The Georgian-style brick building was at least the third home of the Protestant Orphanage, originally the Female Orphan Asylum, from its opening in 1927 until it closed in 1969.

Protestant Orphanage a North Street fixture since 1927

By CAROL ANNE BLITZER

Samuel McConnaughy was an honor student and popular cheerleader at Baton Rouge High School, yet few of his friends knew that she had lived for nearly all of her life in the Protestant Orphanage on North Street.

"I was a lucky girl," she always felt that she had a good life," said McConnaughy, who moved into the home in 1939, after her mother was hospitalized. She was 7 years old.

Elsie O'Neal Holmes moved to the home with her three sisters in 1933 after her mother's death. "It was the greatest thing that ever happened to me," Holmes said.

Built in 1927, the Georgian-style brick building was at least the third home for what originally was called the Female Orphan Asylum.

Crene Muse examined records of the asylum for an article in the Advocate Nov. 19, 1939. These records give no date of founding but indicate that the orphanage was already in existence in 1945.

Mark T. Carroll, in his "River Capital, An Illustrated History of Baton Rouge," writes that the first buildings of the asylum were built before 1854 with contributions from Baton Rouge ladies who supported the home with dues, money and donated items.

The downtown churches contributed to the orphanage. Carroll's book contains a copy of a program for a vocal concert of sacred music held at the Presbyterian Church July 1, 1858, as an event for the Female's Orphan Asylum.

Muse's article refers to early records of the asylum including a doctor's book "with complete descriptions of the treatment to be given patients" and even an order from Sept. 3, 1850, for 108 yards of calico from J.D. Holmes at 14 cents a yard. The fabric was probably used for dresses for the little...

ABOVE: The entry foyer with its original staircase remains very much the way it was when the building was first opened in 1927. Bill Beck, seated, purchased the building with Joe Thompson in 1970.

LEFT: Through the years, thousands of meals were prepared in the original kitchen, now part of the largest apartment in the building.
"Aunt Stella wanted us to be like other girls... She treated us as if you were in a family home... We attended every circus, every good event held in the city of Baton Rouge... There was nothing that we missed."

Elise O'Neal Holmes

Volunteers from the community reseed the room for the oldest girls in the home with bright paint and new draperies and spreads, as shown in this file photo from 1963.

"We used to have a law office around the corner. We saw the palace and were inspired by it," said Beck. It took him two years of working 10 hours a day to fix the place.


After renting the remainder of the building to several organizations, Beck decided to convert it to a private residence. "I made changes, clean it up, new but not new," he said. "I tried not to change the building a great deal." The largest apartment is made of the old living room, dining room and very large original kitchen. Another apartment is made of the old classroom and library with a little in the center where the girls studied.

Beck built an attic off the old laundry room to create an open space apartment with a kitchen and living room. Upstairs are the original old rooms, all converted to bedrooms, with the original lockers used as closet space.

McGuire went on to marry a man from an old Baton Rouge family, to raise her own family and to work in the field of education as an assistant principal director of the Baton Rouge school system in Lafayette.

Past residents of the orphans have shown up at the building seven or eight times in the years that Beck has owned it. They speak well of the living conditions that they enjoyed during their years at the home. We were treated well, the people of Baton Rouge lived at the home. We had many rules we could not abide..." said Beck. "In the end, the board had very little authority. We wanted to be completely free."