When wrecking crews set about the task of dismantling the historic Jefferson Theater in downtown Lafayette in 1976, hardly a peep was heard from residents. While preservationists in other cities—including several in Louisiana—were threatening to lay down in front of bulldozers, or better yet purchase and preserve historic theaters, locals passively accepted the fate of progress and the historical inevitability of one more parking lot for the central business district.

But nine years later, no such docility was in evidence when Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital moved swiftly to demolish an historic orphanage on St. Mary Boulevard. A coalition of strange bedfellows quickly sprang up to protest the hospital’s plans to erect a multi-story glass structure in the midst of one of Lafayette’s older neighborhoods.

In the end, the group salvaged little more than a fragment of the original Spanish style structure. But the intensity of their battle served notice on the city’s development community that a force for historic preservation was present in the city and would have to reckoned with in the future. Literally decades after this kind of movement began to evolve in cities across the land, Lafayette finally had its own agenda for historic preservation in a city that usually looks to the future.

The Saints streets area has what architects call a sense of place: a unique character Lafayette can call its own.
The so-called Sterling Grove area has been placed on the National Register of Historic Places because of the intrinsic beauty of the houses there.
from that heavily-used artery, but the city has a right of way over that precious land and could breach it if it so desires.

John Raines, director of planning and development for the city, admits that from the standpoint of traffic improvement the street should be extended. However, he says it has been the policy of the city to oppose such a plan because it would invite massive commercial encroachment, and hence deterioration, of St. Mary and its environs. But that policy does not have the force of law or ordinance; it is merely an opinion or attitude which could change with a future administr-