Destinations: Places to go close to home

Gordon LaLonde Jr. takes notes Thursday as his work crew finishes work on the Alesia Billeaud house on Morgan Street in Broussard. The house, now offices for attorney Walter J. Rippel, has just been restored by LaLonde’s company, which specializes in work on old houses.

Historic beauty

District’s houses show off town’s history, attraction

Jim Bradshaw and Kayla Gagné

BROUSSARD — In the downtown area, grand Victorian houses bearing the names of the town’s famous early citizens reveal some of the area’s history. And historian Harold Holler said they are popular attractions for tourists who want a glimpse of the old homes.

Some are still homes, while some have become restaurants, activity centers, gift shops or bed and breakfasts. But many of them bear the names St. Julien, Billeaud, Bernard and Comeaux, and many of the families who built them are related.

Holler said that the Edmund Comeaux house on East Second Street is now a restaurant, but it was the home of former Lafayette City Parish President Walter Comeaux’s grandparents. The largest and most magnificent of the Paul Billeaud homes, right next to City Hall, Holler said that is a favorite for many tourists but right now it’s a private home.

Holler said the houses that are private homes are not open for touring, but the others are open to the public.

Main Street Historic District 203-302 E. Main St.

More than two dozen homes and commercial buildings are included in the historic district. According to National Register documents, the town of Broussard dates to the 1850s, but “its most conspicuous development took place between c. 1880 and c. 1930. This turn-of-the-century growth part replaced most of what existed before and created the town’s present architectural heritage. In many ways this growth reflected a contemporary boom in the production of sugar which affected much of southern Louisiana. In Broussard that prosperity was generated by the massive Broussard Sugar Mill which was substantially improved and enlarged in 1897.”

Alesia 108 N. Morgan St.

Built by Hibert Billeaud during the early 1800s for his wife, Alesia, for whom the house was named, the house is a fine example of Victorian architecture. Alesia and her husband built and ran a successful grocery store from the side of the house.

Charles Billeaud House 303 W. Main St.

This Victorian house with key windows and an expansive front gallery was built by Charles Billeaud in about 1907. He and his wife raised nine children in the house. After his death in 1930, the house was sold to the Gammon family, who lived in it for about two years. After 1940, it became rental property until its sale to the Rev. Ed. Kemp in 1959, after which it was used as a convent by the Sisters of Divine Providence.

Martial Billeaud Jr. House 118 N. Morgan St.

Built in 1880 by a son of the founder of the Broussard Sugar Factory, this house features a basement, elaborate woodworking, stained glass windows and a broad gallery.

Valdin Broussard House 408 W. Main St.

This house was built in 1878 by the founder of Broussard, who donated land for the first church, cemetery, public school, Catholic school and train depot. It is the oldest house in Broussard.

Ducrest Building

101 W. Main St.

The building was constructed by Lucien Ducrest, who operated a pharmacy in it for 30 years. Upon his death, his son, Francis M. Ducrest, also a pharmacist, operated the pharmacy in the building for another 30 years. For many years, part of the building was used as the Broussard Post Office.

Edmond Comeaux House

406 Second St.

This house was built in 1888 by Edmond Comeaux and his wife Cecile St. Julien Comeaux and completely remodeled in 1979. It now houses Nady’s Restaurant.

Jannin Store

121 N. Morgan St.

This store was built in the late 1800s by François-Jean de Provence and operated in partnership with his brother-in-law, Joseph Grouard. After Jannin’s death in 1920, his family continued to operate the general store until the late 1960s. In 1972, it was inherited by two of his granddaughters.

St. Cecilia School

302 W. Main St.

This Catholic school was built in 1900 on property donated by Valdin Broussard, founder of the town. It was staffed by Sisters of Divine Providence from 1900 until 1970.

St. Julien House

203 E. Second St.

This house was built in 1910 by Marguerite Roy St. Julien, widow of Gustave St. Julien, and is nearly identical to the Edmond Comeaux house next door, where her daughter lived. It is now used by the Lafayette Council on Aging as an activity center.