

# 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

Appearing for the first time in the Federal U. S. Census of 1890, the community of Rayne was cited as having 569 residents. Since it had begun with no population in 1880 — except for the handful of Poupeville merchants who were moving in at the time — the figures represented a healthy influx, and would likely have been much higher had Crowley not won out as the parish seat in 1887.

Twenty years after Rayne's first census — now in 1910 — Rayne's population had risen to 2,247 — a 294.9 % increase over the two decades.

Those early years witnessed the rise of several business legends in the enterprising young community — Kahn, Broussard, Pucheu, Weil, Chappuis, and more.

But Edward Charles "E.C." Fremaux had actually preceded most of these to Rayne. Long a representative of the Deering farm implements (which later merged to become International Harvester), E. C. Fremaux had been the ideal person to manage the Fremaux and Stamm Hardware and Implement Company on **Lot 13, Block 1** when it opened its doors after the "great fire of 1903."

John Stamm and E. C. Fremaux had been friends for years and would remain so through their lives. But, when young Arnold Stamm graduated from Soule Business College in New Orleans — and A. E. Raymond came to marry John Stamm's daughter and brought his family's "trade" in undertaking to Rayne — E. C. Fremaux went into partnership with Lynn LeBlanc just across, and diagonally up Adams.

But, shortly — tragedy would strike the Fremaux family. On August 27, 1927 — the local paper reported:

The Tribune, with sincerest regret, is confronted with the sad duty of chronicling the death of Mrs. E. C. Fremaux which occurred Thursday at 11:20 P. M.

Mrs. Fremaux had been in ill health for many years, a paralytic stroke being the immediate cause of her death. She was stricken last Saturday afternoon and from then until the hour of her death she was almost totally unconscious. Her death came softly, breath simply slipping away quietly.

Mrs. E. C. Fremaux — the former Josephine Anding, daughter of Henry Anding and Susan Arenas Anding — was only 50 years old. She was survived by her husband and children from his previous marriage, Mrs. Gus DuBose, Mrs. Luther Perry, C.J. Fremaux, L. J. Fremaux, and Paul Fremaux, the only sibling living in Rayne.

The granddaughter of Mattias Arenas, Josephine Anding Fremaux had inherited her family's property. Her mother, Susan (Arenas) Anding had died on July 4, 1898 — and her father Henry Anding, had passed away on March 14, 1923 — leaving to Josephine ownership of the Anding family property on **Block 5**, which included **Lot 3** which fronted Adams Avenue, just across South First Street from the Stamm Hardware Store.

Consequently, when Josephine died in late summer 1927, her husband E. C. Fremaux appeared in District Court in Crowley to settle her affairs.

The succession papers of Josephine (Anding) Fremaux were written in the usual legalities, but included an interesting passage:

E. C. Fremaux, widower, petitions for the succession of his wife, deceased . . . Petitioner Fremaux was not separated from bed and board from his said wife.

Mr. Purvis Carmouche was appointed by the court to "inventory" Josephine's possessions:

Real Estate.....\$250.00  
Personals.....195.00  
Lot 3, Block 5 of the Plan of Rayne.

When exactly E. C. Fremaux opened his farm implement store on Lot 3 of Block 5 is lost in family memory, but suffice it to say that that became the address of one of the most prominent and successful implement "business houses" in SW Louisiana. Joined by his son, Paul, the proprietor renamed the business "E. C. Fremaux & Son" — the two, to run the International Harvester dealership with . . . prompt, efficient service — a prerequisite for farmers who often experienced serious breakdowns of farm equipment in the middle of planting or harvesting

season."

In time — the firm would be joined by Charles "C. P." DuBose (a grandson of Mr. E. C.) who served as the general Secretary of the company.

E. C. Fremaux and Josephine had lived on the corner of Polk and South First Street for years — just across from the corner Perres home on Polk Street.

When Edward "E. C." Fremaux died in August, 1927 — at age 74 — the Tribune wrote in its traditional form of obituary:

"Rayne citizens were inexpressibly shocked early today on receipt of the news that E. C. Fremaux, a pioneer citizen and one of the best known and most highly respected men in Acadia parish, had died suddenly at his home in this city at seven o'clock this morning."

For half a century, E. C. Fremaux had been identified with the life, social and commercial, of this section, and his death removes a leader in all that tended to the betterment of his community.

Mr. Fremaux had been ill three weeks of troubles incident to advanced years. Wednesday, however, he appeared greatly improved and just a few moments before the end came this morning was talking to members of his family, exhibiting high spirits at his improvement. Suddenly, however, that staunch old heart weakened, failed — and a kindly courteous old gentleman becomes but a memory!"

In a lighter moment, Father Hubert Lerschen could not help but wonder, in his homily at St. Joseph's, what would happen to Mr. Fremaux's pet duck which had "walked" the block up South First Street every morning with its owner for years as E. C. went to work — even in semi-retirement.

In time, the son, Paul Fremaux, only added to the firm's growth, with customers coming from surrounding parishes to make their purchases here. Mr. Paul was also to branch out "in associated areas of business activity," including banking and the rice industry through his affiliation with the Rayne Rice Dryer and Ware-



Charlie Fremaux (grandson of E.C. Fremaux, a WWII pilot hero and a Louisiana state legislator, came home to modernize and expand the Fremaux firm on Adams. Pictured, from left, are Boy Scouts, Vincent Chappuis, Sheriff Elton Arceneaux and Mr. Fremaux.

house Company.

