

# 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 age 18, Joseph Privat, officially discharged from the American Expeditionary Force (AEF) of World War I, returned to Rayne in the fall of 1919 and to his chosen profession — baker of bread.

From the small, "box-like Chinese laundry of a bakery" on Devil's Alley, Joseph Privat and his bride, Julia (McBride) Privat prospered from the start of their marriage in 1921. Rayne was growing in population at a good rate, as was the demand for bread. And the birth of a son, Anthony Scott Privat, on November 1, 1922, only added another blessing.

While Joe and Julia had often talked of expanding their bakery, it would be said that baby Antony's birth "made their decision for them." The Privats decided to build a new and separate bakery building — this one, to front W. Texas Avenue (just a couple of doors west from today's Rayne State Bank corner).

In the planning of a new baking facility, their old Devil's Alley shop served as no model, nor, for that matter, did Joseph's military "open-field" baking experiences in Europe.

That was why, in early 1924, Joseph Privat boarded the Southern Pacific No. 8, eastbound for New Orleans, to "see what the big town bakeries looked like."

His wife, Julia (McBride) Privat was later quoted as saying, "What Joe saw there, he didn't like." Apparently, the first couple of facilities he visited were even more antiquated than his own on Devil's Alley. But, worse, Joseph was appalled at the lack of sanitation standards — even to see "... cigarette ashes being dropped into the dough as it was being kneaded. The places were dirty," he would say upon his return to Rayne.

It was, however, from the newly-established McKenzie's Bakery on Prytania Street that Joe got a good look at a modern operation. And so, he "... came home and built his establishment the way he thought a bakery should be — light, airy, and clean. Salesmen who visited the bakery after it was built were astonished at the modern features which had been designed into the building. Many of them asked Mr. Joe to move to a larger city where he could get real volume. But he liked Rayne and chose to stay."

And, shortly, in 1929, Joseph and Julia Privat added a sibling for young Tony, who was seven, then — a sister, Julie, with whom to play back and forth on Devil's Alley with all the McBride cousins through the years.

The *Tribune* of those days filled its front pages weekly, it seemed, with promotions of Rayne's business houses. Any "newness" — any innovation was bound to make headlines, with details in paragraphs followed, of course, in the back pages by an accompanying paid advertisement. Such was the accommodation between the paper and the merchant.

So, one was quick to learn of the new "curved-back" seats being installed at the Opera House and the new "five bearing crank-shaft and the two-unit starting systems" of the Dodge cars on display at the Stamm Motor Car Company. And then, too, were the regular improvements at the Acadia Bakery, as Joseph Privat then called his firm:

**Acadia Bakery Installs New Machinery**

*In order to further improve the quality of bread, Joseph Privat ... has recently installed some of the most modern and sanitary types of machines to aid in his work. The new equipment consists of a flour sifter and blender, a water scale and tempering tank, also a new bread mixer, flour hopper*

*and scale.*

*Through the new process, the flour goes directly from the bag to the sifter bin where it is blended and elevated to the sifter, then dropped into the mixer.*

*Everything is enclosed and the flour is not touched by hand, air or dust. The water, too, goes into the tempering tank where it is weighed, tempered, and dropped into the mixer without being exposed to either air or dust.*

*The new mixer will give a more uniform and higher quality bread handled in the most sanitary manner possible, thereby ensuring the customers of fresh, clean bread of the very finest grade.*

Now, imagine the "hoopla" when the first "loaf-at-a-time bread slicing machine" made its debut! Though it took some time for it to be installed in Rayne, Otto Rohwedder (of Davenport, Iowa) put his invention into commercial use in 1928 — advertised as "the greatest forward step in the baking industry since bread was wrapped."

The next progression was the effort "to keep the slices together at least long enough to allow the loaves to be wrapped." Different bakers tried — first, using rubber bands, even metal pins, before using a cardboard tray to align the slices, all of which led to mechanized wrapping machines.

By late 1928, various independent bakeries across the nation availed themselves of the pioneer efforts of W. E. Long (Holsum Bread) who became the prime promoter of "packaging sliced bread." By 1930, Wonder Bread was marketing sliced bread nationwide.

