‘Hanging Jail’ in DeRidder gets new life, restoration

BY ANGELA MAUSER
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DeRidder — Gary Crowe laughed
at reports that the Old Parish
Jail is haunted. His wife lived
there for 10 years.

Crowe, a retired deputy and
currently building and grounds
chairman of the Beaufort
Parish Police Jury, and
Margaret Harper, were married
on one Friday the 13th and cele-
brated their 50th wedding an-
iversary on another.

Margaret Harper’s parents,
David and Patty Harper, were
the jailer and jailmistress
from 1922 to 1962. They lived in
a ground-floor apartment in
the jail; prisoners were housed
on the second floor.

When her parents were out, Margaret was in charge. She
only had a problem once.

It was one time when a drunk set
fire to the stuffing of a cotton
mattress,” Crowe said. “Marg-
etta got a water hose and put
the fire out.”

A spiral staircase connects
the floors and goes up to a sky-
light. The stairwell leads
back into a tunnel that connects
the jail with the Beaufort
Parish Courthouse. Prisoners
were once walked through the
tunnel for court appearances.

Many were sent upstairs on
a dumbwaiter in the kitchen
and served by a tray — though
then, a tray was called a “run-
around.”

Crowe said the jail held up to
50 inmates. There usually
were two or three women, who
were housed separately.

“Prisoners were issued one
blanket and one cotton mat-
tress,” Crowe said, “and the
blanket was washed every 30
days. They had a cup of coffee
for breakfast, a hot meal for
lunch and a peanut butter and
jelly sandwich with a sweet roll
for dinner. If they were smart,
they saved the sweet roll for
dinner.”

Prisoners draw from water
storage tanks and and outhouses

Fugitive in jail was released this week and is suspected of being the last escapee from the jail.

Robinson said the jail will be
prized and painted after the
load and asbestos is removed
and restored to a clean rough
surface.

Bettie Cunningham, adminis-
trator and secretory treasurer
for the Police Jury, said police
forces will continue to apply
grants to fund renovation.

She was on the walk through.

“I am so glad this project is
off the ground and moving
again,” Cunningham said. “This
Gothic-style building is a mas-
terpiece for the city and parish.”