Leadership of the firm subsequently turned to Edward Charles "Charlie" Fremaux — grandson of the founder. A "military hero," Charlie was a member of Company I, 156th Infantry at the time of Pearl Harbor — but was to serve actively as a pilot in the U. S. Army Air Corps during operations in the European Theater. As Captain and Flight Commander, he was to be one of the most decorated pilots in World War II — his plane, named appropriately "Swamp Angel."

Back home, "Charlie" Fremaux was elected to the Louisiana Legislature as a State Representative.

At the family business, "Charlie" modernized its national lines of stock, expanded the hardware division, rebuilt the frontage for additional display space next to the WOW building which had served Rayne from its first turn of the century as a newspaper plant, a popular dance entertainment and meeting hall and even as a theater.

When "E. C. Fremaux & Son" ultimately closed, older Raynites would miss their McCormick-Deering Newsletter which for years had provided them with a touch of folksy appeal and a heavy dose of advertisement. From 1929, the firm's newsletter had reported:

Last Saturday, a farmer complained he was 60 years old. Cato took up Greek at 81. Chaucer began his Canterbury Tales at 54. Ben John-



The Woodmen of the World Building, adjoining the Fremaux establishment to the south, served as an opera house, a newspaper plant and popular dance and meeting hall, even as a furniture and donut kitchen in years.



Lot 3, Block 5 became the address of one of the most prominent farm implement "business houses" in SW Louisiana, E.C. Fremaux and Son, shown here on a snowy day in the 1940s.



On Lots 9 and 11 of Block 1 on Adams Avenue, Felix Perres (grandson of Rayne founding Mattias Arenas) operated a blacksmith shop in the tradition of the family in conjunction with James "Jake" Laughlin. Notice the huge hide being "cured" for use as "chair seats" and the Lynn LeBlanc Horse and Mule establishment across the street. From left, unidentified man, Jake Laughlin and Felix Perres.

son began the study of Dutch at 62. Maybe there's hope for us middle-aged guys after all.

Lozin Leger brought his McCormick-Deering tractor in a short time ago and asked us to look it over thoroughly. Our expert mechanics took care of the job, giving Mr. Leger an overhauling job which makes his tractor practically as good as new.

According to Postmaster Chappuis, the government is requiring new type extra large mail boxes on rural routes. All patrons will be required to comply with the new regulation. We have received a limited supply of the new Rural Route mail boxes approved by the Postmaster General, which we are offering at \$3.95 each.

But the most "missed event" sponsored by "E. C. Fremaux & Son" was its annual International Harvester Family Party at the South Rayne Gym, packed "to the gills" with worker families, customers, and general public, the old gym "bulged" with delightful entertainment, music, jokes, celebrities, and a "Society Circus" — all "free of charge," of course, in appreciation for the community's support, and more, a major source of amusement for decades in Rayne.

In reflection, with E. C. Fremaux established on Lot 3 of Block 5 by the 1920's (and expanding onto the Hebert family corner Lot 1 and later onto Lots 5 and 7 as well), the burgeoning firm was on S. Adams, just across South First Street from the original Fremaux-Stamm Hardware, which had evolved into the Stamm Hardware Company — with embalming services, burial robes, and a hearse for hire.

One notes that all this activity had originated from Mattias Arenas's 1879 purchase of the whole of Block 1 from Dr. Cunningham's "Plan of Rayne."

At Mattias Arenas's death in 1893, nearly a year had been necessary to handle his succession to the satisfaction of his two daughters, Dolores (Mrs. Auguste Perres) and Susan (Mrs. Henry Anding) and his widow, Eleanor Martin Arenas.

Of the Arenas family members, Susan died first, on July 4, 1898, only five years after her father. Her husband, Henry Anding, first Treasurer of Acadia Parish, died in 1923.

By then, their daughter, Josephine, had been married for some twenty years to E. C. Fremaux, who would later inherit Lot 3 on Block 5.

In the Perres family, Auguste died first — on January 19, 1921. In St. Joseph Church records, Pastor Amable Doutre wrote, "Auguste died yesterday at age 64, after receiving the Last Sacrament. On this day, I officiated at his funeral."

Auguste's estate was left intact until his wife Dolores (Arenas) Perres died on March 1, 1926, at age 68. Two months later, a son (Felix) and a daughter (Lucille Jeanmard) petitioned to legalize their father's succession. The court appointed Dr. John Mauboules and R. Deynood Daboval to conduct an inventory. They reported that Auguste Perres's holdings included:

- (1) Lots 12 and 14, Block 1 (Family home)
- (2) Lot 10, Block 1 (adjoining family home on north)
- (3) Lots 1 and 2, Block 1 (corner of Adams and Louisiana)
- (4) Lots 9 and 11, Block 1 (the two lots just north of the hardware store on Lot 13, Block 1)
- (5) Cash in Rayne State Bank — \$431.00
- (6) Cash in Bank of Lafayette — \$260.00

The total value of the estate amounted to \$24,811.34. How the property and assets were divided is for another day's reading — but, for now, it is noted that Felix Perres (son of Auguste and grandson of Mattias Arenas) got possession of Lots 9 and 11 on S. Polk.

It would be there that Felix Perres would operate a blacksmith shop for years in the family tradition and "in conjunction" with Mr. James "Jake" Laughlin, who was a "jack of all trades" — even making wooden chairs with hand-stretched cowhide seats.

In early 2013, Mr. Laughlin's son, also called Jake, still recalled working with his dad, directly across the street from Lynn LeBlanc's Mule and Horse Livery Stable.

NEXT: Louis Privat goes into lumber, the Stams go into cars, and Lot 13, Block 1 has a new occupant.