Years later, one author, writing on "The History of Slice Bread," mentioned a consequence of the new technology. "As commercially sliced bread resulted in uniform and somewhat thinner slices, people ate more slices of bread at a time, and ate bread more frequently, because of the ease of eating another piece of bread. This increased consumption of bread, in turn, increased consumption of spreads, such as jam, to put on the bread."

The bread-slicing machine would "arrive" in Rayne before 1940, to be used at both Joseph Privat's Acadia Bakery and at the competing bakery of Leo Schexnyder, on the 200 block of N. Adams (a few doors north of today's Rayne Building and Loan).

But, then, just as Raynites were getting accustomed to "commercially sliced bread," the federal government put a stop to its production. The year was 1943, and in January, the U. S. Food Administrator announced a ban as a wartime conserva-



In early 1924, Joseph Privat boarded the Southern Pacific No. 8, eastbound for New Orleans from Rayne's Passenger Depot (on north side of tracks from Depot Square).



Julia McBride Privat is pictured with her young son, Anthony Scott (Tony) Privat who was born on November 1, 1922.

SOUTHERN PACIFIC TRAIN SCHEDULE		
EAST BOUND		
No. 8		1:15 p.m.
No. 6		8:40 a.m.
No. 12		12:30 a.m.
WEST BOUND		
No. 7		5:40 p.m.
No. 5		1:30 p.m.
No. 108	formerly 100	4:20 a.m.

For years, the Tribune published the "Southern Pacific Train Schedule," this one showing the No. 8 eastbound train boarded by Joseph Privat in 1924 for his trip to New Orleans "to see what big town bakeries looked like."

tion measure, explaining that "... the ready sliced loaf must have a heavier wrapping than an unsliced one if it is not to dry out." Presumably, then, the price of bread could be "held down" since the Office of Price Administration (OPA) had authorized a 10% increase in flour prices. (Wow, speaking of micro-managing the economy by the federal bureaucrats — but, it was in wartime.)

Attending to the popularity of sliced bread, protests arose immediately against the federal ban. No better dissent was voiced than from a distraught housewife's lament, originally published in the *New York Times*, and later copied into editorial pages across the country.

*I should like you to know how important sliced bread is to the morale and saneness of a household. My husband and four children are all in a rush during and after breakfast. Without ready-sliced bread, I must do the slicing for toast — two pieces for each one — that's ten! For their lunches, I must cut by hand at least twenty slices, for two sandwiches apiece. Afterward, I make my own toast. Twenty-two slices of bread to be cut in a hurry!*

The outcry was such that the ban lasted only three months. By early March, the federal Food Administrator was forced to rescind:

*Our experience with the order ... leads us to believe that the savings are not as much as we expected, and the War Production Board tells us that sufficient wax paper to wrap sliced bread for four months is in the hands of paper processors and the baking industry.*

But, alas having just won the "sliced-bread battle" with the feds, both Joseph Privat and Leo Schexnyder suffered the same "calamity" almost simultaneous-

ly at their respective bakeries. Both of their slicing machines "went down" within a week or so from each other. (The owners had, apparently, purchased identical machines from the same manufacturer, who, now in wartime, could not replace any parts). Rayne would have to do without ready, sliced-bread for the remainder of the war!

And, as the war deepened, so did the rationing of so many items by the federal Office of Price Administration (OPA) — tires, first, only four days after the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. Ration Boards were established as the number of restricted items rose. In April, 1942, for example, "anyone wishing to purchase a new toothpaste tube, then made from metal, had to turn in an empty one." But, it was the rationing of food stuffs that affected most people — sugar, lard, shortening, and oils, butter, etc. — all those products certain to affect bakeries and ice cream parlors, and more.

Specifically, by mid-summer, 1942, bakeries were told to expect rations of only 70% of normal usage. The wartime rationing of these basic baking ingredients caused Joseph Privat to approach Leo Schexnyder with a unique business proposition. They would merge their baking operations — with Mr. Schexnyder buying an interest in, and continuing to bake from the Privat facilities.

Joe Privat would "... return to his place at the southern edge of town, there, to operate his special interest, a truck farm!"

And, thus, began the second commercial activity that people would long associate with Joseph Privat — his "stand" at mid-block on S. Adams (Gautreaux's Donuts), from which he would, for years, sell seasonal fruit and vegetables so successfully that he needed hired help.

NEXT: A series of tragedies strikes a Rayne family.