father's original holdings in Rayne (besides Lot 11 on Adams and her residential corner, lots 12 and 14 on Polk).

Dolores had asked former Mayor James Webb to "notarize" the transaction. It had been Mr. Webb who had inventoried her father's properties in 1894, a fact that Mr. Webb would repeat in this conveyance as well.

In a flair of penmanship, Notary Webb wrote that "... the only surviving and legal heirs of Mrs. Eleanor Martin, widow Arenas, late deceased ..." was Dolores Arenas, "wife of Auguste Perres, assisted by her husband ..."

All the legal wording, the "presents, grants, bargains, sells, assigns, conveys, set overs and delivers" were noted unto Louis Privat, for the sum of \$1200.

The notary further described how Lot 13 was "bounded" on all sides "with a frontage of 53 feet on Adams and runs back between parallel lines a depth of 120 feet and forms the corner of Adams Avenue and South First Street as per the plat of the Town of Rayne."

In common legal jargon, Mr. Webb continued, "The above is property that Mrs. Eleanor Martin, deceased, ... acquired as part of her share ... in COMMUNITY of the estate of her deceased husband, Mattias Arenas." And Mr. Webb could not resist adding that he had "notarized the Act of Partition" that had brought an end to the succession upheaval in the Arenas family in 1894.

Interestingly, one of the witnesses to Dolores's sale was her niece, Josephine Anding, who, it was said, was "in a hurry" that day. It seems the young lady had other important business to attend.

Josephine and one E. C. Fremaux would "ride by buggy" that early afternoon to the Courthouse in Crowley to apply for a marriage license.

Two days later -- on Sunday afternoon, November 8, 1903 -- Father Amable S. Doutre pronounced Josephine and E. C. to the "man and wife" in a "plain wedding ceremony, with no mass." Witnesses included Henry Anding, Josephine's father, and Frank Bernard, son of Rayne's first Mayor, J. D. Bernard.

It was not that E. C. Fremaux was a "stranger" to the Anding family. Mr. Fremaux had been in Rayne from its beginnings and had, in 1881, purchased a "business lot" (Lot No. 3 on Block 13) with frontage on Adams from Josephine's grandfather, Mattias Arenas, acting an "agent" for Mrs. William Cunningham.

At the same time, E. C. Fremaux had bought a residential lot (Lot 12 on Block 5) with a frontage on Polk Street, which meant that he lived only four doors south of the Henry Anding family. (See the schematic). And it is of note, that Josephine's parents owned Lot 3 on Block 5 at the time of the wedding. This fact will account for the location of what would become SW Louisiana's finest farm implement business, E. C. Fremaux and Son -- at that very site (See photo).

Two more weddings would factor in linking families and properties in early Rayne.

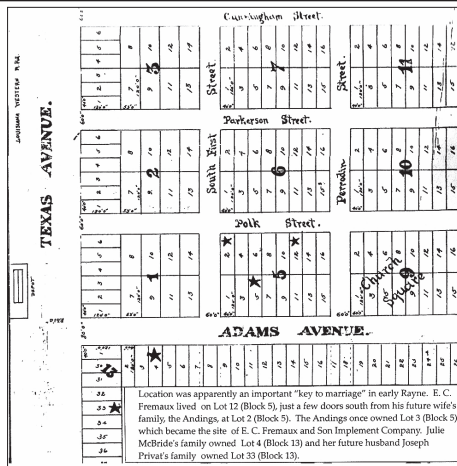
In 1905, Louis Privat, at age 27, baker and owner of Lot 13, Block No. 1, married Miss Marie Villa, daughter of Joseph Pasquel Villa, a native of Spain, and Pauline Monzelun, born in Vermilion Parish. Marie had "grown up" just southeast of Rayne on the LaCroix Plantation.

Louis Privat and wife Marie were soon to leave the bakery business for another life-long occupation, but the Privats would "own and manage" Lot 13, Block No. 1 for more than 60 years.

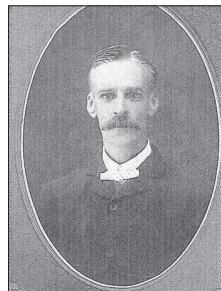
In the meantime, Louis Privat's half-brother, Joseph (at age 30) married Julie McBride, who was 14 years of age, on Monday, February 7, 1921. Julie McBride was the daughter of Walter Scott McBride and Amelia Perres McBride. This marriage produced two children, Anthony "Tony" Privat and Julie Privat Ousse (who would later marry Edwin "Teedie" Ousse).

And the schematic of all these cited properties illustrates that -- however important "location" is in the real estate business -- "location" is often the "key to marriage" -- as well.

NEXT: Privat, Fremaux, and a few Stamms.



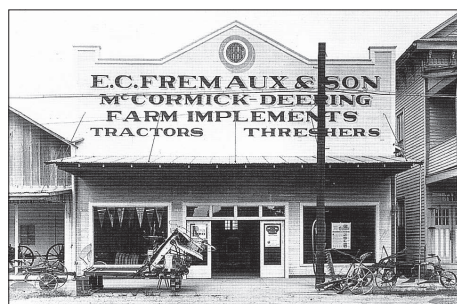
On November 6, 1903, Auguste and Dolores (Arenas) Perres sold Lot 13, Block No. 1 to Louis Privat for the sum of \$1200.



E.C. Fremaux, one of Rayne's original settlers, married Miss Josephine Anding, daughter of Henry and Susan (Arenas) Anding.



Joseph Private, a nephew of Rayne's original bakery, Louis Privat, served the community as its fire chief for years, succeeding Felix Perres, son of Auguste and Dolores (Arenas) Perres.



E.C. Fremaux married Josephine Anding whose parents owned Lot 3 on Block No. 5 which was the site of one of SW Louisiana's largest farm implement businesses, later to be known as E.C. Fremaux and Sons. To the left was the Hebert Farm Implement Store, while to the right was the old Opera House and WOW Building.