

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**

Louis Privat first began baking bread commercially in Rayne in 1902, eventually to sell his small shop off Devil's Alley to his half-brother, Joseph. Joe Privat and his wife, Julie McBride Privat, remodeled, enlarged, and "grew" the business until WW II shortages led the Privats to lease their bakery to Rayne's other bread-maker, Leo Schexnyder.

But fortune frowned on this transaction when, in 1948, Mr. Leo succumbed to the severe burns he received from an explosion at the ovens of the bakery, the terrible accident soon to cause the Privats — now with son Tony and his wife Rita — to return to the baking of bread, until, that is, competition from outside "chain-like" bakeries inevitably forced them to turn off the bread ovens on W. Texas Avenue in 1954.

However, Tony and Rita would keep some ovens lit "to take care of the retail trade of cakes, pies, and pastries." It was then that the Privat baking legend grew even larger. And who, of a certain age, can forget the six-inch fruit pies (peach, lemon, pecan, apricot, cherry, apple, raisin, pineapple, pumpkin, coconut), the chocolate eclairs, the wedding and birthday cakes, of course, the doughnuts, cookies, creme-filled puffs and, yes, the long French bread loaves, still "warm to the touch," that had more than one happy customer tear off the wrapper bag to "sample a crusty-end" chunk before even leaving the store. Tony said that Rita was the cake specialist, and who argued!

Withdrawing from the bakery, Joseph Privat turned his full attention to developing his "Curb Markets" in both Rayne (at mid-700 block of S. Adams) and in Crowley. In time, it was said that Joe Privat "came off the curb" to build, in the mid-1950's, a small grocery as well, advertising canned and processed goods, but always the freshest vegetables and fruit from his own gardens.

And, as Mrs. Myrta Fair Craig had said earlier, "... as the pages of the book about Rayne continue to turn ...," no shift in journalistic practice was more noticeable than in the writing of the Tribune in the mid-1950's. The Craig family sold its interest in the paper in 1954. And Mrs. Craig went to work as the Director of Public Relations for the Department of Public Welfare in Baton Rouge.

And that largely explained why — in February, 1962 — when Joe Privat died at age 71, the local paper literally committed a journalistic crime. In a mix of incorrect information, the printed obituary carried nothing of Mr. Joe's "place in the history of Rayne" — nothing about his military service, his role in the baseball lore of Rayne, or his devotion to family and service to community. Mr. Joe was only a "prominent businessman" in a six-sentence article that served as the beginning of the modern "bare obituaries" that, in their sparseness, leaves the deceased with only a list of his relatives.

But then, to Rayne's good fortune, Mrs. Myrta Fair Craig returned to the Tribune just in time to write another classic farewell to a member of one of Rayne's "founding families."

In the opening paragraph of a long, column-filled notice, Mrs. Craig had already informed her readers that Mrs. Joseph Privat — Julie McBride Privat, at age 67, and within 18 months of her husband's passing, had died at 4:20 P. M. on Saturday, December 28, 1963 at the Rayne-Branch Hospital and that her funeral rites had been conducted at a 10:00 A. M. service at St. Joseph's on Monday, December 30, the Mass celebrated by Rev. O'Neil Landry, Mrs. Privat's nephew who was pastor of St. Joseph's Catholic Church in Centerville.

Without belaboring the point, it is noted that Mrs. Craig added, in part: *She was born July 14, 1886 in Rayne. Mrs. Privat's family was among the first settlers of Church Point and Rayne, her father being the late Walter Scott McBride who came from Popperville to Rayne as a blacksmith on S. Adams. Her mother was a direct descendant of the Acadians of the St. Martinville community. Her husband, Joe Privat, ... operated a bakery in Rayne which has been in the family since the early days of the city. ... Active in the Auxiliary of Arceneaux Post, American Legion, Mrs. Privat was also a member of the Ladies Altar Society of*



"Mr. Joe" Privat had good reason to smile in this 1949 photo. He was displaying his daughter's (Julie Privat Ousse) multi-tiered wedding cake.



Anthony "Tony" Privat is shown in his familiar stance at the counter of the family bakery as its legend grew larger with its baking of pastries, cakes pies — and those long French bread loaves, "still hot to the touch."

St. Joseph Church.

