Parishioners fight to save rectory

By Becky Tillso
Staff Writer

Le Vieux Presbytere, the church rectory for Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Church, sits atop a flatbed truck for its move across the street.

CHURCH POINT — For more than a century the church rectory has stood beside Our Lady of the Sacred Heart at the center of the Church Point community.

Recently the 100-year-old building moved a half block to its new home across the street.

Moving the rectory was something of a high-tech solution to a modern problem, but it was accomplished by the old Acadian custom of neighbors working together to build their community.

The Committee To Save Le Vieux Presbytere has spent the past five years raising $16,000 of the $25,000 required to just move the building across the street.

The all-volunteer group, led by Teasie Carey and Jean Murphy, hosted old fashioned radio music shows and sold concessions at public events as well as accepted donations through the three local banks to fund part of the initial restoration project.

The rectory was built in the late 1800s on the site where the new church has stood since 1954.

The move was the second relocation of the rectory in the past 40 years, according to Father Rex Broussard, pastor at Our Lady of the Sacred Heart. In the 1950s the rectory was moved to make room for the new church.

According to church records, the original cypress building measured 40x40 feet with an eight-foot porch all around and two rooms upstairs. In an 1880 report to the bishop, the priest listed a balance of $100 due on a $600 note at no interest to finance construction of the priest's home.

But modern economics forced the church to abandon the building in 1987 when costs to maintain and insure the structure became more than the church could afford, Broussard said. Consequently, the church had begun plans to tear down the old rectory.

"Right now the church just beyond repair for our budget and the insurance got complicated and we couldn't afford to cover it."

But a group of parishioners "could not stand to see so much history destroyed," according to Murphy, and they decided to move and restore the building as a museum, regardless of the cost.

"When you think of all the baptisms, weddings, funerals these priests have seen, it becomes more than just a rectory. It's part of the life of our town."

Jean Murphy
Committee member
"It is a lot of money, but we could not stand to see the building torn down," Murphy said. "A lot of the priests we have known and loved have lived there.

"It's history," she added. "We want to restore it so the children can see how things were and appreciate the church's history."

For more than a century, the pastors at Our Lady of the Sacred Heart presided over a church which always has been at the center of the community, according to Linda Boudreaux, who has worked in the church office since 1961 when she was 12 years old.

As an example, Boudreaux told the story of two sisters, Helena and Theophine "Miss Fin" Daigle, who worked at the rectory for more than 40 years helping the priest in residence.

"Miss Helena lived in the rectory in a room off the kitchen and Miss Fin lived in church property next door. And they were so faithful for over 40 years. Every day they cooked and kept house for the priests," Boudreaux said.

"And Miss Fin opened the church every day at 4:30 in the morning, turning on the lights and the heaters or just whatever was needed," she added. "They were there from morning till night."

Murphy also thinks of the rectory in terms of the people who have been part of the church.

"When you think of all the baptisms, weddings, funerals these priests have seen, it becomes more than just a rectory," she said. "It's part of the life of our town."

For this reason, the committee to save the old rectory has volunteered countless hours to raise the first $16,000 installment to restore the building as a living museum.

Murphy hopes the museum will add to the town's current list of tourism attractions: the murals, Le Courir Du Mardi Gras, the Buggy Festival and the local winery and sausage packing plant. She says tour groups love the town's historic appeal.

"We truly feel Church Point has a lot to offer," she said. "You have to believe in your community and sometimes we have something in our backyard, but we don't see it because we take it for granted. But we just couldn't let the old rectory go."

The committee already has received donations of antiques and church memorabilia to stock the museum, although the funds to finish the restoration are still not available.

"This will just be an ongoing project," Murphy said. "We will continue to raise money and seek donations and just not give up."

"After all our work, it was a wonderful moment to see the old rectory safely moved to its new home," she added. "While I was watching it move, I wondered what all the priests who have lived there might be feeling. I think they were happy."