Survivors include one daughter, Julie (Mrs. Edwin Ousse); one son, Anthony; one brother, Walter McBride; one sister, Miss Ella McBride; and one grandchild, Edwin "Butch"

Ousse.

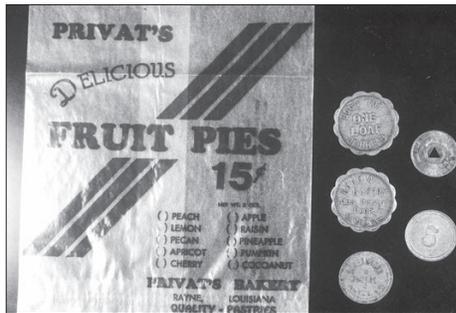
And again, less than five years later, "a page in the history of Rayne turned" in 1968 — this one to bid farewell to a landmark "business house" of the community. At late, mid-afternoon on Saturday, June 18th, Tony Privat locked the doors of Privat's bakery for the last time. The ovens had been shut off since the last batch of cookies had been baked that Friday morning. Tony and Rita had decided to "close up shop."

The decision had not been reached in haste. And Tony, in his ever-affable manner, had not held it secret from his customers. But, if Tony's clientele had known, it was a certainty that Mrs. Craig had known it first. The Tribune carried her "goodbye" in an almost-eulogistic style.

With the closing of the bakery shop, an era has ended which was closely connected with Rayne through the years. Never a birthday without a cleverly decorated cake from Privats, and their wedding cakes were always true works of art — much in demand throughout this part of Louisiana. And to all of us, Sunday will never be quiet the same again without a visit to Privats for breakfast doughnuts, or a loaf of their brown, crusty French bread, a perfect accompaniment for outdoor family barbecues.

And Mrs. Craig would not let a moment like this slip away without a thorough review of the "business house." Louis Privat's beginnings, circa 1900, were recalled, as were the details of the family living upstairs at the bakery, where sons Roland and Fernand "Frook" had both been born. It reminded Mrs. Craig of how the Kahn family had been "raised upstairs" at Mervine Kahn's.

And when Louis "branched out" to acquire the Lewis and Taylor Lumber Yard, the younger brother, Joseph Privat, had stepped forward to bake Rayne's bread until World War II inter-



Joseph Privat's "scientifically constructed ovens" produced perfection when he baked his fruit pies at 15 cents each — a delight remembered still by "mature" residents of Rayne. The tokens, at right, were handed out by Mr. Privat for special orders.

rupted the operation. The particulars of the gas explosion that killed Leo Schexnyder followed, as did of Tony's return from the military and the decision to switch from baking bread to pastries, cakes, and pies.

And more — the building's history was recounted. From its start as the dirt-floor, Chinese "Washes-Washes" laundry on Devil's Alley, it had housed one of Rayne's "first picture shows" before it became the Poston Photography Shop — all, prior to the day the Privats first fired their ovens to bake bread. Mrs. Craig concluded, "... we take a nostalgic look into the past as we bid a regretful farewell to Privat's Bakery."

And, with that — Tony Privat would follow in his father's footsteps, devoting all his time to the Privat vegetable farm (at the north end of today's Edwin Drive).

But the Tribune was not finished with painful farewells and reminders of tragic moments involving the Schexnyder, McBride, Landry, and Privat family connections. In September 1970, the paper would report the passing of 67 year-old Mrs. Leo Schexnyder (Elita Credeur), the "Gold Star" mother, whose son, Lieutenant

Roy Schexnyder, had lost his life during the great war.

But what is it about a death in the family around the holidays that seems to be more sorrowful than at most other times? Perhaps it is that the approach of a Christmas season anticipates the better moments of our lives, all to make worse any sadness that strikes at that time.

And it was the saddest of news that spread through Rayne that Christmas eve of 1970. Tony Privat — that most gentle and amiable of men in Rayne — collapsed that morning at 7:00 A. M. and died at his home of a brain aneurism at age 48.

Mrs. Craig held up the printing of the paper that morning to find space on the front page for the shocking announcement, "Tony Privat Dies Suddenly." And so, on — of all days — Tony's funeral took place that 1970 Christmas afternoon at 3:00 P. M.

His wife, Rita, was 45 then to live another 35 years as a widow. Tony Privat's only other direct survivor, besides nieces and nephews, was his sister, Julie Privat Ousse.

Next: How fickle is time!